Shadow or Substance?

THE REAL CHOICE BEFORE THE CHURCH.

By The Rev. A. M. Stibbs, M.A.

Reflections on the present situation suggested after reading "The Throne of David" by A. G. Hebert.

"So let no one take you to task on questions of eating and drinking or in connexion with the observance of festivals or new moons or sabbaths. All that is mere shadow of what is to be: the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one lay down rules for you as he pleases . . . instead of keeping in touch with that Head under whom the entire Body . . . grows with growth divine." (Colossians ii. 16-19: from the translation by Prof. Jas. Moffatt).

Christianity is a fulfilment of earlier anticipations. It is the "substance" of which they were the "shadows". In the Old Testament we find the "shadows," or the "figures of the true." In Christ God has given the "substance," the reality itself. In the ancient Israel much was anticipated which Israel was impotent to fulfil. The fulfilment came only in Christ. He was the one true Israelite. God brought the Israelites as "a vine" out of Egypt, and planted them in the land of promise. But Christ and Christ alone is "the true vine."

This means, therefore, that many things which were prefigured in special ways by the Israelitish nation of the preparatory age are in Christianity fulfilled only and wholly in Christ. But, having been fulfilled they are then in Him extended to all. He alone has fulfilled the vocation of Israel. But through His fulfilment all alike may now find a place in "the substance" or the body,—which is "Christ."

This is particularly true of the office of the priesthood. The old Levitical order was the "shadow." It recognised a need and suggested a method. There must be a mediator between God and men. But "the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest." Then, in Christ the reality was given. He entered into heaven itself to appear in the presence of God for us. Henceforth there was no more place for "the shadow." It had done its preparatory work. It was now ready to vanish away. In Christ, and with Him as their High Priest, all alike now can with boldness enter into the holiest of all, the very presence of God. Also, in Him the privilege of priestly service is extended to all alike. Christians are "a kingdom of priests," "a royal priesthood." There is, therefore, no more room for "the shadow." There is no more any place 'in Christ' for the claim that a select class, 'the priests' or 'the clergy', stand nearer to God than the laity. For through Christ each and all alike have direct "access by one Spirit unto the Father." There is now" one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus."

In the course of Church history there has been a tendency to revert from the "substance" to the "shadow," and to appeal to the

Old Testament " figures of the true " as a justification for so doing. Hence there has been reintroduced into Christendom the idea of a mediating priestly caste. In his book ' The Throne of David ', A. G. Hebert, writing of the true Sabbath, which has now come to supersede the shadow Sabbath of the Law, says, " But they are to be blamed . . . if they reject the substance, the Messianic reign itself, in order to cling to the shadow-Sabbath, which exists only in order to point forward to it" (p.155 f.). Is it not equally right to suggest that they also are to be blamed who reject the substance, the one eternal and all sufficient priesthood of Christ alone, and in Him the priesthood of all believers, in order to cling to the shadow-priesthood? Also, to pursue the analogy, under the Law only one day in seven was a Sabbath ; but in Christ all our days become the true Sabbath ; we enter into the rest of God, which is to be consummated in eternity. Similarly, under the Law, only a select minority of the people of God were priests, who could offer sacrifice and enter the holy place ; but in Christ, according to the plain teaching of the New Testament, all the people are priests, all alike can offer sacrifice, all can enter the holiest of all. Is it not, therefore, relevant to the present situation in Christendom to say that our generation has afresh to choose between the " shadow " and the " substance? " There is not room for both to exist together.

When in fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy the Lord came to His Temple, He came to break down every barrier which separated men from God and from one another. He came to rend the vail and to remove the middle wall of partition. He meant His house to be a house of prayer for all nations, in which through Him and His priestly work as the one all-sufficient mediation all might draw nigh to God. So, in the last week of His earthly life at the time when He did enter the holy city and the temple, the Gentile Greeks who came asked not for Jewish priests but for Jesus. They wanted not the " shadow " but the " substance ". " Sir, we would see Jesus." And in that hour Jesus said, " I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me ". But the danger to-day is lest the " shadow " prevent men from properly seeing the " substance,"—lest the " priests " stand between Christ and a gathering humanity hungering to find unity in Him.

In February, 1941, in a letter to ' The Times ' the Bishop of Oxford suggested that the sight of the Bishop on his throne in the Cathedral might serve as " the starting point for a vivid scheme of Christian education." Is this not to offer the rising generation the " shadow " rather than the " substance? " However far it may be from the minds of its devoted supporters, in the last analysis is it not true to say that communion with the Bishop as a test of true Christianity or membership in Christ's Church is, or may all too easily become, first a shadow-substitute for the " substance," and, in the end, a false or anti-Christian idea, because it makes the Bishop to claim to be what none but the Christ Himself can be—the centre of loyalty and unity? It is, in principle, similar to the claims of the Papacy. It is the " shadow " not the " substance."

As A. G. Hebert says so plainly and so well in his book ' The Throne of David ', the true centre of unity is our Lord Himself. " As soon as Israel is cleansed from sin and is gathered in faith and humility round

her Messiah, the Gentiles will be found coming" (p.221). "There is one centre of unity only for Israel and mankind . . . That centre of unity, that gathering point, is the Messiah in His Kingdom" (p.221f.). For there is to be one flock not one fold. "A Flock is constituted by its relation to the Shepherd" (p.224). It is He Who will gather together in one the children of God scattered. "His Cross is the appointed centre of unity" (p.224).

Membership and unity are, therefore, "in Christ," and in Him alone. It is those who are in Him Who form the true "Israel of God." Whatever men may think or claim there are now in God's sight no Jewish-Israelites (or British-Israelites); for membership in "the "Israel of God" is not a privilege restricted to those who possess a particular line of physical descent. Nor are the true Israelites Papal-Israelites or Episcopal-Israelites; it is not a privilege limited to those who possess a particular line of official connection or succession. The true Israelites are now Christo-Israelites. Those who are in Christ Jesus are "Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." The true Church is 'ubi Christus' not 'ubi episcopus'. None have a right to say "You must have our ordination, and our sacraments." All that men must have is Christ. For He is "the true Vine;" and if any individual abide in Him he is a true branch. No other ecclesiastical connection is necessary. Rather it is by that one connection that all alike belong to the Ecclesia.

There is, therefore, no need of, nor place for, any priestly caste as a necessary channel of grace. Just as in the extreme case any individual Christian may baptize, similarly in the last analysis any Christian congregation may under God, and by His call and gift, appoint and set apart or ordain its own ministers, including those, of course, who will administer the sacraments. Also, if someone is so baptized by one of the laity, the practice of the Church is not to require re-baptism by a properly ordained minister, but to receive the baptised person into the congregation of Christ's flock. Similarly, if a minister be truly set apart by a congregation of Christian men, or 'by men who have public authority given unto them in the Congregation, to call and send Ministers into the Lord's vineyard' (Art. xxiii), it is improper to demand that he should be reordained, and it is only right to recognise him as a true minister of the Church of God.

It is surely very remarkable that when in the last days of His earthly life the Lord came to His Temple He came to oppose the priests and to vindicate the place of Gentile 'outsiders'. This day of fulfilment when the one true Priest came to His Temple was a tremendous challenge to the shadow-priests in possession. This was the day when they ought to have been willing to yield place to Him, to decrease that He might increase, to disappear that Christ might be all in all. This was the hour when Jesus said, 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone'. 'He that loveth his life shall lose it'. But these priests were unwilling 'to die'. Rather they asserted themselves and their importance. They said in effect, 'This is our House. No one can come before God or have freedom of action here without us and our blessing. It is our right to ask, By what authority doest Thou these things?'

This was their supreme act of robbery. They had appropriated the

court of the Gentiles for their business. They were taking more than a fair price from the worshippers through their monopoly of the Temple trade. Now they sought to retain for themselves the place that belonged to Him Who said, 'My House'. The "shadow" would not make way for the "Substance." So judgment had to begin at the House of God. The Lord went out from the shadow-Temple and disowned it. He said,—awful words—"*Your* house is left unto you desolate." To one of His disciples He added, "Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." If the "shadow" will not make way for the "Substance," it must, in the end, be swept away in judgment.

To-day, it would seem, the same Lord comes again to His Temple, bringing as He promised His "other sheep" from the young churches of the mission fields. He comes to gather together in one the children of God which are scattered abroad; that all may be one. Those who would oppose this movement are "the priests." It is they who seem to want to say, "Some of these 'other sheep' have no right here. They do not belong to the 'one flock'." It is those who claim some kind of 'monopoly' of sacramental grace who once again ask, "By what authority?"

One can almost hear the same Lord answering, "I also will ask you one question. The ministries of the Free Churches, are they sent from God? Their sacraments are they from heaven or from men?" One is thankful, indeed, that to this question the Lambeth Conference of Bishops has already given answer. The Bishops in the Lambeth Appeal of 1920 have said,

"It is not that we call in question for a moment the spiritual reality of the ministries of those communions which do not possess the Episcopate. On the contrary we thankfully acknowledge that these ministries have been manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace."

To such an answer the Christ Himself would surely reply, "Why then do not all in the episcopal communion receive and recognise these ministries as genuine ministries of the Church of God?"

Perhaps the reason why we seem so slow to see and to follow the truth is because, though we want the "substance" rather than the "shadow," our sense of perspective is not true. For we live in a day in which Episcopal power tends to assume undue proportions. For instance, did not Archbishop Davidson once allow himself publicly to describe the Church as consisting of "The Bishops, with the Clergy and Laity"? And is this not how some would still describe it? Did not St. Paul preserve a wiser sense of proportion when he described the Church in Philippi as "all the saints in Christ Jesus . . . with the bishops and deacons"? For the laity are not subservient to the clergy and the Bishops. Rather the latter belong to the People of God as well as to the Lord, as their servants as well as His. So Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, that is, to the laity, to say, "All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas." In other words, the clergy belong to the Church, not the Church to the clergy, or to the Bishops. For in Christ, and in the Church which is His body, the only "heirarchy," or rule of the priests, is the "democracy"

or the rule of the people ; for all are priests and kings unto God. This is the " substance " or the " body," which is " of Christ."

In relation to present practical questions of Church order one feels that the Apostle Paul would adopt to episcopal ordination an attitude somewhat similar to that which he adopted towards circumcision. There would be occasional circumstances possibly in which, to avoid giving needless offence to those as yet unaware of our full liberty in Christ, he would take a Timothy and have him episcopally ordained. There would be other circumstances in which, whatever the pressure even from some in the Mother Church, he would not yield and allow a Titus to be re-ordained—that the Truth of the Gospel may continue with the Free Churches. Nor would he be satisfied with any decree of the Church in council unless it refrained from laying upon the Free Churches episcopal ordination as something necessary for unity. Above all, he would say that in Christ Jesus, and in the Church which is His body, episcopal ordination or non-episcopal ordination makes no essential difference ; but faith which worketh by love.

For the " ministers of the new covenant " are ministers " not of the letter but of the Spirit." Their " sufficiency is of God." Their apostleship is " not of men," and may not even be " through man." Certainly it need not always be through Bishops. There are ministries of the Spirit which are non-Episcopal. If Bishops are to continue to find their place of ministry in the Church, instead of trying to put God's people in bondage to themselves, they must be willing in fresh ways to act on the Christian principle and to lose their life in order to find it. Nothing is more Christlike than to renounce inherited privilege. Nothing is more calculated to promote the glory and Kingdom of God.

It is perhaps the greatest tragedy of history that there has been within the Christian Church a widespread and widely successful return to the " shadow " of a priestly and a ruling caste. At first sight, it is true, the " shadow " often seems more substantial than the " substance." It seems to promise more. But it is the limitation of all shadows that they can never realise that which they suggest. Still worse, if clung to in place of the substance, they increasingly become a disappointment ; until at last there is a revolt on the part of those who want God's reality. It is, therefore, the growth of the power of the Papacy and of the priest, and the increase of sacerdotal ideas of the ministry, that are chiefly responsible for the disruption of Christendom. The Reformation was an inevitable revolt against it.

Some of this " shadow " of a priestly caste claiming undue authority in the Church still remains. Only if they will die to their superior claims can the Church fully live in unity and brotherly love. Only if they will yield the office of priestly mediation to Christ alone can He make His House a House of Prayer for all nations. Nor is it without significance that in the wider world a similar hindrance and challenge confront human society. For there can be no true democracy or commonwealth, no true brotherhood among men, until the plutocracy and the privileged renounce (or are deprived of) their vested interests and monopolies, and until all who still must have wealth or position learn to use them in service and not for self. To return to the condition of things in the Church, and to put the same

idea in an allegorical way, there is a spiritual sense in which it seems to be true that only when this "Moses is dead," can we hope to arise and go over "this Jordan" and enter the promised unity of the People of God. "The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Only as we follow Him as "the one Shepherd and Bishop of our souls" shall we become in realised experience one Flock under one Shepherd.

This, then, is the issue before the Church of to-day. Are we, or at least are some of us, to hold fast to Episcopacy, to a mechanical "Apostolic Succession," or perhaps to the Papacy, and thus oppose the fuller realisation of the "substance," or the "body," which is "of Christ?" Or are we all prepared to hold fast the Head, and in acknowledgment of Jesus only as Lord find our unity in Him? This is the one age-long hope of ultimate unity—that in the Name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue coniess that Jesus Christ is Lord. This does not mean uniformity. Indeed, those who insist on the outward form as of primary importance inevitably return to the "shadow."

At the very end of A. G. Hebert's 'The Throne of David' there is, for instance, a most disappointing anti-climax. When he has a great opportunity to finish by focussing all faith and hope upon the Christ upon His Throne in the City of our God as the one and only centre and vital connecting Head of the unity of God's People, he suddenly and unexpectedly says, 'And the Christian Minister—primarly in each place the Bishop—is the focus and the organ of the local unity of the Church;' (264); and again, with equal suddenness, in some of his closing words, he says, 'When this episcopal office shall again become for Christians who are now divided the focus and the organ of unity—' (265). In strong contrast to this our Lord said even of the local ecclesia at its very smallest, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (St. Matthew xviii. 20). 'This episcopal office' or 'Jesus in the midst'; Shadow or Substance? To whom does 'the Throne of David' belong? the Bishop or the Christ? Are we to exalt Bishops and a particular form of "Apostolic Succession" as indispensable, and perpetuate divisions? or are we all to hold fast the Head, and find increasing unity in Him? Is our loyalty to Bishops to take priority over our loyalty to Christ? or are we prepared, not to love Bishops less but to love Christ more? Nothing less than this is surely the choice which now confronts the Church.