

THE
CHURCHMAN

JUNE, 1881.

ART. I.—THE TRUE CHARACTER OF THE CHRISTIAN
MINISTRY.

WE are familiar with two theories of the Christian Ministry. They may be termed the Evangelistic and the Sacerdotal. There are those amongst us who, in spite of misrepresentation and hard names, as if they were not true Churchmen, venture to maintain that the Sacerdotal theory is not that which is held by the Reformed Church of England, who think that she ought not to hold it, and who, believing that she does not, earnestly hope that the determination of her Ministers and members may become stronger and stronger, that, so far as teaching and influence have any power, she shall not.

For the proof of the assertion that the Reformed Church of England ought not to hold the Sacerdotal or Sacrificial theory of the Christian Ministry, we must refer to Holy Scripture. It is the more necessary in this case, because the Reformed Church professes, as in her twentieth Article, that the Christian Church is a witness and keeper of Holy Writ, and ought not to decree anything against the same, or that is contrary to God's Word written; and asserts, in her sixth Article, that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man to be believed as an article of the faith. As to the testimony of Holy Scripture on this point, it may be enough to refer to the authoritative statement of S. Paul concerning the true character of the Christian Ministry. He says to the Corinthians (1 Ep. ix. 13, 14):—

Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar are partakers of the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.

Passing by instructive references to other matters not relating to our present subject, such as the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures, which the Apostle endorses, the statement that the ministers about holy things were supported without the necessity of a secular employment, and the Lord's purpose, that the preachers of the Gospel should be similarly supported, it is important to mark the telling significance of the contrast presented in the quoted passage between the Old Testament and New Testament Ministry. During the Old Testament dispensation there was an altar. This was the chief and distinguishing characteristic of the worship there enjoined. Everything else either led to it, or derived its significance from it. But an altar implies sacrifice, the taking away of life, the shedding of the blood which is the life. And sacrifice, again, involves the necessity of a priesthood, who might come between God and the sinner, by whom the essential sacrifice might be offered, and through whom alone the offerer might be accepted. All these, again, the Priest, the Sacrifice, the Altar, in order to be complete, required a corresponding ritual, so contrived that every act, and every dress, and every arrangement might be symbolical and typical.

In point of fact, this was the case. Very minute particulars concerning everything connected with the Old Testament worship were ordained, and enjoined by God Himself. The holy anointing oil, the incense, the priestly garments, the special vestments of the high priest, the curtains of the sanctuary, the candlesticks, and the many regulations connected with all these, are so described, that no deviation in their composition, or pattern, and no variety in their use, could be allowed. They were shadows of things to come—holy things, because God had appointed them to be used in His worship. They were connected with God's altar; and those who ministered about these holy things might fitly be described, therefore, as priests who waited at the altar. But the time appointed for their use came to an end. The Apostles and Prophets show that they were intended to point to the great High Priest, Christ Jesus; and when He came and finished His work, then these, having all testified of Him, and therefore served their purpose, were put aside. The priesthood being changed, there was, of necessity, a change in the ritual connected with it. As a significant indication of this, at His death the veil was rent in sunder from the top to the bottom. The way to the immediate presence of God in the holiest was now seen to be through the atoning work, and the continued intercession of the one great High Priest. His High Priesthood is unchangeable, intransmissible; it passes not from one to another. No one but Himself can exercise it. There can be no atoning sacrifice for sin but that which He offered

once. "We are sanctified," says the Apostle, "through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once." To attempt the reconstruction now of that which testified of Him, and then required an altar, and a continually recurring sacrifice, would be to build again that which God has taught us He has pulled down, as being no longer necessary;—it would be to attempt to mend the torn veil; and if the attempt could succeed, it would intimate that the way to the Holiest is not yet made manifest;—it would be to interpose between the sinner and God that which God Himself has removed: it would be to keep at a distance those to whom He has given liberty to enter even into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus; it would be to give up that liberty with which Christ has made us free, and suffer ourselves to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Another part of the contrast is seen in the characteristic feature of the New Testament dispensation. They who once ministered in holy things had to do with the *altar*; they who now minister in holy things have to do with the *Gospel*. Once the descriptive term for God's ministers was "*They wait at the altar*;" now the descriptive term for God's ministers is "*They preach the Gospel*." This is a contrast in which there is untold significance. Then, the Lord's priests sacrificed for His people: now, His people are themselves a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ; and His ministers are helpers of their faith, exhorting and testifying of Christ, and of the true grace of God wherein we stand. Then, the words Priest, Altar, Sacrifice, had a primary and real significance: now, when used, they can only have a secondary meaning, sufficient indeed, to show the reality of the blessings which they indicate, but in no way either interfering with or supplementing the office and work of Him who is our one true Priest, Altar, and Sacrifice. Then, they who ministered in holy things had to show the necessity of a work to be done; the work of reconciliation was committed to God's priests, that they might set it forth by types and symbols: but now, they who minister in holy things have to testify to the work of Christ already done; and consequently the Apostle tells us, that to Christ's ambassadors is committed the *Word* of reconciliation. The *work* is in Christ's hands alone. It could be trusted in no other hands but His. It is honour enough for His ministers to be trusted with "the *Word*," the testimony concerning their Master and His finished work. They need not seek that priesthood also which, jealous for His honour and dignity, they should attribute exclusively to Him. One might appeal for the proof of the significance of the contrast, and its importance, to the whole of the New Testament Scriptures. If under this dispensation it had been intended that there should be an elaborate ritual corresponding to that

under the Old Testament dispensation, might we not reasonably expect that minute details, and careful directions would have been as characteristic of the one as of the other? But what is it that we find? Very much about Christian doctrine and practice; very little about the ceremonial of Christian worship. Many details about the office and character of bishops, very much about the sanctity that should characterize presbyters, and the piety and purity of deacons, but not a word, simply nothing, about their ministerial vestments. About gown, or surplice, simply nothing. Even the Book of Revelation is no exception. It is a book of symbols, but yet of symbols which it is impossible to copy; a book full of meaning, but prescribing no ritual which we can imitate. Are not these things significant? Do they not show that weightier matters should occupy the thoughts of those whom the Father seeks to worship Him in spirit and in truth? Do they not show that a manly Christianity, while seeking that everything shall be done decently and in order, and to edification, will connect itself with that reasonable service which makes the distinction which God Himself has drawn, between the worship whose chief characteristic was that its ministers *wait at the altar*, and the worship the grand description of which is that its ministers *preach the Gospel*?

We now arrive at an important conclusion. The true position of the ministers of Christ is different to that occupied by the servants of the Lord under the Old Testament dispensation. The Old Testament servants of the Lord who had to do with the daily service of the Sanctuary, were called priests. But S. Paul and Apollos and Cephas were *not* called priests. For "who is Paul, and who Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?" "Let a man so account of us," not as the priests of God, but "as the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." Old Testament priests were typical representatives of Christ, the one great Apostle and High Priest of our profession. New Testament ministers are special messengers to the Churches, to bear Christ's testimony. Old Testament priests presented sacrifices without which there could be no remission of sins, and no acceptance. But New Testament servants and stewards present not Christ to God, but Christ to their fellow-sinners. Hence, as has often been noticed, in the New Testament the word for sacrificing priests is never applied to Christian ministers and stewards; there is but one passage into which the Greek term for sacrificing priests enters; that word refers to the spiritual offering of the Gentiles as a living sacrifice. The reason is plain, the necessity of sacrificing priests has ceased, because Christ; by one offering, has perfected for ever. But the necessity for testifying servants and faithful stewards continues. In proportion as they realize the Scriptural description of their office, they will stand

aside out of the sinner's way and point him to the Lamb of God ; careful not to allow even their own shadow to fall on the path on which the sinner flies to Him. What then ? Are not those right who say that the Reformed Church of England, professing as she does to be guided by Holy Scripture, OUGHT NOT to allow any priestly interposition between the soul and the Lord Jesus Christ ?

We may safely and thankfully aver that SHE DOES NOT ! Three illustrative particulars may be selected to show this. The clergyman's commission, his actual ministration, and the special Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper.

It may be well to recall the terms of the commission given to her ministers. In the charge of the Bishop to those ordained, the office to which they are called is described. It is spoken of as one of Dignity, Importance, and Weight ; but it is explained that it consists in the being messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord ; not a word is said of the duties or office of a sacrificing priesthood, but they are to teach and premonish, to feed and provide for the Lord's family ; to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for His children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever. In all this there is no interposition between the soul and the Saviour.

The office of messenger, and watchman, and steward, is afterwards spoken of as the office and work of a Priest in the Church of God. But the word is used in the sense in which the corresponding term "Presbyter" is employed in the New Testament, and never in any connection which admits of the meaning of a sacrificing priest, but simply of one who has a certain office committed to him in the Church of God.

The words of our Lord, which, in later times, have been repeated, when the office and work of a priest in the Church of God is committed to the ordained, convey no more authority now than they conveyed to the Apostles when first spoken. We have no Scriptural instance of the Apostles receiving confessions and ministering absolution in the sense asserted by some modern teachers, against whose teaching we are bound to protest, and to protest all the more strongly because it may be boldly affirmed that no such opinions were held by the Apostles as are now put forth touching the necessity for Sacramental Confession and Priestly Absolution.

The testimony of Bishop Harold Browne, in a recent Charge, will not here be out of place :—

If Sacramental Confession [he says] be an ordinance of the Gospel, and necessary for the Christian, as is sometimes asserted, it is most unaccountable that the New Testament is profoundly silent concerning it, that there is no injunction with regard to it, no example

given of its practice, and especially that St. Paul, who lays down exact rules concerning so many ordinances of the Church, and the conducting of its services, never once alludes to it. A certain temperate and intelligent review of Scriptural doctrine and practice will keep us from exaggerated opinions on one side or the other. There are those who pine for constant confession of sins to human ears, and cannot believe that sin will be forgiven if confessed to God alone. There are those, on the other hand, who would erase from our Service books all forms of absolution, all invitations to unburden the troubled soul, and especially those words of Christ pronounced by the Bishop over the heads of all that are ordained to the priesthood. I am convinced that neither of these extreme positions will stand the testimony of Scripture or of truth. Those sacred words of our Lord conveyed no miraculous authority to the Apostles, no power of discerning spirits, and so forgiving sins. The authority they did convey was distinctly ministerial, to admit to Church fellowship by baptism, to exclude by excommunication, to restore by absolution. That authority is as much vested in the successors of the Apostles as it was in the Apostles themselves. Without it there could be no Church discipline, there could be no true Church. But it did not, as conveyed to the Apostles then; it does not, as given to the Bishops and Presbyters now, interfere with the personal responsibility, nor with the personal privilege of every Christian soul. For each one there is access through the great High Priest to the throne of grace, where alone "we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

It must not be forgotten that our Bishops put a Bible into the hand of those whom they ordain, and bid them take authority to preach the Word of God, and to minister the Holy Sacraments in the congregation. That authority is only such, then, as the Word of God allows; authority to bear the keys in God's household, to bring out of His Treasury things at once new and old, and in their office to discharge those great duties to which God has called them as His messengers, watchmen, and stewards.

In consistency with this, it is important to observe the place assigned to the minister or priest, when he enters on his ministrations in the congregation. The terms minister and ministration, by the way, are continually employed in the Articles of Religion, as contrasted with the priests that were said to offer Christ in the sacrifices of masses for the quick and the dead. The position of the minister in his ministrations is that of a worshipper with the people, a leader, indeed, of their devotions, but in such forms of prayers and praise as cannot be intelligently used, except as the people take their part as truly as the minister takes his part. And by these forms minister and people alike are brought into the immediate presence of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Again and again, He is addressed in prayer and praise as immediately present; and every prayer not directly addressed to Him ends with the

recognition of His gracious name, His merits, His might, His love, His honour, His grace. And all this, be it remembered, when no other name but His is pleaded, no Mediator or Advocate recognized but Himself; no intercession desired as meritorious but His alone; no interposition of blessed Virgin or Saint, real or supposed, or even of officiating priests, but brought at once, as Jesus passes by, to cry out, "O Son of David, have mercy; O Christ, hear us; O Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, grant us Thy peace."

The special character of the order of administration of the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, will repay attention. The importance of an accurate acquaintance with this particular will be seen when it is remembered that the ministers of our Church have solemnly pledged themselves to minister the Doctrines and the Sacraments of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded, and as this Church and nation hath received the same. In view of this, the remark made in the Preface to our Prayer Book is not without signification :—

If any man who shall desire a more particular account of the several alterations in any part of the Liturgy, shall take the pains to compare the present Book with the former, we doubt not but the reason of the change may easily appear.

Such a comparison will be found to be instructive and profitable. Two quotations express what will be its sure result. The first is from Archdeacon Wilberforce, who seceded to the Church of Rome. In his work on the Eucharist, he says :—

The service, consequently, was divested of its sacrificial character, and no longer bore witness, as in early times, to the great event which is transacted at the altar. This was done both by mutilating the prayer of oblation which had been retained in the Book of 1548 (that is the first Prayer Book, sometimes referred to the date of 1549) and by placing it after instead of before the Communion (Chap. xiii. p. 379).

The second is from a pamphlet, said to be by a late Lord Chancellor of Ireland, published without his name, but professing to contain a strictly legal view of the matter in question. After stating in the preface that the laity of the Church of England are entitled to be secured against any ministrations of the clergy that are not in accordance with the Articles and Formularies lawfully interpreted, he thus concludes his notice of the alterations to which reference is made :—

Every word was weeded out of the service which might be supposed to imply that Christ was otherwise present than in the heart and soul of such as rightly and worthily received with faith the Holy Sacrament.

He confirms this conclusion by referring to that remarkable passage of Hooker, in which he says, "The real presence of Christ's most blessed body and blood is not, therefore, to be sought for in the Sacrament, but in the worthy receiver of the Sacrament" (Book v. c. lxvii. 6).

We unhesitatingly affirm that the testimony now quoted tends to show that the Reformed Church of England DOES NOT hold the Sacerdotal theory of the Christian ministry. And if this be so, can any wonder at the solemn determination of some at least amongst us that, God helping us, and so far as we have any power or influence, SHE SHALL NOT. It might be urged that we have no honest standing-ground, as members and ministers of a Church that is at once Catholic and Reformed, except as we hold fast her Scriptural and Evangelical, and therefore Protestant, principles. But there are some practical reasons of no small weight and influence which it may be well to consider.

First, then, the preservation of Christian liberty requires that we should have decided views as to the true character of the Christian ministry. Rights have been dearly purchased; and they are at stake. They cannot be maintained except by earnest and loving contention for the simplicity of the Gospel. We were delivered at the Reformation from an enormous Sacerdotal usurpation. Embrace the Sacerdotal theory, and there is neither reasonable justification for the Reformation, nor any effectual safeguard against the re-imposition of that yoke which our forefathers were not able to bear. To be forewarned should be to be forearmed. Warning upon warning is found in the Sacred Scriptures that perilous times will come, that some will depart from the faith, that even amongst Christian teachers some will arise speaking perverse things. Fact upon fact has been accumulated in our times showing that such warnings are not to be despised. It ought, therefore, to be neither matter for reproach nor surprise that a jealousy should be felt, similar to that which the Apostle expressed when he said, "I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

But the security of Christian privilege and the success of Christian effort are involved in this matter. Who can sufficiently estimate the value of that privilege? Assurance of pardoning mercy, adoption into God's family as fellow-citizens of the saints, peace under a continued sense of reconciliation, boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Christ, a sense of our acceptance and of the acceptance of our unworthy attempts to glorify God, the knowledge that all things work together for our good, the confidence that when we are absent from the body we shall be present with the Lord—all these are

involved in that Gospel which is committed to the Christian minister. Well might our Lord teach us that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than the greatest of the Jewish prophets, who had not these privileges, and could not enjoy this consolation.

Then as to the success of Christian effort. Effort there must and will be if there be a true appreciation of Evangelical truth. The simplicity of the Gospel cannot be consistently held, except where in practice there is no slothfulness. The garden of the sluggard, whatever his opinions may be, is the garden of a man void of understanding. We have in these days greater opportunities, and more facilities, for Christian work than perhaps have been granted to any generation since the Apostolic age. Christianity may cast God's seed upon all waters, and quickly find the fields everywhere white unto the harvest. But if we look for success, we must put forth effort in God's appointed way, and in the use of His appointed means. The preaching of the Gospel of Christ has been tried. In Apostolic days it proved to be the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believed, Jew and Greek. Why should we doubt that the Gospel of Christ should possess the same power now? The promise of the Spirit has not been taken from us. The presence of the Saviour is continued with us. When the question then again and again returns, "Shall God's ministers go forth as sacrificing priests, or as faithful Presbyters?" let no one think it strange, if we say that the latter expression describes the ministry of the New Testament. Let no one think it strange that though we refuse not the name of priest according to its original derivation from *Presbyter*, yet we receive it (Hooker, Book v. ch. lxxviii. 2, 3), "as drawing no more the minds of those who hear it, to any cogitation of sacrifice, than the name of a senator, or alderman causeth them to think of old age, or to imagine that everyone so termed must needs be ancient, because years were respected in the first nomination of both." Let no one think it strange that—remembering with Hooker that "the Holy Ghost throughout the body of the New Testament, making so much mention of Christian ministers, doth not anywhere call them priests,"—we determine to embrace and carry out in practice the Evangelistic, rather than the Sacerdotal theory, of the Christian ministry, assured that whatever may be the discouragements of the present hour they who go forth bearing precious seed, will doubtless come again with joy, bringing their sheaves with them.

WILLIAM CADMAN.