

**TWO LETTERS ON
APOSTOLICAL
EPISCOPAL SUCCESSION,
AND TRADITION**

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Two Letters on Apostolical Episcopal Succession, and Tradition by Charles Bowdler

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BY
CHARLES BOWDLER.

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LETTER I.

ON

APOSTOLICAL EPISCOPAL SUCCESSION.

P R E F A C E.

THE following Letters are published rather more by constraint than willingly. That which is second in order, though first in date, (having been written in the year 1839,) has been printed before, but it was for private circulation only, and I have been repeatedly urged to give it greater publicity.

Had the observations on episcopal succession appeared alone, it should have been in such a form as would have enabled me to ask for them the countenance of the Right Reverend the Bishop of Chichester; and have thus afforded me the opportunity of expressing myself towards his Lordship in terms of cherished and grateful esteem, while I indulged a hope that the general tenor of the argument would be approved by him, as embracing a subject of general interest and legitimate discussion. It is hardly necessary to add, that I should even then have had no right to claim his Lordship's approval of any part of what these pages contain, and for which I am alone responsible.

They make no pretensions to originality, and contain little that may not, in substance at least, be found elsewhere; my object being only to supply, in a condensed form, what appears to be a plain and correct view of a subject that is acquiring importance very disproportionate, I think, to its real value.

To avoid the possibility of mistake, however unimportant such a mistake might be, I desire to express my hope that nothing may be found in the following pages to indicate an undervaluing of episcopacy, as being now beyond comparison preferable to any other form of ecclesiastical polity; or of the Church of England itself as a blessing to the dominions in which it is established. All that I desire to combat is the alleged necessity of Apostolical Succession to that Episcopacy, leading as it does to an undue exaltation of the priesthood, and to the evils that follow in its train; among which it is not the least, that it brings discomfort and discouragement to many who, in humility and sincerity of heart, are seeking the way of God's salvation as revealed in His word.

The hedge of the vineyard is not broken down by any obstruction being thrown in the way of those who are engaged in building a wall with untempered mortar.

A LETTER, &c.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

THE claim of episcopal apostolical succession, as now advanced, is similar to that of tradition, and is in close connexion with it,—the attempt in each instance being the same—viz. to establish an authority independent of, if not superior to, the word of God.

As the distinction to be taken in the one case is between the *authority* and *worth* of tradition, so in the other it is between the *necessity* and the *benefit* of a *ministerial* (*episcopal*) succession.

The claim advanced is to this effect,—viz. that our Lord, as head of his church and kingdom upon earth, appointed twelve apostles, giving to them power and authority to ordain successors. That from their time to the present there have been three orders of ministers, viz. bishops, priests and deacons, which therefore are necessary to the constitution of a christian church. That our Lord instituted sacraments, which, as