

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH APOSTOLICAL.

THERE are many persons at the present day, who, from not having turned their minds to the subject, think they are Churchmen in the sense in which the early Christians were, merely because they are Episcopalians. The extent of their Churchmanship is, to consider that Episcopacy is the best form of Ecclesiastical Polity; and again, that it originated with the Apostles. I am far from implying, that to go thus far is nothing; or is not an evidence (for it is,) of a reverent and sober temper of mind; still the view is defective. It is defective, because the expediency of a system, though a very cogent, is not the highest line of argument that may be taken in its defence: and because an opponent may deny the fact of the Apostolicity of Episcopacy, and so involve its maintainer in an argument. Doubtless the more clear and simple principle for a Churchman to hold, is that of a *Ministerial Succession*; which is undeniable as a fact, while it is most reasonable as a doctrine, and sufficiently countenanced in Scripture for its practical reception. Of this, Episcopacy, i. e. *Superintendence*, is but an accident; though, for the sake of conciseness, it is often spoken of by us as synonymous with it. It shall be the object of the following Tract to insist upon this higher characteristic of our Church.

My position then is this;—that the Apostles appointed successors to their ministerial office, and the latter in turn appointed others, and so on to the present day;—and further, that the Apostles and their Successors have in every age committed portions of their power and authority to others, who thus become their delegates, and in a measure their representatives, and are called Priests and Deacons. The result is an Episcopal system, because of the practice of delegation; but we may conceive their keeping their powers altogether to themselves, and in the same proportion in which this was done would the Church polity cease to be Episco-

palian. We may conceive the Order of Apostolic Vicars (so to call it,) increased, till one of them was placed in every village, and took the office of parish Priest. I do not say such a measure would be justifiable or pious;—doubtless it would be a departure from the rule of antiquity—but it is conceivable; and it is useful to conceive it, in order to form a clear notion of the Essence of the Church System, and the defective state of those Christian Societies which are separate from the Church Catholic. It is a common answer made to those who are called High Churchmen, to say, that “if God had intended the *form* of Church Government to be of great consequence, He would have worded His “will in this matter more clearly in Scripture.” Now enough has already been said to show the irrelevancy of such a remark. We need not deny to the Church the abstract right, (however we may question the propriety,) of altering its own constitution. It is not merely *because* Episcopacy is a *better or more scriptural form* than Presbyterianism, (true as this may be in itself,) that Episcopalians are right, and Presbyterians are wrong; but because the Presbyterian Ministers have assumed a power, which was never intrusted to them. They have presumed to exercise the power of ordination, and to perpetuate a succession of ministers, without having received a commission to do so. This is the plain fact that condemns them; and is a standing condemnation, from which they cannot escape, except by artifices of argument, which will serve equally to protect the self-authorized teacher of religion. If *they* may ordain without being set to do so, *others* may teach and preach without being sent. They hold a middle position, which is untenable as destroying itself; for if Christians can do without Bishops (i. e. Commissioned Ordainers), they may do without Commissioned Ministers (i. e. the Priests and Deacons). If an imposition of hands is necessary to convey one gift, why should it not be to convey another?

1. As to the *fact* of the Apostolical Succession, i. e. that our present Bishops are the heirs and representatives of the Apostles by successive transmission of the prerogative of being so, this is too notorious to require proof. Every link in the chain is known from St. Peter to our present Metropolitans. Here then I only ask, looking at this plain fact by itself, is there not something of a divine providence in it? can we conceive that this Succession

has been preserved, all over the world, amid many revolutions, through many centuries, *for nothing*? Is it wise or pious to despise or neglect a gift thus transmitted to us in matter of fact, even if Scripture did not touch upon the subject?

2. Next, consider how *natural* is the doctrine of a Succession. When an individual comes to me, claiming to speak in the name of the Most High, it is natural to ask him for his authority. If he replies, that we are all bound to instruct each other, this reply is intelligible, but in the very form of it excludes the notion of a ministerial order, i. e. a class of persons set apart *from* others for religious offices. If he appeals to some miraculous gift, this too is intelligible, and only unsatisfactory when the alleged gift is proved to be a fiction. No other answer can be given, except a reference to some person, who has given him license to exercise ministerial functions; then follows the question, *how* that individual gained his authority to do so. In the case of the Catholic Church, the person referred to, i. e. the Bishop, has received it from a predecessor, and he from another, and so on, till we arrive at the Apostles themselves, and thence our LORD and SAVIOUR. It is superfluous to dwell on so plain a principle, which in matters of this world we act upon daily.

3. Lastly, the *argument from Scripture* is surely quite clear to those, who honestly wish direction for *practice*. CHRIST promised He would be with His Apostles always, as ministers of His religion, even unto the end of the world. In one sense the Apostles were to be alive, till He came again; but they all died at the natural time. Does it not follow, that there are those now alive who represent them? Now who were the most probable representatives of them in the generation next their death? They surely, whom they have ordained to succeed them in the ministerial work. If any persons could be said to have CHRIST's power and presence, and the gifts of ruling and ordaining, of teaching, of binding and loosing, (and comparing together the various Scriptures on the subject, all these seem included in His promise to be with the Church always,) surely those, on whom the Apostles laid their hands, were they. And so in the next age, if any were representatives of the first representatives, they must be the next generation of Bishops, and so on. Nor does it materially alter the argument, though we suppose the

blessing upon Ministerial Offices made, not to the Apostles, but to the whole body of Disciples ; i. e. the Church. For, even if it be the Church that has the power of ordination committed to it, still it exercises it through the Bishops as its organs ; and the question recurs, *how* has the Presbytery in this or that country obtained the power ? The Church certainly has from the first committed it to the Bishops, and has never resumed it ; and the Bishops have no where committed it to the Presbytery, who therefore cannot be in possession of it.

However, it is merely for argument sake that I make this allowance, as to the meaning of the text in Matt. xxviii ; for our LORD's promise of His presence " unto the end of the world," was made to the Apostles, *by themselves*. At the same time, let it be observed what force is added to the argument for the Apostolical Succession, by the acknowledged existence in Scripture of the doctrine of a standing Church, or permanent Body Corporate for spiritual purposes. For, if Scripture has formed all Christians into one continuous community through all ages, (which I do not here prove,) it is but according to the same analogy, that the Ministerial Office should be vested in an order, propagated from age to age, on a principle of Succession. And, if we proceed to considerations of utility and expedience, it is plain, that, according to our notions, it is more necessary that a Minister should be perpetuated by a fixed law, than that the community of Christians should be, which can scarcely be considered to be vested with any powers, such as to require the visible authority which a Succession supplies.

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