

XXXIV. *On Episcopal and other Rings of Investiture.* By
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THE Ring has for many ages formed part of the insignia of a Bishop ; there does not, however, appear to be any evidence either as to the period or the special reason of its first adoption. It seems from very early times to have had a two-fold purpose and signification, the one practical and useful, the other mystical and symbolic.

Many of the General Councils held during the first six centuries had reference to the episcopal office, and the canons decreed thereat had especial relation to the election, ordination, and duties of Bishops. In no one canon, however, is any mention made of the episcopal ring. In the Apostolical Constitutions regulating the discipline and practice of the early Church are found minute and particular directions for the election and ordination of Bishops. These constitutions are said to have been drawn up by the Apostles themselves ; by some, however, they are thought to have been compiled from the early precepts, practice, and customs of the Apostles by St. Clement, who died about the year 100. By others, again, they are believed, from internal evidence, to have been a collection of previous constitutions, rules and regulations, made in the fourth or fifth century. In speaking of a Bishop these regulations prescribe the sort of man who should be chosen for a Bishop, viz. that he must be a man of good morals, fifty years of age, and the husband of one wife, who must not have been a widow, and then give expressly the form of his consecration, which is as follows : After the election is made, the people on the Sunday assemble in the church, together with the priests and Bishops, of which there must be at least three present. He who presides in the assembly presents the newly-elected Bishop to the people, and asks if it is he whom they have chosen, and whether he is a fit and proper person ; and on the people answering in the affirmative, one

of the first Bishops standing before the altar shall, together with the other Bishops, make a prayer over the elect. During this time the deacons shall hold the Book of the Holy Gospels open upon the head of him whom they are ordaining, and the Bishops and priests shall pray in silence; when the prayer is ended, and the people have answered Amen, one of the Bishops is to place a hoste in the hands of the ordained, and the others conduct him to the throne prepared for him. He then receives the holy kiss from all the Bishops, and after the reading the lessons from the prophets and the Gospels he pronounces a blessing on the people.

These directions are very minute, and there is in them no mention whatever of a ring, or staff, or any form of investiture. But these constitutions, and all the canons of the early councils which allude to the subject, are very express about the Bishop being elected by the people and clergy, with the consent of the Metropolitan, which term first occurs in them, and that at least three Bishops shall be present at his consecration.

I must leave to others to determine the date of these Apostolical Constitutions, which, if of the fifth century, will serve to show that the ring could not have been adopted as a symbol of the episcopal office till after that time; at all events, it seems clear that the ring is not coeval with the institution of Bishops.

The earliest document with a certain date in which mention is made of the episcopal ring is that usually cited, viz. the 28th Canon of the Council of Toledo, held in the year 633, by which it is ordained that a Bishop, priest, or deacon condemned unjustly, and whose innocence is acknowledged by a second Synod, cannot perform the functions which they did before until they have received before the altar the degrees from which they were fallen, that is the ensigns of their office. "The Bishop shall receive the stole, the ring, and the staff, the priest the stole and the chasuble, the deacon the stole and the albe, the sub-deacon the chalice and paten, and so for the other degrees." From this it is evident that the Bishop must have received the ring and staff before they could have been taken from him on his deposition from his office, and from the manner in which they are mentioned it would seem that they had long been the habitual ensigns of the episcopal dignity. It may, therefore, I think be fairly inferred that the ring was adopted at some period between the compiling of the constitutions, probably in the fifth century, and the year 633.

There is, however, another authority, at least cotemporary with that council, if not of earlier date. St. Isidor, Bishop of Seville, who died A.D. 636, in his work "De Ecclesiasticis Officiis," lib. ii. c. 5, when writing on the episcopal dignity,

says, "Huic (Episcopo) autem dum consecratur datur baculus, ut ejus indicio subditam plebem vel regat vel corrigat, vel infirmitates sustineat. Datur et annulus propter signum pontificalis honoris vel signaculum secretarum." Here he informs us that the staff and ring were given to the Bishop at his consecration, and mentions the two-fold purpose and signification of the ring, but does not tell us from what source these insignia were derived.

Numerous authors, from the thirteenth century downwards, have written on the subject of the rituals and ceremonies of the Church at various periods, as well as the insignia of the different orders in the Church, but no light is thrown on the early history of the ring.

Durandus, Bishop of Mende, one of the most learned lawyers of the thirteenth century, in his "*Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*," when writing on the Episcopal Ring, says, "Annulus est fidei sacramentum, quo Christus sponsam suam sanctam ecclesiam subarravit, ut ipsa de se dicere valeat, 'Annulo suo subarravit me Dominus meus, Jesus Christus,' cujus custodes et pædagogi sunt Episcopi et prelati; annulos pro signo in testimonium hujus rei ferentes." He then alludes to the return of the Prodigal Son, as mentioned in the Gospel, on whose hand his father ordered a ring to be placed as a mark of honour, and adds, "Ex quo evangelio annuli usus creditur acceptus." Again, "Annulus ergo pontificis integritatem significat fidei, ut videlicet ecclesiam Dei sponsam sibi creditam sicut se diligit, et sobriam et castam cœlesti sponso custodiat." Thus he considers the ring as a mark of dignity, and the symbol of the mystical union between the bishop and the church. Then with regard to the practical signification he says, "Antiqui literas annulo sigillabant, unde Episcopus annulum portat, quoniam Scripturæ mysteria et ecclesiæ sacramenta perfidis sigillare et humilibus revelare debet." Thus drawing a mystical meaning from the practical use of a seal ring. Again, "Annulus digiti donum significat Spiritus Sancti. Annulus aureus et rotundus perfectionem donorum ejus significat, quem sine mensurâ Christus accepit. Ipse de plenitudine suâ secundum differentes donationes distribuit; aliis secundum Apostolum dans sermonum scientiam, aliis gratiam sanitatum, aliis operationes virtutum, quod visibilis Pontifex imitatur, alios in ecclesiâ constituens sacerdotes, alios diaconos, alios subdiaconos. Non igitur ab re in Episcopi digito gemmatus fulget annulus, per cujus mysterium dantur fulgida carismata gratiarum."

These extracts will suffice to show the mystical significations attributed to the ring of the bishop by the early writers; and from the last passage we also learn that the ring was of gold and jewelled. Many subsequent writers might be cited,

but they mostly incorporate in their works the words of Isidor and Durandus, without, however, always making known the source from which they drew them. From the mystical meaning of the ring we will now proceed to its history, and in the eighth century we shall find it assume a new character.

In the beginning of the seventeenth century, some attention seems to have been paid to the subject of rings in general, and several persons wrote concerning them. John Kirchmann, a learned German of Lubeck, published a treatise “*de Annulis;*” and about the same time Henry Kornmann also wrote another small treatise “*de triplici Annulo.*” Kirchmann seems to have made deep research respecting these rings, and in the chapter on episcopal rings he gives their history as far as he had been able to trace it. The office of a bishop has been for many centuries conferred by investing the individual with a ring and pastoral staff, though in the first ages we have seen that it was not so. Of this custom he says he cannot find, in ancient writers, any trace earlier than the time of Charlemagne, who, when Italy had been ravaged by the Longobardi, the church plundered, and the capital itself menaced, was called in by Pope Adrian I. to assist in expelling the invaders. This he succeeded in doing by the conquest of Desiderius, the last King of the Lombards, in 774, and restored to the Church the possessions of which it had been deprived. In gratitude to Charlemagne for these important services which he had rendered to the church, it was decreed in a general synod held at Rome, attended by the Pope, and 153 bishops and abbots, that Charlemagne should have the power of electing the Pontiffs, and ordering the holy see, and that in addition the archbishops and bishops of the provinces should receive investiture from him. This right was afterwards confirmed to the Emperor Otho I. by Pope Leo III. in a bull which is still extant, and which Kirchmann cites *in extenso*, giving also his authorities for the whole history. He proceeds to say that he here finds, that among the other solemnities of episcopal investiture the ring was usurped, and that the Emperor was wont to send it, as a symbol, to him on whom he wished to confer a benefice; and he quotes a passage from William of Malmesbury, who reports Gregory VI. to have declared that Adrian I. was to be commended for having granted to Charlemagne the right of investiture of ecclesiastics, so that no elected person could be consecrated until he had received from the Emperor or King, as he is termed, the ring and staff as the ensign of his authority.

Here, then, we have not only an important change in the appointment to the episcopal office, but also the first mention of the source from which the ring was to proceed. He moreover states that, on the death of a bishop or abbot, the chief

persons of his college or city transmitted the ring and staff of the deceased prelate back to the Emperor, who afterwards conferred the sacred insignia on him whom he should choose; and, in proof thereof, cites a case in which the ring and staff of St. Otho, Bishop of Bremen, were sent back to the imperial court. He also cites the case of an abbot, who, on his deposition, placed his ring and staff on the altar, over the body of St. Benedict, in the presence of those who were assembled. He then goes on to say: "Of this kind were doubtless those sixteen large and good pontifical rings, one of ruby, with other gems set round it, one of emerald, one of sapphire, and one of topaz," which Bishop Conrad, in the old chronicles of Mayence, enumerates among the jewels of the church of that city.

In the history of the ring it will here be sufficient to mention that as an ensign of investiture it was in the eleventh and twelfth centuries a most fruitful source of discord between the Emperors and the Popes, until, in the year 1123, the Emperor Henry V., alarmed by the threats and excommunication of the Pope, ceded the right of investiture by the ring and staff to Pope Callixtus II., from which time the rings were sent to the bishops elect from the Pope, and I believe the practice continues to the present time.

So far for the history of episcopal rings. With regard to their fashion I have found no mention; and, from the result of the inquiries I have made, there does not appear to be any prescribed form, but that they have been usually made according to the taste and fashion of the time. Kornmann, who wrote his treatise early in the seventeenth century, quoting from the Roman Pontifical, says that the ring is given to the Bishop with these words: "Accipe annulum discretionis, et honoris et fidei signum, ut quæ signanda sunt signes, et quæ aperienda sunt prodas, quæ liganda sunt liges, et quæ solvenda sunt solvas;" and then citing the authority of a synod held at Milan, when matters respecting ecclesiastical ornaments were determined, states, "Annulus Episcopi ex auro puro solidè conflatus constat, cum gemmâ pretiosiore in quo nihil sculpti esse debet." Many examples of episcopal rings have been found in the ancient tombs of bishops; those found at Chichester, Hereford, and Wells, may be cited as instances among many others where the bishops of old were interred with their rings and croziers, and some of these are of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These rings are usually of middling size, slender, and of rather antique form, plain, and without ornament, and set with an uncut stone of no great size or fine quality, which is frequently a ruby or sapphire. It is difficult to reconcile the practice of returning the ring to the Emperor, with that of interring the bishop with his ring on his finger; but it is probable that, when in the twelfth century the Emperor ceded to the Popes the

right of investiture by the ring, the sending back the ring was dispensed with; and, being the property of the Church, and not of the Emperor, the Bishop was allowed to be interred with his ring as an emblem of his dignity.

Investiture by the ring was not however altogether confined to Bishops or ecclesiastical persons. The Emperor was himself at his inauguration invested with a ring; and Kirchmann tells us that, at the coronation of Ferdinand III. at Ratisbon, in 1616, a few years before he wrote, the Archbishop and Elector of Maintz, having received from the altar a very precious ring, placed it on the finger of the Emperor with these words: “*Accipe regię dignitatis annulum, et per hoc Catholicę fidei cognosce signaculum, et ut hodie ordinaris caput et princeps regni et populi, ita perseverabilis auctor et stabilitor Christianitatis et Christianę fidei fias, ut feliciter in opere cum Rege regum glorioris per eum, cui est honor et gloria, per infinita secula seculorum.—Amen.*”

It will only be necessary to mention the fact that from very early times our sovereigns have also been invested with a ring at their coronation, and that they were in some cases buried with their rings; for on this subject much information is to be found in the third volume of our *Archæologia*. But another circumstance is also deserving notice, that according to John of Salisbury, who was a cotemporary, the Pope Adrian VIII. ceded and gave to Henry II. King of England the island of Ireland, in hereditary possession, on the ground that, according to the grant of Constantine, all islands belonged to the see of Rome, and he sent at the same time as the mark of investiture a large gold ring set with a fine emerald, which was preserved in the royal treasury.

Not only kings, however, but other dignitaries used to receive investiture by a ring. According to some ancient French writers, a duke was invested by a cap of gold (*chapeau d’or*) ornamented with pearls; a marquis with a ring set with a ruby; a count with a diamond-ring; a viscount with a rod of gold; and a baron with a banner.

Cardinals on their creation receive a ring, and the stone is usually a sapphire.

As far, however, as I am able to learn there is no ceremonial of the investiture of a Pope with a ring at his coronation, though it is on record in the *Epistles* of Arnulphus, Bishop of Rochester, that the antipope Octavianus, who called himself Victor I., laid the apostolical insignia at the feet of the Emperor Barbarossa, and received investiture from him by a ring. Here I may mention that I have it from authority which may be relied on that the Pope has no official ring which he wears. There is, however, one ring which his Holiness wears on the occasion of performing certain great functions. The stone is an exquisitely fine

cameo of the head of our Saviour, cut in bloodstone, which is known to be more than 300 years old, probably a fine cinquecento gem, and of course descends from one Pope to another.

I must not, however, omit to mention one important ring, as it is called, belonging to the Pope, which, though it is neither an episcopal or investiture ring, seems in an especial manner to bear the character of an official signet ring. This is the so-called "Fisherman's Ring." Whatever may be its actual form, and of this we are at present ignorant, it is certainly now not a ring to be worn, and has for ages past been simply a seal, nor does there appear any record of its ever having been worn, though from its name and use we may fairly infer that it was at some very remote period worn as the signet-ring of the pontiffs. It is the Pope's lesser seal or signet used for documents of minor consequence, and the impression is usually made on red wax, or stamped on the paper; the Bulla being what may be termed the great seal, employed for giving validity to instruments of greater importance, and the impression of it is always on lead. The origin of the fisherman's ring is obscure. Mabillon says that he has not been able to find anything about it earlier than what Massonus relates, who quotes a letter from Pope Clement IV. dated 1264, to his kinsman Ægidius Grassus, in which he says, "Non scribimus tibi nec consanguineis nostris sub bullâ, sed sub piscatoris sigillo, quo Romani Pontificis in suis secretis utuntur." Thus in the thirteenth century it was not called by the Pope himself *annulus*, but *sigillum*, and its use as a private seal or signet distinctly enunciated. It would be vain to speculate on its origin, but it derives its name from a representation of St. Peter in a fisherman's boat of ancient form, which is engraved on it, and not from any tradition that it ever belonged to St. Peter, as from its English name is not uncommonly supposed. The Germans call it "Der Fischer-ring," which is "The Fisherman-Ring," whereas we, probably in our translation of *Annulus Piscatoris*, have termed it The Fisherman's Ring, seeming to imply thereby that it had once belonged to "the Fisherman." The figure of St. Peter forms the centre, and round it is the name of the reigning Pope, if the figure of an impression of this seal given in a recent work on rings, published in America, is correct. Of this ring or seal little seems to be authentically known, save that it has from an early period been only a seal, though it may possibly still have the form of a ring. We are informed in Sedler's Lexicon, and it is generally believed, that on the death of a Pope one of the duties of the Cardinal-Chamberlain is to destroy this seal, and that a new one is made for the successor to the papal throne.

In conclusion, the inference I am disposed to draw from the foregoing investi-

gation is, that as in all times and countries the affixing a seal to a document gave it its validity and binding force, the seal was the real instrument of the power and authority of any office, and therefore became the symbol of it. That in the earliest times it was customary to have seals and signets in the form of rings, probably as a convenient mode of carrying them, possibly for ornament, and certainly the greatest security against their being used without the knowledge and contrary to the will of the wearer. The delivery, therefore, of the seal or signet ring was committing to the individual the authority and power to execute the rights and duties of his office; and, though official seals ceased to be signet rings, and rings ceased to be the actual signets, the form was preserved, and the ring was still employed as the symbol of authority to use the seal; and this authority continued to be conferred by the delivery of a ring long after the original use and meaning of it had passed away. The real meaning of the ring having been forgotten, a mystical one was invented and adopted.