



MODERN PRETENSIONS TO APOSTOLICAL SUCCESSION.

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THE office of the apostles, *as apostles*, was in its own nature temporary, and terminated with those who first discharged its functions. The foundation of a building, once properly and securely laid, does not require to be laid over again. And here was the peculiar work and honor of the apostles. To them it was committed to lay the foundation of the Christian Church; (we use a Scripture figure;) and all who were raised up to their help, and all who came after them in the

evangelical ministry, could only assist in rearing the superstructure upon the foundation laid by them, until the whole building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple of the Lord, to be complete, all perfect, and glorious, at the end of time.

Where then are the successors of the apostles, of whom we hear so much in these days, until the very term becomes almost nauseating? *There are none.* In the nature of things there can be none, as both the functions of the apostleship, and its essential qualifications, were of such a character as to render their transmission impossible. In all that pertained to the apostolic office, the chosen twelve stand alone, in peerless honor, which none can ever share with them. The brightest stars in the Christian firmament, they will forever shine among the servants and saints of the living God in unrivaled glory.

The only one of the apostolic band who ever had a successor was Judas Iscariot the traitor, because "he by transgression fell" before the time had arrived for discharging the duty of

the office to which he had been chosen. Paul, not Matthias, was that successor, as will be shown more fully in Tract No. 29 of this series. Before they were taken from among men on earth, the apostles had done their work. They had fulfilled the special commission given to them as Christ's witnesses, and so established the great fact and miracle of Christ's resurrection that the gates of hell have never prevailed to cast a doubt upon it. And on this sure and immovable foundation has been rising, for more than eighteen hundred years, the Church of the Redeemer—the Gospel Church—whose spreading glories and victories are set forth in such sublime and glowing strains by the evangelical prophet Isaiah (lx). And it will continue to rise and grow until “the top-stone shall be brought on” with immortal joy and triumph; and it shall shine forth in unparalleled beauty and symmetry and luster, the best, the greatest, and most glorious of all the works of God.

Multitudes of workmen of all grades have been employed on this building, but none of

them have had a hand in laying the foundation; that was done for them by "the glorious company of the apostles." And from the time of Barnabas and Silas, and Apollos and Timothy, the Head of the Church has been calling forth men to this work of raising up and building Churches—living stones—all the world over, to be incorporated in the one Church of the Saviour's love, for which he gave himself, that he might "sanctify and cleanse it," and "present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." And however the world may frown, and Satan rage, and bigotry cavil, and persecution do its bloody work, there will be no lack of workmen, and the building will go on to its completion.

We have already intimated that a twofold character belonged to the honored twelve. They were not only apostles, but evangelical teachers. Christ invested them with a twofold commission—one which they were to hand down through successive generations,

and to hold in common with many others, both coeval with and coming after them, as was clearly indicated by that promise, "And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world;" and another which was not to be, and could not be transmitted.

Peter, John, James, and Paul have successors in the evangelical ministry of the Word; but, as Christ's apostles, they never had, and never could have, successors. How much evil has resulted from confounding things which are thus perfectly and essentially distinct!

All faithful ministers of the word of life, possessing the spirit of the apostles, preaching the doctrines which the apostles preached, and no other, and imitating the zeal and devotedness of the apostles, are their true successors in that ministry of the Gospel which they were the first to exercise, and which is God's chosen instrumentality to enlighten and save the world—but not in the apostleship. This is the only sense in which any can succeed them. And those who are destitute of the

piety and zeal and devotedness of the apostles, or depart in doctrine from their teaching, are in no sense whatever the successors of those men of God. Call them what you may—popes, bishops, priests, or deacons—they are but intruders into an office to which God never called them, the duties of which they are not qualified to fulfill, and the assumption of which will end only in exposing them to shame and everlasting contempt. “By their fruits ye shall know them.” “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”

There are not wanting, even among divines and dignitaries of high standing and authority in the English Episcopal Church, men who regard the apostleship as a personal and temporary institution, not designed to be perpetuated in the Christian Church. The famous Henry Dodwell says, “The office of the apostles perished with the apostles, in which office there never was any successor to any of them, except to Judas the traitor.” Dr. Isaac Barrow says, “The apostolic office, as such, was personal and temporary; and, therefore, ac-

ording to its nature and design, not successive or communicable to others in perpetual descendance from them. It was, as such, in all respects EXTRAORDINARY, conferred in a special manner, designed for special purposes, discharged by special aids, endowed with special privileges, as was needful for the propagation of Christianity and founding of Churches." And again, "Now such an office, consisting of so many extraordinary privileges and miraculous powers which were requisite for the foundation of the Church and the diffusion of Christianity against the manifold difficulties and disadvantages which it then needs must encounter, was not intended to continue by derivation; for it contained in it divers things which, apparently, were not communicated, and which no man, without gross imposture and hypocrisy, could challenge to himself."* Yet further, "St. Peter, who had no other office mentioned in Scripture, or known to antiquity, besides that of an apostle, could not have properly and adequately any

* Barrow, vol. iii, p. 54.

successor to his office, but it naturally did expire with his person, as did that of the other apostles."* Whitaker, the celebrated Protestant champion, says, "The office of a bishop has nothing to do with the office of an apostle—*Munus Episcopi nihil est ad munus apostolicum.*"

The claim set up for High-Church Episcopacy, that bishops of the Anglican Church are the successors of the apostles, therefore possessing apostolical authority and power, rests precisely on the same ground as that set up for the supremacy of the pope, that he is the successor of Peter, and that Peter was the prince of the apostles. Both are alike baseless, possessing no shadow of sanction from the word of God; which, had there been any truth either in the one or the other, would not have been silent on a subject involving such momentous issues to the Church and the world. It is imposture and usurpation in both cases alike.

If those who make these high-sounding

* Barrow, vol. iii, p. 55.

claims to be the inheritors of the office and authority of the apostles were less intolerant and exclusive, we might be content to smile at their absurdity; but when it is sought on these arrogant and unfounded assumptions to unchurch all other Churches, excepting only those which are under these pretended successors to the apostleship, and to denounce as intruders into the sacred office all ministers who have not received authority from them, then it behoves us to inquire into the validity of such claims, and show that they are equally at variance with Scripture and reason, and that they are, in point of fact, identical with the usurpation of that papacy which for many centuries has been the curse and corruption of religion, and a fearful incubus upon the world.

These claims are unscriptural. There is nothing in the New Testament to sustain or justify them. Indeed, every thing which is there taught us relative to the apostolic office is at variance with them. Powell, in his "Essay on Apostolical Succession," says,

“Some eminent writers in favor of episcopacy substantially give up direct Scripture proof, and rely chiefly upon an induction from the testimony of the early Christian fathers. Thus, Dr. Hammond asks, ‘Who were the apostles’ successors in that power which concerned the governing their Churches which they planted? And first, I answer, that it being a matter of fact or story later than the Scriptures universally reach to, it cannot be fully satisfied or answered from thence.’ Henry Dodwell, a divine of the Anglican Episcopal Church, has probably never been surpassed in laborious ecclesiastical learning, and he devoted it all to the establishment of this system of exclusiveness on behalf of apostolical powers and authority. Now this High-Church champion, after all his toil to establish these claims, fairly gives up all direct scriptural authority for them. ‘The sacred writers,’ says he, ‘nowhere professedly explain the offices or ministries themselves, as to their nature or extent, which surely they would have done if any particular form had been

presented for perpetual duration.' And the very learned Bishop Beveridge, another exclusionist, makes substantially the same acknowledgment. He says, 'Nothing can be determined from what the apostles did in their early proceedings in preaching the Gospel as to the establishment of any certain form of Church government for perpetual duration.'” In the absence of all direct and clear Scripture proof of the validity of these claims, they fall to the ground; for the testimony of the fathers of the Church, both Greek and Latin, from Eusebius downward, amounts to just nothing at all. On such a subject no mere *human* authority can suffice. We point to *the book*, and say with Chillingworth, “The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants.”

Such claims are unreasonable and absurd. “To establish their scheme the advocates of apostolical succession must show two things: first, that the order of the twelve apostles was to be an *ordinary standing* order in the Church; and secondly, they must show *Divine*

law, POSITIVE Divine law, for the exclusive succession of modern bishops to the rights and authority of the apostles. For if the order of the twelve apostles was *extraordinary* and *temporary*, the claim to succeed them in that which had no continuance beyond themselves is a vain presumption; and if there be no Divine law for giving to bishops the exclusive rights and authority of the twelve, then the assumption of such rights and authority without Divine law is an *impious* assumption, and an attempt at an intolerable usurpation in the Church of Christ." *

Now as they cannot show either the one or the other of these two things, their claim is both ridiculous and absurd. For what can be more absurd than to see persons pretending to be successors to an office which died out nearly two thousand years ago, to which they can show no appointment by any competent authority; the peculiar duties of which they cannot possibly discharge; and for which they possess not one essential qualification? And

* Powell.

this is precisely the case with our modern High-Church pretenders, who so complacently arrogate to themselves the title of "successors to the apostles." With just an equal show of reason and right they may claim to be arch-angels. If successors of the apostles, having apostolic power, (though it would not be easy to show what it is,) they can, of course, show the signs of their apostleship. Let them then make it clear to us that they have seen Christ alive and conversed with him since his crucifixion, so as to be able, as eye-witnesses, to testify that he is risen from the dead; let them show that they have been appointed *by Christ himself*, without any human agency or intervention, to be *his* witnesses of the resurrection; and let them prove to us that they can work miracles to confirm their divine mission. These are the essential qualifications of an apostle. If they have them, we will not hesitate to admit their claim; but if not, they stand convicted as false apostles, pretenders, and impostors.

These claims are fraught with most pernicious

cious tendencies. The whole history of the Romish Church proves this; for from this usurpation of apostolic power has proceeded all that is corrupt and despotic and destructive in Romanism; all the darkness and superstition and idolatry, and the cruelties and bloodshedding with which an anti-Christian system has overspread and cursed the world for ages. It is the fundamental principle of antichrist. Examine, and you will find this to be the very corner-stone upon which the papal throne is erected; it is the band which binds the triple crown upon the head of "the man of sin," who has so long usurped a false authority in the Church, and plundered the world of its rights and liberties. And give it room to exert its baneful influence in the hands of its present claimants—let it have full scope—and it will work out similar results. It will banish all spiritual religion from the Church, overturn the liberties of nations, and fill the world, so far as it can reach, with spiritual darkness and superstition and moral death. Its tendency is always and only to

produce mischief and ruin. The arrogance, bigotry, and intelligence of modern High-Churchism, the superstitious forms and Popish practices which the Ritualists have introduced into many Churches, and the gross corruption of sound doctrine and grievous heresies, which are so often making their appearance in the Anglican Episcopal Church, are only the early developments of this evil principle—the fruits of the same poisonous root, which has already produced a dreadful harvest of evil to the human race.

They are repulsive and revolting to right-minded men, because of the corrupt channel through which they profess to be derived. If traced at all up to the apostles, this succession of bishops must be traced up through the moral monsters which have disgraced humanity upon the papal throne. Bishop Godwin, in his “Lives of the English Bishops,” (see Powell’s “Apostolical Succession,”) gives lists of archbishops of Canterbury and York, and of bishops also, including those of Durham and Winchester, naming the popes and car-

dinals by whom they were ordained, extending over a period of about seven hundred years; and clearly shows, beyond all contradiction, that "the Episcopal ordination in the Church of England before the Reformation came through the popes of Rome, and flowed steadily through all the filth of popery." And what, for more than a thousand years, has been the character of the Romish pontiffs, through whom the apostolic successionists of our day are compelled to trace their pedigree? Howell "challenges the world to produce, either from sacred or profane story, any one series, generation, or order of men to this day, that has been guilty of such failings, weakness, unsteadiness, cruelty, etc., as they have." Usurpers, murderers, stirrers-up of sedition and war, image worshipers, poisoners, Simoniacs, heretics, necromancers, adulterers, libidinous and incestuous persons, are all numbered among the bishops or popes of Rome. Prideaux, Bishop of Worcester, a staunch Churchman, and a standard writer on ecclesiastical history, numbers among the popes "thirty

eight *usurping Nimrods*; forty *luxurious Sodomites*; forty *Egyptian magicians*; forty-one *devouring Abaddons*; twenty *incurable Babylonians.*" Platina, who wrote in the fifteenth century on the "Lives of the Popes," calls some of them "*monsters*," and says, "They left no wickedness unpracticed." Pope Sixtus IV. *licensed brothels at Rome.* Of Pope Alexander VI., in the fifteenth century, Howell says, he was "one of the greatest and horri- blest monsters in nature that could scandalize the holy chair. His beastly morals, his im- mense ambition, his insatiable avarice, his de- testable cruelty, his furious lusts, and mon- strous incest with his daughter Lucretia, are at large described by Guiciardini, Ciaconius," etc. One of the popes or bishops of Rome was an abandoned woman, known as Pope Joan, who was elected and confirmed as Pope John the Eighth. and whose death was caused by the shameful amours to which she surrendered herself. Prideaux declares that there are fifty authorities belonging to the Church of Rome in favor of this fact. Boniface the Seventh,

Baronius saith, "was a thief, a murderer, and a traitor to his country." Gregory the Seventh "poisoned some six or seven popes before he could get the popedom himself." Down this polluted channel, through all this mass of corruption and crime, these claimants of apostolic succession have to trace their spiritual descent. It is an insult to our common sense, and a still greater insult to our holy religion, to expect that we should believe in such a monstrous incongruity. "What concord hath Christ with Belial?" How is it possible that these monsters of wickedness should be, *in any sense*, successors to the holy apostles, and *the only authorities* to give ministers and pastors to the Church? No wonder that there are so many infidels, when this is gravely proposed to be believed as a part of the Christian religion.

Those who derived their authority as bishops from such a source could not be expected to be much better; and accordingly we find that the bishops and archbishops in the English Church prior to the Reformation were fearfully corrupt. In Bishop Godwin's "Lives of

the English Prelates," evidence enough is given that the English bishops regularly traded with Rome in Simoniacal traffic. "John of Oxford, Bishop of Winchester, paid six thousand marks to the pope for his consecration, and the same sum to Jerdan, the pope's chancellor." Greenfield, Archbishop of York, was two years before he could obtain his confirmation and consecration from the pope, and then he paid nine thousand five hundred marks for the favor. When Moreton became Archbishop of Canterbury he spunged from the bishops of the provinces a large amount of money, compelling them, by the authority of the pope, to bear the cost of his translation to that see—to the amount of £15,000. How repulsive to our reason, and to all the notions of propriety and purity which we receive from the teachings of God's holy word, is the idea of a Christian ministry flowing down through such a line of all that is base and wicked, sensual and devilish!

They are not provable, even on High-Church principles. The bishops and clergy who make

these claims have no certainty that they are bishops or clergy at all; for there is no possibility of proving that apostolic succession, on which *they* maintain the validity of all ordinations to the Christian ministry depends. Mr. Wesley says: "I deny that the Romish bishops came down by uninterrupted succession from the apostles. I never could see it proved, and I am persuaded I never shall. But unless this is proved, your own pastors are no pastors at all. The figment of the uninterrupted succession I know to be a fable." The very first link of the chain is lost. Dr. Comber, a very learned divine of the Church of England, says: "Upon the whole matter there is no certainty who was bishop of Rome next to the apostles, and therefore the Romanists" (and the Tractarians equally) "build upon an ill bottom when they lay so great a weight on their personal succession." Concerning the next, the third bishop of Rome, and the fourth also, there is equal uncertainty; so that Dr. Comber says, "There is neither truth nor certainty in the pretended succession of the first popes."

Lord Macaulay says: "Even if it were possible, which it assuredly is not, to prove that the Church had the apostolical orders in the third century, it would be impossible to prove that those orders were not in the twelfth century so far lost that no ecclesiastic could be certain of the legitimate descent of his own spiritual character. And if this were so, no subsequent precautions could repair the evil. . . . We see no satisfactory proof of the fact that the Church of England possesses the apostolical succession. . . . What evidence then have we for the fact of the apostolical succession? And here we may easily defend the truth against Oxford with the same arguments with which, in the old times, the truth was defended by Oxford against Rome." Powell observes: "The early history of the bishops of Rome abounds in *contradiction*; the *later records are all confusion*; the *elections were frequently scenes of bloodshed*; and the numerous schisms about the popedom were *interminable*. Therefore the historic evidence of an unbroken line of descent from Peter

down to the present bishops of England utterly fails. The bold bravado is a fable, and is discreditable to those who make it." "Come we therefore to Rome," says Bishop Stillingfleet; "and here the succession is as muddy as the Tiber itself. Then let succession know its place, and learn to veil bonnet to the Scriptures. The succession so much pleaded by the writers of the primitive Church was not a succession of *persons in apostolic power*, but a succession in apostolical doctrine."

Finally, These claims are unjust and wicked. They involve a daring attempt to usurp a power which God has not given, and to lord it over God's heritage, both ministers and Churches, on *false* pretenses, than which nothing can be more unjust and wicked. The fact is, the Scriptures and the early Churches knew nothing at all of any order of bishops as distinct from that of presbyters, as might be shown from the testimony of all the Christian Churches in the world, not excepting the Romish Church, or the Protestant Episcopal Church of England; and the greatest divines

of all ages are shown to be against these exclusive claims for the Divine right of bishops.* We quote a few instances :

Wiclif. "I affirm that, in the time of Paul, the presbyter and bishop were names of the same office."

Erasmus. "Anciently none were called priests, but bishops and presbyters, who were the same."

Cranmer, the martyr-archbishop. "The bishops and priests (presbyters) were at one time, and were no two things, but both one, in the beginning of Christ's religion."

Dr. Whitaker. "Formerly there was no difference between a presbyter and a bishop. For the placing of bishops over presbyters was a *human arrangement.*"

Calvin. "The reason why I have used the terms bishops and presbyters and pastors and ministers promiscuously, is because the Scriptures do the same; for they give the title of bishops to all persons whatsoever who were ministers of the Gospel."

* See Powell's "Apostolical Succession."

Melanchthon. "They who taught in the Church, and baptized, and administered the Lord's Supper, were called bishops or presbyters; and those were deacons who distributed alms in the Church. But these offices were not so separated as to make it sinful for a deacon to teach, or to baptize, or to administer the eucharist."

Mosheim. "The rulers of the Church were called either presbyters or bishops, which two titles are, in the New Testament, undoubtedly applied to the same order of men."

Archbishop Usher. "A presbyter hath the same order *in specie* with a bishop; *ergo*, a presbyter hath equally an intrinsic power to give orders, and is equal in the power of order."

The order of bishop, then, in the Anglican Church is simply a prudential human arrangement, and as such we have nothing here to say concerning it. But to claim for it a Divine right, when there is not a word in the Holy Scriptures to show for it, is usurpation; and to make this baseless claim the pretext for

attempting to unchurch the best and purest and most God-honored Churches in the world, and for denying the scriptural rights of thousands of the most holy and useful ministers upon earth, is unjust and wicked. It was to resist this usurpation, injustice, and wickedness, in the papacy, that the noble band of English martyrs, whose names shine out with brightest and purest luster in the Anglican Church, went to the stake, and cheerfully laid down their lives. And greatly is it to be lamented that those who have entered into their labors should become mere apes of popery, and set up false claims which their martyred predecessors resisted unto blood.

Let it not be said that we are opposing Episcopacy. On this subject, in the abstract, we have nothing to say here *pro* or *con*. Methodism, to which we are sincerely attached by ties of affection, which grow warmer and stronger with the lapse of time, embraces both the Episcopal and Presbyterian forms of Church government. In England it is Presbyterian, in America it is Episcopal, possess-

ing some of the finest specimens of Christian bishops that are to be found in the world. Both these forms in the Methodist Churches are of strikingly providential origin; as if to show to the world that both are equally scriptural, and equally efficient, when based upon those great principles which are laid down for the purpose in the New Testament. Both are working admirably, and with increasing power and success, for the world's salvation. It is not the right or the wrong, the good or evil, of Episcopacy that we call in question, but the claim of a Divine exclusive right for *Anglican* Episcopacy, which we have proved to be baseless and absurd, and at variance with Scripture, common sense, and the well-being of mankind.

That the great Head of the Church designed there should be a succession of ministers therein to the end of the world is evident from the New Testament; not, however, such a succession as that claimed by men of the Tractarian school—the Bible knows nothing of it—but a succession of faithful men exhibiting the apos

tolic type of moral character and life, holding and preaching the doctrines which the apostles and their coadjutors preached, and manifesting the same yearning zeal and devoted effort to save the lost souls of men. Such were Timothy, Barnabas, Apollos, and many others in the primitive age of the Church. Such were Luther and Melancthon, and their fellow-laborers. Such were many of the reformers of the English Church. Such were many of the Puritan divines. Such were the Wesleys, and Whitefield, and Fletcher, and the other agents of that modern revival of religion which gave birth to Methodism, and imparted an impulse to religious evangelism such as the Church never witnessed since apostolical times. Such are many of the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America, and missionaries of every denomination carrying the light of God's saving truth to multitudes, all the world over, who are sitting in darkness and in the region and shadow of death. And such are many of those men of God, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational, Bap-

tist, in England, Scotland, Ireland, and elsewhere, who are raising up and presiding over Churches, and preaching the ever-blessed Gospel with an unchallengeable purity, and with the power of God sent down from heaven, winning thousands of souls to Christ, and diffusing influences abroad before which every system of error and superstition and moral evil shall fall to rise no more. The advocates of an intolerant and exclusive system may frown and fulminate their thunders; but it will avail nothing, for this is the work of God.

“So shall the bright succession run,
Through the last courses of the sun;
While unborn Churches, through their care,
Shall rise and flourish large and fair.”

“No weapon formed against it shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against it in judgment” shall be condemned; for “the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”