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I.—LITERARY.

WHY SHOULD CHRISTIAN PEOPLE FEEL SUCH DEEP INTEREST IN THE CONVERSION OF THE YOUTHS IN OUR SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES?*

The Southern Presbyterian Church has, from the first week of its organization to the present, evinced a most intense concern for this part of her people. It had been no matter of wonder, if the detonating clouds of the awful war which was to be fought during the years 1861-'65—if those clouds, by which the country was overhung by a canopy darker than night, had driven from the minds of our first Assembly all

*DEAR BRO. LINGLE :

This paper was prepared for delivery in the College Church on the last Thursday of February, 1895. I send it to you in place of the article on "The Testing System in the Irish Presbyterian Church" which I had promised. I have all the material gathered for the latter article but my present circumstances make its putting into shape embarrassing.

I am glad to publish the paper sent, for notwithstanding its marks of hasty preparation, it is really a plea for the observance of a day of prayer for the youths of our schools and colleges. Our last Assembly did much toward the practical abolition of the observance of such a day, by changing the time to a Sunday in November. The observance is so important that the Assembly may well appoint from year to year a week day; and the Church may well meet for prayer on the subject. I very much fear that under the inspiration of our last Assembly the Church would soon reduce this honored and useful observance to a mere incident in the regular service of the Sunday appointed—a reference to our youth in the long prayer it may be.

Yours very truly,

Orlando, Fla., 11th March, '96.

THOS. C. JOHNSON.

THE DRIFT APOSTOLICWARD.

A marked characteristic of the church life of to-day is the evident desire to get back to apostolic methods and to realize apostolic ideals. "The apostolic church," "the apostolic doctrine," "the apostolic practice," are common phrases in the mouth of the most positively evangelistic Christianity of the nineteenth century.

The Church Fathers are not often named, the mediæval theologians are rarely quoted. The conviction is in many minds that through the centuries, an elaborate system of ecclesiasticism has been built up, by no means confined to the Roman Catholic church, and that this system is a hindrance rather than a help to the spread of the gospel and to the christianization of the world. Hence the effort is to get back, past all, intermediaries, to the fountain source of light and truth, and conform nineteenth century church life to the apostolic pattern.

Doubtless the church life of every age has made some such claim as this. It has professed to be apostolic, but to profess it is not necessarily to possess it. Perhaps the ritualists of the 17th century may have defended their persecution of the Covenanters by claiming that King Charles represented the apostolic church. Perhaps Tetzels may have buttressed his traffic in "indulgences" by avowing himself an exponent of the apostolic church. The drift apostolicward to-day has much more in it than this. It is not a badge by which to vaunt one's ecclesiastical superiority, that is sought; but it is to get back to that atmosphere of pentecostal power and catch the pulse-beat of that life when the church achieved its finest results.

Instead of stopping with the reformers and church fathers, why not go, for methods as well as truths, to those at whose feet the reformers and church fathers sat? Instead of going to John Calvin, why not go to Paul? And why not go to Paul directly, without journeying by the way of John Calvin to reach him? Instead of going to the Westminster Assembly, why not go to the New Testament? And why not go to the New Testament immediately without journeying by the way of the Westminster Assembly to reach it? Instead of going to

the church fathers, why not go to the Holy Ghost? And why not go to the Holy Ghost direct, without journeying by the way of the church fathers to reach him?

These are questions on the lips of evangelistic Christianity to-day. There is a growing impatience with mediæval systems and evangelistic forms, and a purpose to get back past dogmatic theologies and doctrinal symbols, to the naked text of sacred scripture and to the living example of Christ's apostles. There are those who will sharply criticise this, and with some justice. Two cautions must be entered.

In the first place, Christ did not cease teaching his church when the canon of the New Testament was completed. He shall not only "bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you," but "he shall teach you all things," was the Saviour's promise of the Paraclete. The Holy Ghost is still in the church teaching, and the church is enriched by the study of a pious scholarship for 1800 years. All this has made more luminous God's way and will. To set it all aside with a sneer at "second-hand medievalism," is merely to put oneself back in the second century. If the drift apostolicward reaches its best results, it will not be dead to the experience of Christian faith, nor to the achievements of Christian scholarship since the days of the apostles. When this is said it is not meant, let it be understood, that Martin Luther's example is as good as Simon Peter's, nor that Calvin's Institutes are as infallible as Paul's epistles.

The other caution has reference to the limitations and fallibility of the apostles themselves. They were men of like passions with ourselves, they made mistakes and what was done by them or at their suggestion, is not necessarily an infallible example for us. For instance, the early converts of the apostolic age sold all their earthly possessions and "had all things in common." That comes dangerously near socialism. Is that example binding on the Christians of every age? It would be difficult so to maintain.

Besides in a multitude of questions which confront the church life of to-day, there is no apostolic examples. The conditions are not the same. The world is larger since then. Take the single question of Sabbath observance. By reason of the changes in living brought about by modern inventions and discoveries, a thousand delicate points impinge upon that problem today, which never crossed the thought of apostolic life.

Is it not evident that what must be sought is not so much the apostolic method as the apostolic spirit? It is not that we want to turn all of our churches into Jewish synagogues, albeit they were the meeting houses of the apostolic disciples. Neither is it that we want to conduct our worship to-day precisely as Peter did on the day of Pentecost, or as Paul did that night at Troas when Eutychus fell into his fatal slumber. But we do want the spirit which characterized the church life of those days, and in so far as the present drift apostolicward is a revival of that spirit, and a reproduction of its methods, where methods were given; let us hail it as the token of progress. May it not be seriously questioned whether Christ and his apostles would feel at home at the Sunday morning service in some of our fashionable city churches?

Is it worth while to make a struggle for the creation of a church life which shall breathe spirit of apostolic days? Undoubtedly, and the effort is making, and wherever made, results in a revival.

This drift, in the church life of to-day, toward the teachings and practice of the apostles shows itself in many ways.

1. It is manifest in the effort to make church fellowship more than a fine phrase. Too often our churches have degenerated into ecclesiastical coteries of the better class of people, who flock to an architecturally imposing edifice on the Sabbath to be entertained by the music and solaced by the sermon. Such an organization will require more than eternity to carry out the great commission. The heart-beat has died out of such church life, and the poor and undervalued shiver when they go to them. They rarely care to return to repeat the experience.

The apostolic church had a fellowship that was more than a phrase, and the churches that are doing most now to bring in the multitudes are those that are making an honest effort to reproduce this.

2. We are trying to get the administration of church finances back to the apostolic teaching. The raising of money for the support of the gospel by fairs and festivals and entertainments is sufficiently condemned by asking whether Peter ever exhorted the saints at Antioch to hold a church supper to raise money for sending Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey.

There were no pew-rents in the apostolic church, and the

practice of renting out sections of the Lord's house for a certain sum is falling more and more into disfavor. It is found that churches prosper as they follow the apostolic method of voluntary offerings. Whether they prosper or not, the conviction is growing that this is the right way, and, if right, should be followed, whether the receipts be large or small.

3. There is a drift also to greater liberty in the mode and form of worship. A church may not be ritualistic, but if its order of exercises is such that the singing of a hymn at an unusual place in the service, or the changing of the posture in prayer, raises a storm of protest from the orthodox, the church is ritualistic to all intents and purposes.

"Where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty." The early gatherings of believers for worship had a delightful informality about them, which has been lost from much of the church life of later time. It was not necessary for a believer to attend a training school for a month, before he could manipulate himself comfortably through the ups and downs of a Sunday service. Instead of an ornate rigidity in worship, evangelistic Christianity says: "Let us have more liberty, more informality, less that appeals to the senses, more that appeals to the heart."

4. The practice of employing salaried singers, regardless of their faith, to furnish the praise of the sanctuary, is falling into the same condemnation. The question is beset with serious difficulties inasmuch as the mass of church members have no special training in song.

Nevertheless this part of the service is being brought more and more before the jury of apostolic example. As it is, congregational song revives, and the demand is made that those who lead in the ministry of song, have something besides the qualifications which insure success in the opera. They must be Christians. Praise is as much a part of worship as prayer, and there is nothing in the apostolic church to suggest that an unbeliever may lead the congregation in either.

5. The same drift is evident in the attitude of the church toward theology. It is growing more and more intolerant of theology in its dogmatic form. There is probably as much doctrinal preaching to-day as ever, but the doctrines are not served in the garb of dogmatic theology. They are rather served as they are found in the Bible, not as gathered into a system, but as inhering in the life.

This is sharply criticised by some, and yet such was largely

the preaching of the apostles. They preached doctrines, and those doctrines in logical relation to each other, but in logical relation to each other only because they found them thus in Christ. The theology that is preached from the pulpits of christendom to-day is not the theology of the scholastics but the theology of the apostles—very much the same in substance, but widely different in dress. The theology of the apostles is the theology of Christ. "They ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

Some one has suggested that all dogmatic theology is in the Bible, just as all the bones in the graveyard were once in human society, but they were not there as dry bones. The dogmas of theology are in the Bible, but they are there incarnated, clothed with flesh, and warm with blood-beat.

6. It needs but to mention the great missionary movements of the passing century to show the same drift. The apostolic church was not self-centered. It was missionary to the core. The missionary work of christendom to-day is not only missionary, but missionary along apostolic lines. It sounds out the apostolic commission, and presses forward with the apostolic faith and fervor. Repeatedly has it received the apostolic seal of approval on its work.

And so, in whatever direction we look, the drift apostolicward is evident. It is not as well defined sometimes, as we would like it, but it is there, and it is growing stronger. There are other drifts in the church life of to-day, to be sure, that run counter to this, but the apostolic drift *is there*. It is one of the marked characteristics of current Christianity. May the drift become a land-slide, sweeping all before it, until "the days of the apostles" shall repeat themselves 1900 years afterwards, and the triumphs of that time crown again the church!

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