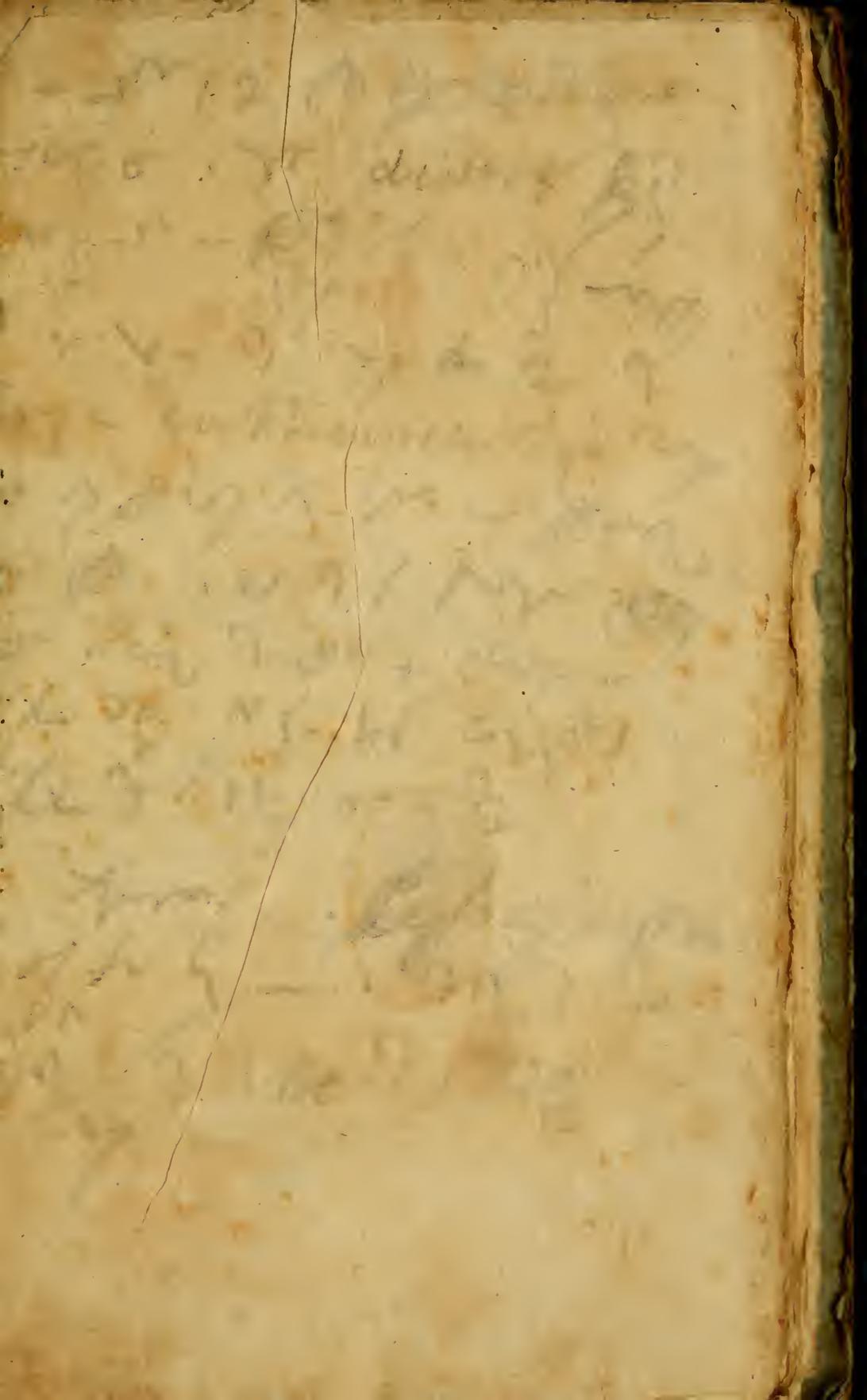


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AN
ATTEMPT
TOWARDS A STATEMENT
OF THE
Doctrine of Scripture
ON SOME
DISPUTED POINTS
RESPECTING THE
CONSTITUTION, GOVERNMENT, WORSHIP,
AND DISCIPLINE OF THE CHURCH
OF CHRIST.

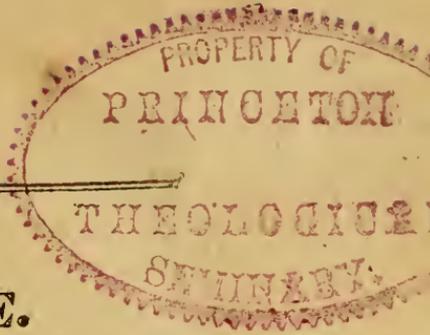
BY
GREVILLE EWING,
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, GLASGOW.

“Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth.”

GLASGOW,

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P R E F A C E.

THE word of God is the only authority which we are bound to obey, in our Christian fellowship. But our heavenly Father has not thought it proper to give a minute detail of the formation and the practice of his primitive churches. The history of the Acts of the Apostles is exceedingly short, and the facts which are stated, are only a selection. The apostolic epistles throw light on the subject, rather by occasional hints and allusions, than by direct narrative or full description. They were originally letters of business, most of them addressed to particular churches in particular situations; and we shall hardly be secure from mistake, as to their meaning and application, unless we carefully attend to the times and circumstances, in which they severally appear to have been written.

In all inquiries, therefore, on the subject of Christian fellowship, it seems of primary importance, that we never fail to distinguish, between those points which are manifestly fixed by explicit revelation, and those which are merely the result of inferences from revelation made by the reason of man. We make this remark with a view, not to contract, but to lead our readers to endeavour distinctly to ascertain, the rule of

duty; to observe, in each particular case, what is the nature and extent of the obligation they are under, whether they are absolutely bound to obey, or whether they are not absolutely bound to regard compliance in themselves or others as voluntary. That much of the practice of churches must arise out of human inferences from holy scripture, is generally allowed; but it seems to be frequently forgotten, that, in every instance of this kind, the inference, though drawn from inspired premises, partakes of the fallibility of the mind which draws it. Hence it often is confidently urged on others, with the high claim of divine authority, instead of being modestly submitted to their examination. When churches fall into this mistake, they establish a tyranny of opinion, which binds the conscience, where Christ hath left it free; which intimidates every objector, or excludes him from communion; and which denounces all other churches that do not admit the divine authority of what is merely human, perhaps grossly erroneous, as ignorant, superstitious, prejudiced, and corrupt. It very seldom happens that a whole society is equally imbued with this tyrannical disposition. Its prevalence, at least its origin, may commonly be traced to the adventitious influence of a very few. These may, indeed, succeed for a while, in moulding others into their own spirit, and may occasion great inquietude to the most harmonious churches, and great obstruction to the progress of the gospel. It is of the utmost consequence, therefore, to examine the holy scriptures for-ourselves; to inquire how far the light of revelation really extends; to mark both our duty and our liberty; and, while we should certainly make conscience of yielding implicit obedience, wherever

God hath interposed his own authority, to regard all other things as matters of prudential consideration, and mutual agreement, which Christians ought conscientiously to arrange to the best of their judgment, and, when arranged, to practise in a peaceable and loving manner, without captious, fickle, and endless schemes of alteration, without intolerant obstinacy, without indulging an inclination, either to envy or to censure others, whose judgment and practice may not be the same.

In the present state, we are not warranted to expect uniformity of Christian fellowship, among the churches of Christ. Our diversities are, no doubt, to be ascribed, in a great measure, to remaining ignorance, and the influence of improper motives; but these are not the only causes. If Jesus Christ had intended, by the unity of his disciples, a unity of church order, he would have described it as minutely, as Moses does the construction of the tabernacle, and the rites of the passover, or any other sacrifice: This, however, he has not done. Accordingly, Christians, equally wise and good, frequently differ conscientiously in opinion respecting the meaning of particular passages of scripture, while they agree in acknowledging no other rule. How many are there, who observe several varieties of practice among churches, about which they see no reason to move any dispute: how many more, who cordially love one another, and gladly join in occasional communion, though they cannot have the pleasure of stated fellowship, because they differ from one another, in some of the inferences, concerning that fellowship, which they draw, according to their best judgment, from the holy scriptures. They are conscious, that, in some things,

they differ from themselves at a former period, when they were as truly believers in Christ, as they pretend to be now. They are far from supposing that the change is, therefore, unimportant. But they learn to state their sentiments with diffidence and forbearance, and to preserve the necessary distinction, between the certainty of the things which are most surely believed by all Christians, and the bare probability of those, which depend on the reasoning faculty of each individual.

It is the object of the following pages to illustrate this distinction in some important instances, in which the Author conceives it has, of late, been obscured. He expects that those who differ from him in judgment will oppose his sentiments in terms of lenity or reprobation, corresponding to the various degrees of confidence with which they are in the habit of proposing their own opinions. In comparing their respective views of divine truth, it is surely desirable that Christians should study a liberality of spirit, and an urbanity of manners, which, without the sacrifice of any principle, may at least preserve, from fatal injury, the cordiality and confidence of brotherly love. To be convinced of an error, is to receive a benefit from him who has convinced us; but to be assailed with unqualified terms of reproach; to be told that we are ignorant, superstitious, prejudiced, and worldly; or that we know not what that meaneth, "Let God be true, and every man a liar:"—such harsh epithets, such licentious applications of holy scripture, however they may aid the disputant in throwing odium on the man whom he treats as his adversary, are not calculated to carry conviction to the mind. They make no more impression

on the deliberate inquirer, than the *anathema sit*, that favourite imprecation, borrowed also from scripture, so characteristic of the spirit of the church of Rome. It is however, our duty and interest to admit truth, through whatever medium it may be conveyed. Let us endeavour, on both sides, to attend to the argument, without indulging, or regarding the warm language (often unintentional) of personal emotion; and let our readers endeavour to judge according to the strength, not of assertion, but of evidence produced.

Some of the views which the Author entertains of Christian fellowship have been very boldly ascribed to prejudice. This charge is made with some advantage against any opinion, which happens to have been long held. But the novelty of an opinion is no security that those, who have embraced it, are free from prejudice. A man's views may be recently adopted, and may be new to many of his contemporaries, as well as to himself, and yet, if he be so attached to them, as to be averse from attending to what can be offered on the other side, he also is under the influence of prejudice; and, if degrees might be compared in so humbling a case, we would say, that the prejudice of the man who is transported by a new discovery, is less to be excused, than that of the man, whose sentiments have stood the test of ages. But it is only the test of scripture that is infallible. New and old are but relative terms. There is no new thing under the sun. If antiquity were an advantage, error next to truth might put in its claims to a very high antiquity. Various species of wild speculation respecting Christian fellowship have had the ephemeral existence of many a successive day. If they have not stood the test, they

have run the gantlet, of ages; and are probably doomed, while the world shall endure, to repeat the round of being started, exploded, forgotten, revived. They shake the unstable, and give opportunity to the evil-disposed to indulge their inclination. Their progress; therefore, must be carefully watched, especially by the Christian bishop. But perhaps they contribute to the establishment of those who really love the truth, as storms do to the vigour of the plants which are exposed to their violence. At any rate, they are permitted by our heavenly Father, in infinite wisdom, as a trial of the faith and patience of his people. How thankful should we be, that the most important subjects are the least liable to be disputed. Errors are no doubt circulated on every subject; yet the ground of a sinner's acceptance with God; the rules and motives of Christian morality; the refuge and consolation of the soul under trials, especially in the prospect and approach of death; and the bright hope, which is laid up for us in heaven, of which we have heard in the word of the truth of the gospel,—are established by evidence far more clear, full, and incontrovertible, than that which we can obtain for the divine authority of many of the forms of Christian fellowship.

GENERAL VIEW OF THE SUBJECT.

CHURCHES appear not to have been occasional or ambulatory companies of Christians, but stated societies, consisting of Christians resident in the particular places to which the gospel had come with power. In scripture, mention is frequently made of the churches at Jerusalem, Antioch, and elsewhere; but although we read of many occasional interviews of Christians, and of long journeys both by land and sea, which parties of them accomplished, we perceive not the slightest hint, that they considered themselves or were acknowledged by others, as, in these circumstances, constituting churches. The strain of the scripture history leads to an opposite conclusion. The travellers were sometimes sent out by a church; they "broke bread" with the brethren, when they happened to arrive at a place where there was a church; they gave an account of their conduct when they returned to the church by which they had been sent out; they were recommended by churches in one place to churches in another; all which facts seem calculated to distinguish casual meetings, private society, and moveable temporary fellowships of peregrination, from those stated select assemblies of the called, and chosen, and faithful, which are denominated in scripture churches of Christ.

These churches appear not to have been immediately settled, according to the model which was to continue. At first the apostles did every thing; with the assistance, however, of evangelists as fellow-labourers. Various spiritual gifts were also bestowed for a while on the believers, by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, which sometimes immediately accompanied the preaching of the gospel, sometimes followed the sign of the laying on of the Apostles' hands, and sometimes seems to have taken place in answer to the prayers of the Christians, who were taught "earnestly to desire" "spiritual gifts," and even to make a choice of those, which they were instructed to distinguish as "the best." By means of these spiritual gifts, which were frequently distributed among all the original members of a church, the men were enabled to conduct the worship, and to edify and govern the church, when the apostles, or their fellow-labourers were called elsewhere, and when the ordinary office-bearers were not yet appointed. The appointment of these does not, in any instance, appear to have been made immediately on the formation of a church. Under the direction of apostles or evangelists, they were selected, after a time, from among the elders, or early converts, in the several churches. Hence bishops and deacons, the ordinary office-bearers in a church, are often spoken of under the general name of elders, although the term elder is by no means confined to them, nor indeed to office-bearers at all, but is frequently used in a latitude of meaning, which is limited merely by the term younger. Finally, a bishop in each church, seems to have been the president, and to have been called the angel of the church to which he belonged.

A stated society, then, endowed with spiritual gifts, having elders ordained to particular offices, one of whom presided, appears to have been, in the days of the apostles, the complete character of a church of Christ.

That the primitive churches regularly assembled, on the Lord's day, for the purposes of praise, prayer, reading the scriptures, preaching, charitable contribution, and the Lord's supper; and that baptism and discipline were administered when occasion required; there seems no reason to doubt. But no precise descriptions, hardly any direct accounts, are given in scripture, respecting the mode, the order, or the particular times, in which these exercises were severally performed. That they should be attended to still, all Christians ought to admit: How, and when, further than is already stated, Christian churches may agree among themselves; but no man, no church, may impose a law upon others, or condemn them for disregarding it, and following the dictates of their own judgment. Neither ought changes in the lawful practice of a church to be insisted on by any individuals, unless the advantage of such changes can be very clearly proved to the satisfaction of all. There is a difference also between early and later churches, owing to the cessation of spiritual gifts, which must always be allowed for, in our attempts to imitate the example of the primitive Christians.

The following sections contain a further illustration of some of these observations; and we hope that the view here given of church fellowship, will be found to combine the most conscientious attention to the word of God, with the fullest exercise of genuine Christian liberty, and the utmost extent of genuine Christian forbearance.

OF THE GIFTS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCHES.

IN Joel. ii. 28, 29, we find the following remarkable prophecy. "And it shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men (your elders) shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids, in those days, will I pour out my Spirit." On the day of Pentecost, when the disciples "were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance," Peter declared that this pouring out of the Holy Spirit was the accomplishment of the prophecy of Joel. The apostle seems to have meant that it was the beginning of its accomplishment, because the Spirit was afterwards given with similar effect, to many who were added to the church at Jerusalem, and to many who formed churches in other places, and was continued with the believers of that age, probably to the end of their lives, or till the complete settlement of the primitive churches had taken place.

The various effects of this pouring out of the Holy Spirit, are in the New Testament generally called gifts, 1 Cor. xii. 31. The primary and general effects of it, appear to have been the gift of prophecy, and that of speaking various languages. From the narrative in the 2d chapter of the Acts, it would seem, that these gifts were at first united. They were, however, distinct from each other, and sometimes were afterwards enjoyed and cultivat-

ed separately. Other gifts were added, but these were evidently the most important, at least of those which were generally bestowed. It is probable that the boldness mentioned, Acts iv. 31. included both these gifts: "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spake the word of God with boldness." In Acts xix. 6. they are expressly conjoined: "And when Paul had laid hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied." In the discussion concerning spiritual gifts, which occurs in the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and extends from the beginning of the 12th chapter to the end of the 14th, various gifts are mentioned, but those of tongues and of prophecy are the principal subject of regulation.

When gifts are mentioned, in the New Testament, as accompanying the original propagation of the gospel, and as exercised by the first preachers in the course of their labours, or by the first converts who believed through their word, whether in a private capacity, or in the meetings of a church; they seem universally to signify gifts of a miraculous nature. For instance, Paul says, Rom. i. 11. "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift," probably a gift to be imparted by the laying on of his hands, the gift of prophecy for example, which tended so much to the edification of believers, and accordingly it is added, "to the end you may be established." Some of them, on whom the hands of an apostle had been laid, enjoyed this gift already, with various others, (see Rom. xii. 6—8.) but Paul wished to impart

some gift also to the rest. Again he says, 1 Cor. i. 5—7. “That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that ye come behind in no gift.” These gifts of utterance and knowledge (tongues and prophecy) were in the Corinthian believers, confirmations or evidences of the truth of the gospel. The passage may receive further illustration, from a comparison of it with 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2. and Heb. ii. 3, 4. In 1 Tim. iv. 14. and 2 Tim. i. 6. the word gift evidently has the same meaning. Nor does the meaning seem to be different, in 1 Pet. iv. 10, 11. “As every man hath received a gift, (not THE gift, as in the common translation,) ministering the same, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, *speaking* as oracles of God (not as THE oracles of God, that is, agreeably to sacred scripture, as we are apt to understand it, but “as being themselves oracles of God,”) if any man minister, *ministering* as of the strength which God giveth; that God in all things may be glorified thro’ Jesus Christ, to whom belongeth the glory and the power for ever and ever, Amen.”

For enabling us to understand what is intended by the gifts of the primitive churches, we are furnished not merely with passages where the word happens to occur, but with large explanations of their nature and various uses. One of the most remarkable of these explanations, is that already mentioned, which occurs in the 12th, 13th, and 14th chapters of the 1st epistle to the Corinthians. In that portion of scripture, some of the apostle’s expressions seem, at first sight, to be obscure. When carefully examined and com-

pared, however, they reflect much light on one another, and much aid has lately been afforded to the inquirer on this subject by different commentators*. We request the particular attention of the reader at present, to 1 Cor. chap. xii. verses 8, 9, 10, compared with verses 28, 29, 30. In the enumeration there given, the apostle mentions,

First, the gift of "the word of wisdom." This expression seems to imply the whole scheme of the gospel doctrine. In this sense we find "wisdom," and "the wisdom of God," used in the second chapter of the epistle, and Peter says, that Paul wrote his epistles "according to the wisdom given unto him," 2 Pet. iii. 15. This "word of wisdom," verse 8, answers to "apostles," who are placed the first in order among the persons who had the gifts, verses 28, 29. Agreeably to the name of their peculiar gift, they are called "wise men:" compare Matth. xxiii. 34. with Luke xi. 49. This gift is also called "revelation," 1 Cor. xiv. 6. because the gospel, which was preached by the apostles, "is not after man, for they neither received it of man, neither were they taught it, but "by the revelation of Jesus Christ," Gal. i. 11, 12.

Under this word of wisdom is probably to be included the knowledge of the mysteries relating to the Christian church. The scheme of the gospel doctrine is called "the wisdom of God in a mystery," 1 Cor. ii. 7. and "the mystery of godliness," 1 Tim. iii. 16. Again, the mystery of God's calling the Gentiles to be his people, without any subjection to the law of

* See Benson's Essay on the Settlement of the Primitive Church, subjoined to his Paraphrase of 2 Timothy; and Mac-knight on the place.

Moses, is called wisdom: see Ephes. iii. 8, 9, 10. Col. i. 9, 10—13, 26, 28, and ii. 2, 3. Those mysteries are said to have been communicated by revelation, Gal. i. 12. Ephes. iii. 3. Rom. xvi. 25. as the word of wisdom is said to have been, 1 Cor. xiv. 6. None but apostles appear to have had the revelation of those mysteries. To Peter was it first revealed that the devout Gentiles should be received into the Christian church, without any further subjection to the law of Moses, Acts x.: to Paul, that the idolatrous Gentiles should be so received. This was one of the mysteries of which Paul was a steward, 1 Cor. iv. 1. and he often calls it a mystery, Rom. xvi. 25. Ephes. i. 9, 10 and iii. 3—9. and vi. 19. Col. i. 26, 27. and ii. 2, and iv. 3. To him also was revealed the mystery of God's casting off and restoring the Jews, Rom. xi. 25, &c.; the mystery that the last generation shall not die, 1 Cor. xv. 51. and the mystery of iniquity, 2 Thess. ii. 7. To John was revealed the mystery of the seven stars and seven golden candlesticks, Rev. i. 20.; the mystery of God, Rev. x. 7.; and the mystery of Babylon, the woman, and the beast, Rev. xvii. 5, 7.

Secondly, the gift of "the word of knowledge." By this gift seems to be meant a clear understanding of the signification and design of the law and the prophets, and of the confirmation which the Old Testament gives to Christianity. Paul seems to use the word "knowledge" in this sense, in Rom. ii. 20, and 1 Tim. vi. 20. This gift is reckoned the second in order of the spiritual gifts, verse 8th, as prophets are, verses 28, 29. among the persons who had those gifts. Those, therefore, who had this gift, were per-

sons who had also the gift of prophecy. The two gifts, however, were perfectly distinct; and in this probably were the prophets of the Christian church favoured above those of the Jewish, that the former knew the meaning, both of the prophecies which went before, and of those which they uttered themselves; whereas, the latter, as Peter says, 1 Epis. i. 11. were left to “ Search to whom, or what kind of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did refer, when it testified before hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” The speech of Stephen, Acts 7th, seems to be an example of the exercise of the gift of knowledge. Although the prophets of the Christian church had been able to attain the true meaning of the ancient oracles by the force of their natural faculties, their interpretations would not have had that authority to bind the consciences of men, which interpretations communicated to them by inspiration undoubtedly possessed.

Thirdly, the gift of “ faith.” Faith here is to be distinguished from that belief of the gospel, without which men cannot be Christians at all. It was a gift bestowed on particular Christians. It seems to have been a firm confidence in the power of God, as engaged to verify and support the gospel, and to have appeared chiefly in two ways. One was in the person, who was endowed with it, attempting without hesitation, to work the greatest miracles, when moved to do so by the Holy Spirit. In this way Christ speaks of faith, in Matth. xvii. 20. and xxi. 21. Mark xi. 22, 23. Luke xvii. 6.; and the apostle Paul, in 1 Cor. xiii. 2. “ all faith, so that I could remove mountains.” Another way, in which this

confidence appeared, was the boldness (*παρρησια*, boldness of speech) with which the first preachers published and maintained the doctrines of the gospel, both in the world and in the church. This boldness was promised by Christ to his apostles, Matth. x. 19, 20. Luke xxi. 15. When accordingly it was displayed by Peter and John, we learn from Acts iv. 13, 29, * that it excited great astonishment in the Jewish council, and great triumph in the Christian church. But this gift was not confined to apostles. We have a remarkable instance of its being displayed in both of the above mentioned ways by Stephen, Acts vi. 8, 9, 10. In the enumeration of the passage before us, "faith" is mentioned, verse 9, next after, "the word of knowledge," and seems therefore to have belonged to those gifted men, who, in verses 28, 29, are placed after "prophets," and are there called "teachers." These,

* On Acts iv. 13. it has been said, "The Sanhedrim *still* perceived in their manner of address, that they were "unlearned and ignorant men." A very incorrect representation. There is no ground for ascribing the council's knowledge of the apostles' want of learning to their manner of address. The passage literally rendered is, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and had discovered (that is, by information from such as knew them to have been fishermen) "that they were unlearned and ignorant men (or *private men*, such as had no office of teaching in the Jewish church as the scribes had) "they marvelled, and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." Their manner of address, instead of indicating their situation, was entirely unlike it, and therefore astonished the council, when they learned what that situation was. That they had information about those two apostles appears from the last clause of the verse, which seems to refer to the facts mentioned, John xviii. 15—18—25—27.

however, were probably not "the pastors and teachers" spoken of, Eph. iv. 11, but rather those teachers, who, in that passage, are called evangelists, and are placed in the same order as here, next to prophets. When we consider the nature of the duties which Timothy and Titus were called to perform at Ephesus and in Crete, we shall see how likely it is, that this boldness of faith, was the gift, which Paul so frequently exhorts them to stir up. See 1 Tim. i. 3, 4. and iv. 11—14. 2 Tim. i. 6—8. and ii. 1—3. Tit. i. 13. and ii. 15.

Fourthly, the gift of "the inworkings of powers." This is Macknight's rendering of the clause, which in our common version is rendered "the working of miracles." Though hardly English, Macknight's is the preferable translation, because the other is deficient in precision, neither distinguishing this gift accurately from "the gifts of healings," nor expressing clearly what it seems really to have been. It is put after "the gifts of healings" in verses 9, 10, but it is put before them, in verses 28, 29, 30, where the order of the gifts seems to be more particularly marked. "The inworkings of powers" seems to denote the power of conferring spiritual gifts. It is expressed, in the plural number, to denote the variety of the spiritual gifts conferred. Those who possessed this gift are called "powers" (in our common version "miracles" and "workers of miracles") in verses 28, 29. This name does not signify any separate class of persons, but denotes an energy which the apostles alone appear to have been enabled to exercise. When the apostles, who were in Jerusalem, heard that the Samaritans were converted by Philip, they sent

Peter and John to confer on them the Holy Spirit. Acts viii. 14—17. It was this gift of God, [which, Simon thought, might be purchased with money, Acts viii. 18—22*. Though “the inworkings of powers” be the gift which most forcibly struck the minds of mankind, and raised the apostles highest in their estimation, “the word of wisdom,” “the word of knowledge,” and “faith” are placed before it in the catalogue, because by these gifts the gospel was communicated to the world; whereas it was only confirmed by “the inworkings of powers.” In like manner, “powers,” that is, persons who possessed the gift of communicating spiritual powers, are placed after “teachers” or evangelists, verse 28. because the apostles, in confirming the gospel by conferring spiritual powers, exercised a gift inferior to that of prophets and evangelists, who by inspiration revealed it.

Fifthly, “the gifts of healings.” Here the expression is again in the plural number, to denote the variety of diseases which were healed. Our Lord promised these gifts to those who should believe the preaching of the gospel, Mark xvi. 18. Accordingly, many of the first Christians possessed them, and by exercising them, not only confirmed the truth of the gospel, but gave a striking display of its beneficent nature. The apostles had “the gifts of healings” bestowed upon them in common with others, only they possessed them in a more eminent degree, and exercised them in a superior manner. Thus the shadow of Peter, as he passed along the streets of Jerusalem, cured many

* With regard to Ananias conferring the Holy Spirit on Saul, see Benson and Macknight on Tit. iii. 6.

sick people, and when handkerchiefs and aprons, which had touched the body of Paul, were carried to the sick in Ephesus, they immediately recovered. The elders appear also to have enjoyed these gifts more commonly than the rest of the brethren. Hence the direction James v. 14, 15. "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." In the exercise of these gifts, none of the gifted men, not even the apostles, were permitted to act according to their own pleasure, but were always directed to the exercise of them by God: otherwise Paul would not have left Trophimus sick at Miletus; nor have suffered his beloved Timothy to labour under frequent infirmities; nor Epaphroditus to be sick nigh unto death.

Sixthly, the gift of "prophecy." The word prophecy does not appear, in any part of scripture, to be limited to the prediction of future events, but it seems always to imply speaking by inspiration of God. Of old, the prophets sometimes appeared singly; sometimes in companies; sometimes sung with the accompaniment of instrumental music, and even with dancing; sometimes prayed; sometimes addressed individuals, or assemblies of the people; sometimes added to their words symbolical actions; sometimes wrote their prophecies; sometimes sealed them up in oblivion and wrote them not; but, in all these cases, the proper notion of prophecy was the effusion of a man, who spake, not according to his own will, but as he was moved by

the Holy Spirit. When Saul joined the song of a company of prophets, it was because the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, 1 Sam. x. 6. see also 1 Sam. xix. 20—24. Those who are called sons of the prophets often gave decided evidence of having revelations from God. See 1 Kings xx. 35—43. 2 Kings ii. 3, 5, 7, and ix. 1—10. When impostors assumed the character of prophets, they pretended to be inspired either by Jehovah or by idols, 1 Kings xviii. 22. and xxii. 24, 25. Jer. xxiii. 25—32. In like manner in the New Testament, when Paul calls a heathen poet a prophet, Tit. i. 12. he uses a name which was given by the heathen to their poets, from an opinion that they were inspired by the gods.

It is doubted, however, whether the gift of “prophecy,” spoken of in the 12th, 13th, and 14th chapters of 1 Cor. were the result of inspiration, and peculiar to primitive times; or whether it be not a talent common to believers in every age, which is still exercised by Christian brethren, when they exhort one another in meetings of a church.

In support of the first of these opinions, we remark, that prophecy is spoken of, as precisely on the same footing with all the other gifts, which are not denied to be the effect of miraculous influence. After enumerating them, in chap. xii. 8, 9, 10, the apostle says, ver. 11, “But all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.” Accordingly prophets are classed with apostles, ver. 28.; it is denied, ver. 29, that all the members of the church were prophets; and the very advice, ver. 31, to “desire earnestly the best gifts,” and chap. xiv. 1. to “desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but rather

“that they might prophecy,” proves that none of those gifts, and least of all prophecy, was a talent common to all believers even then, much less to believers in every age.

Again, prophecy is spoken of as on the same footing with the other gifts, when they are contrasted with love, that universal and essential characteristic of the disciples of Christ. See chap. xiii. 1—3. 8—12. Neither is any distinction supposed between prophecy and the other gifts, in the way of obtaining them, chap. xiv. 1. “Follow after love, and earnestly desire “spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.”

Further, when the apostle, chap. xiv. discusses the respective properties of tongues and prophecy, he says nothing inconsistent with the belief, that the one was a miraculous and extraordinary gift as well as the other. The contrast runs thus, ver. 2, 3, 4. “He that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue, speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the Spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth, speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue, edifieth himself: but he that prophesieth, edifieth the church.” It seems to be the object of the apostle to distinguish two gifts which were equally extraordinary and miraculous, by their several degrees of utility. The circumstances, of being addressed to men; being intelligible; being calculated for edification, and that not of an individual alone, but of the church; have no tendency to prove, that prophecy was not a miraculous gift. What is said of him that prophesieth speaking unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort, reminds us

of Isaiah and the other prophets of old, whose writings are full of such instructive, animating, and consolatory addresses. Having been originally spoken to the people in their own language, and being accessible to all, in every age, by means of translations, it is easy to conceive that those writings have been more useful, than the sign of tongues ever was, or ever would be, were it still continued. But no one will, therefore, imagine that they were not given by inspiration of God, or that what is commonly called exhortation, in some churches, is at all to be compared with them. It seems reasonable to believe, that if it had pleased God to cause as many of the prophecies of the primitive Christian church to be left on record, as there are of the prophecies of the ancient church of Israel, they would have borne a nearer resemblance to the writings of Isaiah, than to any exhortations, which we can now expect to hear in the meeting of a church. Christian prophecies would probably be more clear than Jewish ones, since the Christian prophets possessed "the word of knowledge," as well as "prophecy." The few instances of New Testament prophesying, which are recorded, confirm this opinion. About Acts xi. 28. and xx. 23. and xxi. 11. there is no room for dispute. In Acts xv. 32. it is said, "And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them." These words may be thought to represent prophesying as the same thing with exhorting. But they are explained by verses 27, 28. "We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Ho-

“ly Spirit and to us, &c.” When Judas and Silas exhorted and confirmed the brethren, they were telling by mouth the same things which the apostles, elders, and brethren at Jerusalem had told by letter. They were telling what seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to them, which they could not have done, unless they had been prophets also themselves, who spoke by the Spirit.

But the miraculous nature of the gift of prophecy is more directly intimated.

In chap. xiv. 5, the apostle declares that “greater is he that prophesieth, than he that speaketh with tongues.” One would think that this declaration might lead to the acknowledgement of some difference between a prophet of the primitive churches, and a modern exhorting brother. But what follows is even more decisive. The prophet is greater than he that speaketh with tongues, “except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.” These words seem absolutely to identify the essential qualities of prophecy and tongues; and to imply that, when an external obstacle (the ignorance of the hearers) is removed by interpreting, the effect of both gifts is the same, and the difference between the one and the other equalized. This conclusion seems also to follow from the strain of the apostle’s reasoning, verses 6—19, especially verses 12, 13. Let the man, who spoke with tongues, only interpret, and he then ceased to be inferior to a prophet, because he became equally useful. In both cases, the speaker said the same things, and by the same authority, only in the one case he was, in the other, he was not understood.

Again, in verse 26, it is said, “How is it then, or

“ what then is *to be done*, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all be done to edification.” The whole of this description seems to apply to the primitive state of the church. Surely nothing like it can be said of any church since the cessation of miraculous gifts. Has every one of us, when we come together, such things as these, that the regulation of them should apply to us? In verse 29, those, who prophesied, are called “ the prophets.” Would it be warrantable to give this name to the brethren who exhort in our church meetings? All the brethren are, in such meetings, at liberty to exhort; but “ are all prophets?” Chap. xii. 29.—When two or three of the prophets spoke, it is said, ver. 29, “ and let the others judge ” or “ discern.” This was a direction to exercise the gift of “ the discerning of spirits,” chap. xii. 10. One gift was accompanied by another corresponding to it. The gift of discerning, as we shall afterwards endeavour to show, was independent of those general rules of judging, which all Christians were to observe, and which are given, Matth. vii. 15—20. chap. xii. 3. and 1 John iv. 1—6. to aid us when miraculous gifts should cease.

Finally, when one prophet was directed to give place to another, verse 30, it was in the event of something being REVEALED to that other. It is odd, that in a discussion of the point in hand, a word so remarkable as this, should be sometimes passed over in silence. The fair interpretation of the passage seems to be, that the Spirit is supposed to have “ revealed ” something to the first, and to have “ revealed ” something

also to the second; and Paul desires that, when this happened, the first should conclude before the other began. When two or three brethren exhort in a modern church, is it because any thing has been "revealed" to them? Do successive revelations mark out the succession of speakers? The affirmative is maintained by the people called Quakers, and they endeavour to practise accordingly; but where is the evidence that any "revelation" is made to them at all?

It has been thought, that prophecy is exhortation, because it is said, verse 31, "Ye may all prophesy, one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted." Certainly all might prophesy, who could obtain the gift, and therefore, verse 39, they are advised to "desire to prophesy." The law then was the same, as in the days of Jeremiah, chap. xxiii. 28. "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully." There is no question, whether prophets may prophesy: it is only doubted by some, whether any should be acknowledged in that character, who have not wherewith to discharge the duties which belong to it, that is, who can afford no evidence of being inspired. The end, which was to be answered by prophesying, "that all might learn, and all might be comforted," has been considered in our remarks upon verse 3d.

Again, it has been thought, that prophesying was what is called an ordinary gift, because it is said, "Despise not prophesyings." The expression, "despise not prophesyings," seems evidently to refer to an extraordinary gift. It is explained by the preceding clause, to which it stands as a parallel. The whole

sure of "binding heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and laying them on other men's shoulders, while he himself will not move them with one of his fingers," Matth. xxiii. 4.

The gift of prophecy was bestowed on women as well as men. This was agreeable to the word of Joel, that "their daughters should prophesy." We read of prophetesses in the Old Testament, but we have reason to think, they were more numerous in the primitive times of Christianity. Thus, in Acts xxi. 8, 9. we read of "four daughters" in one family who prophesied, and, from various passages in 1 Cor. and 1 Tim. we are led to believe, that prophecy was then very frequent among the Christian women. Because, in 1 Cor. xi. the apostle reproves women for praying or prophesying in the church without their veils, but does not blame them for the practice itself, it has been supposed, that he allowed them to pray and prophesy publicly, provided they did it with their heads veiled. But as the apostle's intention, in chap. xi. was only to show the indecency of the manner, in which the women prayed and prophesied in the public assemblies, no argument can be drawn in favour of that practice from his not prohibiting it there, because he expressly prohibits it, in chap. xiv. 34. of the same epistle. Some have indeed thought, that this prohibition was only in the case of their not being inspired. For deciding on this opinion, it may be useful to consider the connection in which the prohibition occurs. The apostle, after describing the utility of prophecy, verse 3, and referring to the inspiration by which the prophets spake, verse 6, and ordering them to pray or prophesy in a known language, verse 7—12. or if

they prophesied in a foreign language, to do it so as it might be interpreted, by some one in the assembly, who had the gift of interpretation, verse 13, and after giving them directions concerning the orderly exercise of all their spiritual gifts founded on this fact, that “the spiritual gifts * of the prophets were subject to the prophets,” verse 32; he adds, verse 34, “let your women be silent in the churches, for it hath not been permitted to them to speak.” The prohibition standing in this connection implies, that the Corinthian women were not to pray and prophesy in the church as teachers, on pretence of being inspired, and unable to restrain the motions of the Spirit. Besides, the reasons given by the apostle show that the prohibition was absolute and general. Christ had not permitted women to speak in the church as teachers of the men: neither had the law of Moses permitted them, for it commanded them to be in subjection to the men. The apostle therefore considered women’s praying and prophesying in the church as a renouncing of their subjection to the men. Accordingly he terms it, 1 Tim. ii. 12. “usurping authority over the man.” They were not so much as to ask a question in the church, even on pretence of learning something, lest it might have given them a handle for entering into disputations with the men. But if they wished to learn any thing, they were to ask their husbands at home, verse 35. Nay, it was indecent for women to speak at all in the church, being inconsistent with that modesty which is their greatest ornament.—In short, to cut off every pretence for women’s teaching in the church, the apostle asks, verse 36, “Did the word of God go forth from you into the

* See Macknight on the place.

“ world? or did it only come to you by the ministry “ of the men?” plainly telling them, that whatever inspirations of the Spirit they might be favoured with; no inspiration was given them for the purpose of enabling them to teach publicly, or to lead the devotion of the church.—If it be asked, for what purpose the inspirations of the Spirit were bestowed on women? it may be answered, for enabling them to instruct their own sex in private; especially those of the younger sort, and those who were newly converted. Perhaps, also, some of the married women, who were eminent for their gifts, may, in private conversation, have occasionally assisted the new converts among the men. Perhaps Priscilla was an example of this kind, for she is mentioned along with her husband as expounding the way of God more perfectly to Apollos, Acts xviii. 26.—The daughters of Philip are said to have prophesied, but it will not follow that they prophesied in the church. On the contrary, it is in the account of a private visit at their father’s house that their gift is mentioned; Acts xxi. 8, 9. They may have uttered their prophecies in conversation; like Anna, Luke ii. 38. by which all the ends of the revelations made to them may have been answered.

Seventhly, the gift of “ discerning spirits.” This gift appears to have been bestowed to enable men to know, whether a person pretending to inspiration, really spoke by the Spirit of God. Among the disciples of Christ, there very early appeared false teachers, who, to gain credit to their errors, pretended to deliver them by inspiration. A gift of this kind was therefore necessary for preventing the faithful from being led away by impostors, especially in the first age, before

the writings of the apostles and evangelists were completely published. Hence the allusion to this gift in 1 John ii. 26, 27. "These things have I written unto you, concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye have received of him, abideth in you: and ye need not that any man teach you." Though Christians were not to quench the Spirit, nor to despise prophesyings, yet they were to "try all things, and to hold fast that which is good," 1 Thess. v. 20—22. Accordingly it is said, 1 Cor. xiv. 29. "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others discern, or judge." This gift was not rendered unnecessary by the declaration, John x. 4, 5, "The sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers." It was bestowed, indeed, to verify this declaration, till the scriptures should be completed, collected, and copied, so as to get into general circulation. Hence the permanent rules of judging, such as those contained in Matth. vii. 15—20. 1 Cor. xii. 3. and 1 John. iv. 1—6, seem to be different from this gift, for they were given for the direction of Christians when this gift should cease.

Those who possessed this gift are called, verse 28, "governments," rather, "directors." The word originally signifies *the steering of a ship*, or, *the skill of a pilot* by which he is enabled to steer a ship. Hence by a beautiful, and not uncommon figure, it is used as a name for those, whose gift peculiarly fitted them to *sit at the helm of affairs* in a church, to *govern, direct, and manage with judgment*. If they could try the spirits, and discern whether a man, who pretended

to prophesy, spoke by human presumption, or divine impulse, they could surely direct the judgements of the Christians, and show what regard ought to be paid to prophecies, or doctrines delivered as prophecies. The enabling of men to discern spirits was a remarkable display of the favour of that God, who searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men, and who, in this instance, gave power to his servants, in some measure to do the same.

Eighthly, the gift of speaking "divers kinds of tongues." The word "tongue" is, in this passage, and chap. xiv. 2. evidently used for a foreign language. The gift of speaking various kinds of foreign languages was one of the first means of the rapid growth of Christianity. By it, the disciples on the day of Pentecost, addressed a multitude from many different parts of the world, and the first preachers of the gospel were enabled immediately, wherever they went, to preach the wonderful works of God, without waiting till in an ordinary way they learned the language of the country. By it also the gifted brethren could address foreigners, who came into the churches, in their own language, as was done with such effect on the day of Pentecost. Thus were tongues "a sign to them that believed not," chap. xiv. 22, and the means of instructing such of them as were foreigners. Although the apostle advised the brethren at Corinth chiefly to desire to prophesy, he did not undervalue tongues, for he says, chap. xiv. 18. "I thank my God; I speak with tongues more than you all." From these words it also appears, that the persons who were endowed with this gift, had not communicated to them the knowledge of all

languages; and even the languages which were given them, may not have been communicated to them all at once, but only as they had occasion for them.

Ninthly, the gift of "interpreting tongues." This being a distinct gift from that of speaking with tongues, it may be presumed, that not every one who understood the foreign language in which an inspired teacher spake, was allowed to interpret. The only persons permitted to do this in the church were the interpreters, who were endowed with a special inspiration for that end. The doctrines of the gospel, being entirely different from all the notions which heathens, or even Jews had been accustomed to entertain on religious subjects, any interpretation of what was delivered by the Spirit in a foreign language, made without a supernatural direction, might have led the church into error.—This faculty of interpreting foreign languages by inspiration, was, in another respect, a gift very necessary in the first age. The books of the Old Testament were written in Hebrew, a language not then understood by the common people, even in Judea, and the writings of the apostles and evangelists were in the Greek tongue, which was no where spoken by the common people, except in Greece and some cities of the Lesser Asia. Unless, therefore, there had been, in every church, inspired interpreters, who could translate those inspired writings into the common language, they would have been, in a great measure, useless, especially at the beginning, when the knowledge of them could not be obtained, by ordinary study, without delaying long the general instruction of the church. Whereas every church having inspired interpreters present in their assemblies, to translate the

Hebrew and Greek scriptures into the language of the country, the members at large had an immediate opportunity of deriving from those writings, all the knowledge and comfort which they are fitted to yield.

The "diversities" or "divers kinds of tongues," verse 28, seem to answer both to "speaking tongues" and "interpreting tongues," verses 10 and 30. And "speaking with tongues," verse 30, seems to include "prophecy, discerning spirits, and speaking tongues," verse 10. For they who exercised the gift of tongues did generally at the same time, pray, or prophesy, sing psalms or hymns, or discern spirits, as well as speak in an unknown tongue, see Acts x. 46.

These were the gifts which the apostle Paul enumerates in the first epistle to the Corinthians, as having been distributed by the Holy Spirit among the primitive Christians. The first seems to have been always communicated to particular persons by an immediate effusion of the Holy Spirit from heaven, and the second generally in the same manner. The other gifts were frequently distributed among whole churches, through the laying on of the hands of the apostles, or the earnest desire of the brethren to obtain them. They all appear to have been completely distinct from the qualities which are essential universally to the character of a Christian. They were distributed according to the divine will among different individuals in Christian churches, for the good of the rest. The possession of them did not of itself ascertain Christian character, Matth. vii. 22. Wonderful and important as they were, the cultivation of love was "a more excellent way." Without gifts, men could not become remark-

ably useful in public, but though they had all gifts, if they had not love, (which was a supposable case) they could not be Christians: love is amiable; kind and forbearing; the very fulfilling of the law. Gifts were to cease, and we see they have ceased, but love never faileth. It not only was superior to the gifts which were temporary, but is even the greatest among the graces which abide.

We have said, that there is a difference between early and later churches, owing to the cessation of spiritual gifts, which must always be allowed for, in our attempts to imitate the example of the primitive Christians.

Among the primitive Christians, even the Jewish converts were recently awakened from the grossest ignorance, and prejudice remained among them with a degree of strength, of which we cannot easily form a conception. The Gentiles were, till their conversion, utterly destitute of spiritual ideas, and had very imperfect notions of morality. The sacred books of the Jews were not generally known, and the writings of the apostles and evangelists were not published, till a considerable time after numerous churches were planted in many countries of Asia and Europe. In these circumstances, the knowledge which the Christians derived from the preaching of the inspired teachers, who came to them at first, but remained only for a time, could not be either accurate or extensive. To supply that defect, the spiritual gifts were bestowed. Some were fitted for speaking to edification, and exhortation, and comfort, or for leading the worship of the church, by prayers, or psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Others were en-

abled to govern the body. Others translated into the common languages, the discourses delivered for a sign, or for the sake of strangers, in foreign tongues, as well as the parts of scripture which were read in the church.

Although gifts were sometimes distributed among all the original members of a church, yet as the church increased, the gifted brethren do not appear to have formed a large proportion of the whole, but only such a number as was sufficient for their service. We gather this from I Cor. xii. 15—21. where the apostle seems to compare them to the eye, the ear, the organ of smelling, and the hand, and declares, that other members were as really of the body as they. In like manner, in Acts xiii. 1. there were only five prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch, and of these, two were called away.

That gifts were necessary for enabling the primitive brethren to conduct the public worship and discipline, we learn from the continual reference to the enjoyment of gifts, when these things form a subject of regulation. Thus Rom. xii. 6. "HAVING THEN GIFTS, "DIFFERING ACCORDING TO THE GRACE THAT IS "GIVEN TO US, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* "according to the proportion of faith: or ministry, "let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, "on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; "he that giveth, *let him do it* with simplicity; he that "ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with "cheerfulness."

There is another passage of scripture on the same subject, which is particularly worthy of attention, because it not only refers, like the former, to the enjoy-

ment of gifts, but expressly declares in what state of the church they were intended to cease, and how provision should be made while gifts continued, for the building of the body of Christ after they should cease. Ephes. iv. 7—16. “ But to every one of us is given “ grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ. “ For he saith, He ascended on high, he took captivity “ ty captive, and gave gifts to men.—And he gave “ some, indeed, apostles; and some prophets; and “ some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; “ FOR (*the sake of*) FITTING THE SAINTS FOR THE “ WORK OF THE MINISTRY for (*in order to*) the “ building of the body of Christ. TILL WE ALL “ COME TO THE UNITY OF THE FAITH, and OF THE “ KNOWLEDGE OF THE SON OF GOD, TO A PERFECT “ MAN, *even* TO THE MEASURE OF THE STATURE “ OF THE FULNESS OF CHRIST. That we may no “ longer be children, tossed and whirled about with “ every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, by “ craftiness for (*the sake of*) the very system of er- “ ror. But that holding the truth with love, we may “ make all the members grow to him, who is the head, “ even Christ. From whom the whole body being “ aptly joined together, and compacted through the “ service of every joint, He maketh increase of the “ body, according to a measure of energy, of each par- “ ticular part, to the building of himself by love.”

Whether this, or the common translation be preferred, we may remark, on this passage, that “ the pas- “ tors and teachers ” here mentioned, are not ordinary bishops, for these were not yet ordained*. The a-

* In consulting the Epistles, it is of the utmost consequence

postle is speaking, not of officers on whom Timothy should afterwards lay hands, for the benefit chiefly of that particular church, but of gifts which Christ had

to keep in mind their several dates, as far as they can be ascertained. We shall therefore subjoin a table of them, in the order of time, with the places where, and the times when they were written, according to the opinion of Macknight, who is allowed to have been very judicious and successful in this part of his work. The list will be found useful to refer to in perusing other parts of these papers. It may also be convenient for the reader on various occasions.

Epistles.	Places.	A. D.
Galatians, written at	Antioch,	perhaps. 50.
1 Thessalonians, - - -	Corinth,	end of 51.
2 Thessalonians, - - -	Corinth,	52.
1 Cerinthians, - - -	Ephesus,	spring of 56.
2 Corinthians, - - -	Macedonia,	summer of 57.
Romans, - - - -	Corinth, {	end of 57. or beginning of 58.
Ephesians, - - - -	Rome,	60 or 61.
Philippians, - - - -	Rome,	summer or autumn of 61.
Colossians, - - - -	Rome,	61.
Philemon, - - - -	Rome,	61.
Hebrews, - - - -	Rome or Italy,	61 or 62.
Epistle of James, - - -	Jerusalem,	61 or 62.
1 Timothy, - - - -	Nicopolis, {	end of 64. or beginning of 65.
Titus, - - - -	Colosse,	65.
2 Timothy, - - - -	Rome,	summer, of 66.
1 Peter, Babylon, (probably Rome)	{	end of 66. or beginning of 67.
2 Peter, - - - -	Rome,	67 or 68.
1 John, - - - -	Judea,	68.
2 John, } 3 John, }	- - - -	Ephesus, between 80 and 90.
Jude, - - - -	- - - -	perhaps between 90 and 95.

given to men when he had ascended up on high, that the Lord God might dwell among them. The apostle says, that these gifts which began to be bestowed on the day of Pentecost, qualified some for being apostles, some for being prophets, some for being evangelists, and some for being pastors and teachers. One of the most important ends which these supernaturally endowed office-bearers were to accomplish, for the edifying of the church, was to "fit the saints for the work of the ministry;" that is, we apprehend, to train men, by ordinary means of instruction, for the office of a bishop. This work, we believe, would not be neglected by any of the gifted persons here mentioned, but seems to have been particularly the charge of the "pastors and teachers." That they should have a charge of this kind follows not merely from a verbal criticism, but from the nature of the thing. Here were men supernaturally qualified for pastors and teachers. But men were to be fitted for the work of the ministry, by the use of ordinary means, for supernatural qualifications were about to cease. Who should, nay, who could, fit these men, except those who had been previously fitted (though in a different way) themselves? It may be observed also, that in fitting these men, they were to have in view the edification of the body of Christ in general, and not a supply only of colleagues or successors in the particular churches to which they belonged. The supernaturally endowed pastors and teachers (whose names seem to refer to one office) were to continue until, being fully instructed by their discourses and conduct, and provided with the record of divine truth in the completed volumes of scripture, the believers should

have arrived, through faith and knowledge of the Son of God, at the state of manhood in their associated capacity; and having among them men fitted for the work of the ministry, should be able, by the blessing of God, to direct and defend themselves from error and mutability, to propagate their faith in the world around, and to transmit it to posterity, without further miraculous interposition.

The education, then, of pious men for the work of the ministry, under the tuition of pastors and teachers, seems to be the chief allowance which ought to be made for the difference of circumstances, between the primitive and later churches, occasioned by the cessation of spiritual gifts.

Although, in the passage last quoted, the cessation of spiritual gifts is plainly referred to, and no evidence of their existence can now be given, it is amazing how many have, in all ages, been inclined to affect the possession of them. Almost all the enthusiastical errors, which are recorded in church history, have arisen from this source. From the preceding remarks, the reader will perceive, that the principal dispute at present respects the gift of prophecy. But this has not been always the case. Many have attempted to exercise other spiritual gifts. The celebrated Mr. Whiston, for instance, a man of much ingenuity and learning, but at the same time of an uncommonly voracious appetite for the marvellous, appears to have contended as earnestly for the exercise of "the gifts of healings," as any do now for that of the gift of prophecy. His arguments may be seen at large in the memoirs, which he wrote of his own life, particularly the use which he makes of James v. 14, 15, strenuously urging that the elders of the church should be called to act in the

same manner still, and alleging several supposed examples of its being done with the most perfect success.

At present, though prophecy is chiefly fastened on, yet the word gifts seems to be very much used in a sense exceedingly indefinite. Every Christian is said to have gifts. Every church is encouraged to expect within itself all necessary gifts. The brethren, it is said, ought, when they come together, to be called to exercise their gifts. This exercising of gifts is called an ordinance of Christ. Christians are charged to practise it, as they would not be guilty of refusing to submit to divine authority. Pastors are admonished to give place for a portion at least of the time of public worship, every Lord's day, that the brethren may have a proper opportunity of observing the ordinance of exercising their gifts. Churches are advised to look with a jealous eye on the education of men for the ministry; to decline seeking a pastor beyond their own company; and to trust in the Lord for gifts. In short, the language held on the subject, seems to imply the boldest claim possible to gifts of every kind. We confess, that we cannot approve of such language, because we apprehend, it will be difficult to show, that a single gift, in the scriptural sense of the word, has existed in any church of Christ upon earth, these fifteen hundred years.

Some, indeed, use the word gifts merely for the natural faculties of Christians. These, especially considered, as sanctified by divine grace, and improved by diligent cultivation, they call the ordinary gifts, to distinguish them from those which they allow to be extraordinary. They use the word, either by way of accommodation, or in allusion to those passages of

scripture, in which reason, with all its successful operations, particularly in the prosecution of religious inquiries, and every holy disposition of heart, are ascribed to God. See Job xxxii. 8. and xxxv. 11. and xxxviii. 36. James i. 5, 16, 17. To this mode of speaking, when sufficiently explained, we see no objection. No miracle is pretended. No right is claimed of acting as when there was a miracle. The use of ordinary means for individual improvement is allowed to be necessary.

Upon the whole, we may learn from the subject of this Section, that Christians, those especially who wish to be publicly useful, should study to acquire, by the use of means, a measure of those faculties, which God declared, by miraculous interposition, to be of essential importance to the success of the gospel. Some of these are, indeed, plainly beyond our reach, such as "the inworkings of powers," and "the gifts of healings." Others were requisite in that state of things only, which obtained, while revelation was yet incomplete, such as "the word of wisdom," "the word of knowledge," the "faith" which wrought miracles, and "the discerning of spirits." All of them were most likely enjoyed in a degree of excellence, which must ever distinguish them from the little attainments of man; as, in the animal creation, we see the difference between the perfection of instinct, and the slow advances of reason. But if God has, by the original effusion of these gifts, intimated that wisdom, knowledge, utterance, a power of persuasion; the knowledge of the scriptures, the knowledge of tongues, and the knowledge of human character, are faculties requisite to the success and maintenance of the gospel of Christ;

(and can any deny that he has given this intimation?); it surely follows, that every friend of the gospel should admit, nay, should urge, and require, the pursuit of those attainments, as the bounden duty of all, who discharge, in the churches now, those offices which were discharged by the gifted men in primitive times. Even gifted men themselves were called to diligent study, for their gifts were in this way susceptible of improvement*, how much more must study be necessary to those, who have no extraordinary original advantage?—The cessation of miraculous gifts is no proof that the faculties of which they consisted, are now to be neglected. Some of them appear to be of importance still; only He, who does nothing in vain, ceased to interpose by miracle for supplying them, when opportunity was afforded, in process of time, to acquire them another way. The miraculous supply at first was of obvious utility, but a continuance of it would have led to idleness and sloth. Divine goodness, then, seems equally manifest, in the effusion, and in the cessation, of the gifts of the Spirit.

Again, we may learn from this subject, that, as the gifts of the Spirit are clearly distinguishable from those influences which are commonly called grace, and granted to every Christian, so the means to be used for acquiring or cultivating the faculties necessary to an instructor of others, are different from an attendance on those ordinances of grace which are instituted for the edification of the church at large. That he ought to attend such ordinances is as evident, as that he ought to be a believer, that

* 1 Tim. iv. 14, 15. See also Eccles. xii. 9, 10, 11.

he ought to abound in grace, and to be an example to other believers in all righteousness; but there are various other objects of attention, which are quite distinct from these, and which he cannot meet with, among the exercises of a church. Every one will see the absurdity of attempting to combine a church and a grammar school. Now, if natural talents, even when sanctified by grace, must be improved by the use of ordinary means, schools, for various branches of study, must be as useful in an education for the ministry, as in any education of another kind. Attention to general literature is necessary to enable a man to enter with advantage on the particular study of the scriptures, no less than on that of any other ancient writings, or on any other particular branch of study; and this attention must be paid for the same length of time, as is found necessary in other cases. When a man attempts to expound the scriptures, it will soon be seen, whether he is retailing what he has heard in a church meeting before, or has culled from some favourite author; or whether he is able, to examine a subject for himself, and, having examined it, to communicate to others, with clearness, precision, and energy, the result of his inquiries. Much may no doubt be done by strong natural powers, and great individual exertion, but, in general, the ordinary means of improvement are of immense advantage.—Some men seem rather to tolerate, than to require learning in a minister of the gospel. When they mention its utility, they speak as if they were making a concession. When they would spare a seminary of instruction for the ministry, they feel as awkward as one who is questioned about stolen goods. “What learning, say they, may

"not be useful to an elder, and if he has it, a church
 "need not ask how he acquired it." A system, which
 requires so embarrassed an account of the matter, as
 this, betrays symptoms of error. It either cherishes
 the enthusiastic notion that miraculous gifts of the
 Spirit are poured out still; or it excludes all miracle
 from the case, and reduces one of the most glorious
 gifts of the day of Pentecost to the level of ordinary
 religious discourse.—The word of God does not leave
 the education of men for the ministry in a state of dark
 and mysterious uncertainty. It explicitly says, that
 gifted pastors and teachers were to fit saints for that
 work. It seems a most natural inference, that those
 who have been fitted for it themselves, and have experi-
 ence in it, should, in all ordinary cases, employ themselves
 in fitting others. This has accordingly been the ge-
 neral practice from the beginning; and though the
 imperfections of whatever is actually practised afford
 a handle against it, yet these ought not to be rashly
 sustained as an objection to the practice itself. Many
 errors, we know, have been committed in the education
 of men for the ministry, but to take the management
 of that education, on this pretext, out of the hands of
 ministers of the gospel, and to put it into the hands of
 individuals or committees, not acknowledged, nor so
 much as alluded to, in scripture at all, and totally un-
 acquainted by experience with the work for which
 they would fit others; instead of remedying such er-
 rors, will only add to their number. Let pastors of
 churches, then, openly avow their readiness to attend
 to this most important part of their duty; and let o-
 thers, who desire to bring forward men to the work
 of the ministry, show singleness of heart, by submitting

to the intimations of scripture, as to the persons by whom the education of such should be conducted.

It has ever been the glory of Christianity to contribute to the diffusion of general knowledge. The learned men of the heathen world bear no proportion to the multitudes of those, who, in all ages, have devoted themselves to study, from love to the cause of God and truth. Never was the spirit of mental improvement more strongly excited than by the primitive propagation of the gospel. All acknowledge the effect of the reformation from popery on the republic of letters. It may be affirmed, in general, that learning has languished when Christianity has been corrupted; has revived when Christianity has been reformed; and flourishes or fades according to the degree of purity and vigour, in which Christianity is maintained. Now this connection between learning and Christianity has been greatly strengthened, if not chiefly preserved, by the learning thought necessary to the pastoral office. We justly reprobate that antichristian system, which calls ignorance the mother of devotion, and discourages the instruction of the common people; but does it not make bad worse, if we also discourage the instruction of those who are to teach them?

The knowledge of the scriptures, so as to be able to expound them, implies an acquaintance with a great variety of subjects; but no kind of learning is more immediately connected with the success of the gospel than that which is commonly called classical. Since miracles have ceased, let the gift of tongues be succeeded by the study of tongues. The necessity of learning to speak foreign languages is not disputed in the case of a missionary. Why should that of learning

to interpret them be disputed in the case of a teacher in the church? The Bible has been given us in foreign and in dead languages. We have much reason to bless God for an excellent translation of it, but that excellent translation we should never have had without learned teachers. After all, however, it is a human performance. And although such is the kindness of God that the way of a sinner's salvation must shine in almost every page of almost any translation of scripture; yet there are many passages which cannot well be explained without making remarks on a translation; and one great use of a teacher must be to correct the errors, and to illustrate the obscurities of a translation. Surely he is ill-fitted for this part of his duty, if he cannot do it from his own knowledge of the original languages. If he be ignorant of these, the church may think they are enjoying the instructions of a teacher whom they have chosen; but they are mistaken; they do not know whom they have chosen; for both they and their teacher, are at the mercy of his library. "I appeal to yourselves," says Dr. Campbell to his students,* "I appeal to common sense, whether there be not an impropriety, not to say an absurdity in this, that a person should be by office the interpreter of a book, which he himself cannot read without an interpreter. And such surely is every one, who cannot read any part of his Bible in the original, but must have recourse to translations." Teaching also requires a knowledge of that language which the teacher himself must use. Now if that language should be even his mother tongue, he cannot under-

* Lectures on Systematic Theology, Introductory Lecture IV.

stand it thoroughly, nor speak it with a desirable degree of clearness and precision; unless he be accustomed to the grammatical and critical study of language, and be able to compare one language with another.

We should here like to mention the study of eloquence; but we have been admonished "to be content to hear plain men speak the things of God in a plain manner; and not to indulge a fondness for fine speaking." What a fallacious way of treating the subject is this! If by speaking in a plain manner, were merely meant, speaking in an unadorned manner, we ought certainly to be content to hear it, and, when the subject is the things of God, cheerfully to admit the sentiment of the poet, "Loveliness needs not the foreign aid of ornament, but is, when unadorned, adorned the most." In this sense, plain men speak plain enough. But the most important meaning of the word plain, is not that which is opposite to ornamented, but that which is opposite to obscure. If in this sense, be understood the phrase, "speaking in a plain manner," we ought not only to be content, but desirous to hear such a manner of speaking the things of God. Here, however, the fallacy of the expression will be seen; for, in general, plain men, (men who have not had the advantage of a liberal education) do not thus speak in a plain manner. They are apt to use wrong words, and too many words; they bring out their thoughts with little arrangement or connection; and they often rather speak about their thoughts, than tell distinctly what they are. Shall we be content to hear teachers speak the things of God in such a manner as this? Shall we deny, that the studies commonly

known by the names of logic and belles lettres, that learning to think and speak with accuracy, method, and clearness, is a duty? or shall we say, that it is superseded by the ordinary worship and discipline of a church? As to "fine speaking," which is represented to be the only alternative, it is difficult exactly to understand the phrase; but if it be used for any kind of speaking besides what is calculated to engage attention, to inform, to convince, and to persuade (qualities of style not undervalued in the holy scriptures) we cheerfully renounce it.

"I am sensible; (says Dr. Campbell,) that there are many pious Christians, who are startled at the name of eloquence when applied to the Christian teacher; they are disposed to consider it as setting an office, which in its nature is spiritual, and in its origin divine, too much on a footing with those which are merely human and secular. And this turn of thinking I have always found to proceed from one or other of these two causes; either from a mistake of what is meant by eloquence, or from a misapprehension of some passages of holy writ in relation to the sacred function. First, it arises from a mistaken notion of the import of the word. It often happens, both among philosophers and divines, that violent and endless disputes are carried on by adverse parties, which, were they to begin by settling a definition of the term whereon the question turns, would vanish in an instant. Were these people then, who appear to differ from us on the propriety of employing eloquence, to give an explication of the ideas they comprehend under the term *eloquence* or oratory, we should doubtless get from them some such account as this, a knack, or artifice by which the

periods of a discourse are curiously and harmoniously strung together, decorated with many flowery images, the whole entirely calculated to set off the speaker's art by pleasing the ear and amusing the fancy of the hearers, but by no means calculated either to inform their understandings or to engage their hearts. Perhaps those people will be surprised, when I tell them, that commonly no discourses whatever, not even the homeliest, have less of true eloquence, than such frothy harangues, as perfectly suit their definition. If this, then, is all they mean to inveigh against under the name *eloquence*, I will join issue with them with all my heart. Nothing can be less worthy the study or attention of a wise man, and much more may this be said of a Christian pastor, than such a futile acquisition as that above described. But if, on the contrary, nothing else is meant by eloquence, in the use of all the wisest and the best who have written on the subject, but that art or talent, whereby the speech is adapted to produce in the hearer the great end which the speaker has, or at least ought to have principally in view, it is impossible to doubt the utility of the study; unless people will be absurd enough to question, whether there be any difference between speaking to the purpose, and speaking from the purpose, expressing one's self intelligibly or unintelligibly, reasoning in a manner that is conclusive and satisfactory, or in such a way as can convince nobody, fixing the attention and moving the affections of an audience, or leaving them in a state perfectly listless and unconcerned.

“ But, as I signified already, there are prejudices against this study in the Christian orator, arising from another source, the promises of the immediate influ-

ence of the Divine Spirit, the commands of our Lord to his disciples, to avoid all concern and solicitude on this article, and the example of some of the apostles who disclaimed expressly the advantages resulting from the study of rhetoric, or indeed of any human art, or institute whatever. In answer to such objections, I must beg leave to ask, are we not in the promises of our Saviour, to distinguish those, which were made to his disciples, merely as Christians, or his followers in the way to the kingdom, from those made indeed to the same persons, but considered in the character of apostles, the promulgators of his doctrine among Jews and pagans, and the first founders of his church? Are we entitled to apply to ourselves those promises made to the apostles, or even the first Christians, manifestly for the conviction and conversion of an infidel world? "These signs," says Christ, "shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." Do we now expect such signs to follow upon our faith? And is not the promise of immediate inspiration on any emergency (which is doubtless a miraculous gift as well as those above enumerated) to be considered as of the same nature, and given for the same end? And ought not all those precepts, to which promises of this supernatural kind are annexed as the reason, to be understood with the same restriction? When our Lord foretold his disciples, that they should be brought before kings and rulers for his name's sake, he adds. "Settle it in your hearts not to meditate before what you shall

“ answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom
 “ which all your adversaries shall not be able to gain-
 “ say or resist.” It is manifest the obligation of the
 precept can only be explained by a proper apprehension
 of the extent of the promise. But the truth is, that
 few or none, in these our days, would consider pre-
 meditation in such circumstances as either unlawful or
 improper. Who, even among those who inveigh most
 bitterly against the study of eloquence for the pulpit,
 does ever so much as pretend that we ought not to
 meditate, or so much as think, on any subject before
 we preach upon it? And yet the letter of the pre-
 cept, nay and the spirit too, strikes more directly a-
 gainst particular premeditation, than against the gen-
 eral study of the art of speaking. It is more a parti-
 cular application of the art, than the art itself that is
 here pointed at. And as to what the great apostle of
 the Gentiles hath said on this article, it will serve, I
 am persuaded, to every attentive reader, as a confirma-
 tion of what has been advanced above, in regard to the
 true meaning of such promises and precepts, and the
 limitations with which they ought to be understood.
 Well might he renounce every art which man’s wis-
 dom teacheth, whose speech was accompanied with the
 demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that is with
 those miraculous gifts, which were so admirably calcu-
 lated to silence contradiction, and to convince the most
 incredulous. But the truth is, there is not one argu-
 ment can be taken from those precepts and examples,
 that will not equally conclude against all human learn-
 ing whatsoever, as against the study of rhetoric. Be-
 cause the apostles could preach to men of every nation
 without studying their language, in consequence of the

gift of tongues with which they were supernaturally-endowed, shall we think to convert strangers, with whose speech we are totally unacquainted, and not previously apply to grammars, and lexicons and other helps for attaining the language? Or because Paul, as he himself expressly tells us, received the knowledge of the gospel by immediate inspiration, shall we neglect the study of the scriptures and other outward means of instruction? There have been, I own, some enthusiasts who have carried the matter as far as this. And though hardly any person of the least reflection, would argue in such a manner now, it must be owned that the very same premises, by which any human art or institute in itself useful, is excluded, will equally answer the purposes of such fanatics in excluding all. And to the utility, and even importance of the rhetorical art, scripture itself bears testimony. Is it not mentioned by the sacred historian in recommendation of Apollos, that he was “an eloquent man,” as well as mighty in the scriptures? And is not his success manifestly ascribed, under God, to these advantages? There is no mention of any supernatural gifts, which he could receive only by the imposition of the hands of an apostle; and it appears from the history, that before he had any interview with the apostles, immediately after his conversion, he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing from the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. The very words used by the inspired penman are such as are familiar with rhetoricians in relation to the forensic eloquence, *Ευτινω, μαρτος Ιουδαιois διακουτηλιγχετο*, *Acriter, vehementer, magna contentione*. Now, though it is not permitted to us to reach the celestial heights of a Peter or a Paul, I see

nothing to hinder our aspiring to the humbler attainments of an Apollos. But enough, and perhaps too much, for obviating objections, which I cannot allow myself to think, will have great weight with gentlemen, who have been so long employed in the study of the learned languages, and of the liberal arts and sciences. However, when one hath occasion to hear such arguments (if indeed they deserve to be called so) advanced by others, it may be of some utility to be provided with an answer *.”

When many churches were forming in this country, it seemed so desirable speedily to procure a number of labourers, that we were tempted to act, as if we wished to ascertain by experiment, how little preparation would answer the exigency. Of the preachers so prepared no complaint ought to be made. All things considered, they have done astonishingly well. But we are too apt in practice to yield to the pressure of temporary circumstances, and then to defend that practice, by a theory founded on cases of supposed necessity. Thus it is often asked, will you absolutely admit of no pastor any where, unless he has learning? May it not be asked in return, Are we at all obliged to answer such a question, in order to ascertain what is proper for fitting saints for the work of the ministry? The institutions of God are not calculated for cases of necessity. They suppose a providential supply of means, and opportunity to use them. The divine institution made it unlawful for any but the priests to eat the show-bread. But if, on that account, we would not admit, that others might have been reliev-

* Lectures on Pulpit Eloquence, Lecture I. p. 260—268.

ed by it in a case of necessity, we should go beyond scripture, and condemn that which David did, when he was an hungered and those that were with him. His case, however, made no alteration on the general rule of duty.

We fondly hoped, that what could hardly be attained by us at once, would be gradually pursued; and that our plans of education would be extended and improved. Unhappily, however, such of us as are pastors have not perceived, or not actually undertaken, our part in this important work. The churches have not been called by us to countenance such an attempt, but rather to depend on a source of supply, which is private, is little known to them, of uncertain duration, and almost entirely beyond the sphere of their influence. And now it is publicly recommended to the churches to lay no stress upon learning at all; to confine themselves to such teachers as they can find among themselves, whether learned or unlearned; nay, to unite purposely in the same office some of the one description and some of the other. What a monstrous scheme of ignorance and confusion is this! Is it not high time to change our course, and, instead of trying how little preparation will answer a supposed exigency, to inquire how much preparation we are able to provide? Our inquiries on this point could not fail to be encouraging. In this much-favoured country, pastors would find little difficulty in superintending the education of students. What is rarely the case any where else, the public seminaries are here opened to people of every religious persuasion, for no subscription of articles is required of the scholar. In short, the means of knowledge are so abundant, and so easy

of access, that it must be owing to the wilful negligence of churches of all descriptions, if they do not procure for those who are to teach among them, an education as thorough and extensive, as is afforded to any class of men, in any nation upon earth.

Serious people are often afraid of training men, for any length of time, for the work of the ministry, lest after all, they should be found unfit for it. But in every undertaking we must be willing occasionally to experience disappointment. When churches are free from secular influence, they have the choice of their own teachers, and may therefore reject those, whom they judge unfit to edify them, whatever may be their literary eminence. They may be imposed upon, indeed, but imposition may be practised by the ignorant as well as by the learned.

The training of young people for the ministry is treated by many with such sovereign contempt, that some perhaps will think it foolish to venture to plead for the practice. But surely a young Christian may be early animated by a desire for that "good work, the office of a bishop;" and although we are by no means to appoint a new convert to that office, yet there is no law against preparing and proving him for it. Some of the most useful ministers, in all ages, have been early called by divine grace, and early desirous of the work to which, in the course of providence, their life was to be devoted. But we go further on this subject. If classical studies are to be cherished for the sake of the gospel, it is of importance to secure an early attention to them. Children are always the best scholars in the study of languages; whereas very few indeed can prosecute that study with success, after they

have advanced in life. Shall we scruple to recommend this fact to the serious attention of Christian parents? Shall we not tell them, that when revolving schemes for the settlement of their offspring, they ought to inquire, not merely what education will fit them for worldly business; but what may be done, when their talents are promising, to fit them for being useful in the church of Christ, if the Lord, to whom they have been committed at baptism, and in whose nurture and admonition they have been brought up, should appear, in the issue, to have marked them for his own. After all, indeed, they may not prove godly persons, or may not be adapted, or even inclined, to the work of the ministry. But, in these cases, a ready field is open to their choice in other departments of literature; and, if truly serious, a body of well educated youth must be of vast advantage to Christian churches, whether they be called to bear office or not. Great would be the absurdity of saying, that none should be admitted to the ministry, but those who had enjoyed such early advantages; but any thing like contempt or reproach of them seems equally subversive of the principles of the gospel, and of common sense.

It is to be feared, that one reason, why the affectation of despising learning is so popular with many, is the prevalence of pride and covetousness in the human heart. Men are not naturally fond of feeling the superiority of others in any respect. They are therefore under a temptation of endeavouring to keep all around, down to their own level, although it should be even to their own disadvantage to do so. Besides, learning is attended with some expence, and many are disposed to think that any plan, which promises to dimi-

nish expence, is of course an improvement. It is not much to be wondered at, that those Christians who are unacquainted with the thing which they disregard, should undervalue learning; but when men, who have any portion of it themselves, seem disposed to encourage the ignorant in their prejudice, the circumstance is extraordinary indeed. In common cases, knowledge is accompanied by the love of knowledge, and a desire to diffuse and increase it; and we are accustomed to think people far gone in the progress of barbarism, who are willing to countenance contempt of information.

But to return, for a moment, to the general subject of this Section, we have pleasure in concluding with one remark concerning it, about which, we trust, there is no controversy among the people of Christ. The gifts bestowed on the primitive churches form a very striking proof of the divine origin of Christianity. Miracles and prophecy have been, in every age, leading parts of the evidence of revelation. In the gifts of the primitive churches, they were united, and displayed to mankind with the most astonishing profusion. This fact must ever tend to confirm the faith of the Christian, and to preserve upon his mind a lively sense of the importance of the everlasting gospel. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us, by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will," Heb. ii. 3, 4.

OF THE ELDERS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCHES.

THE first converts to the faith of the gospel appear to be frequently spoken of, in the New Testament, under the general appellation of elders. Of these, some belonged to the company of disciples, while Jesus was yet on earth, and, with the women, constituted the original members of the Christian church: others were afterwards added.

The former seem to be referred to by Luke, chap. i. 2. when he speaks of "eye-witnesses*:" such as had seen our Lord in the flesh; had conversed with him, and enjoyed the benefit of his instructions and example in the time of his personal ministry; had also seen him after his resurrection, and could therefore bear witness of that important fact. The apostles, who had been ordained by Jesus himself, were of this description, and perhaps are distinguished in the passage cited from Luke, as not only "eye-witnesses," but "ministers" of the word. Out of persons of the same description, was the place to be supplied, from which Judas by transgression fell, Acts i. 21, 22. The disciples, on whom the Holy Spirit fell on the day of Pentecost were probably all of the same kind; (compare with the preceding text, Acts ii. 1.); and so were the five hundred, mentioned by Paul, 1 Cor. xv. 6. who, at one time, saw the Lord after his resurrection. Whether the seven chosen at Jerusalem to manage the charitable fund; and some of the evange-

* See Benson's Essay quoted before, Chap. III. Sect. 2.

tists, were selected from this sort of elders, we do not know.

It is pretty evident, however, that such of these elders, as were not apostles, had trust and authority in the church at Jerusalem, at a very early period. With them, it seems to have been, that Barnabas and Saul deposited the alms, which the church at Antioch sent to the church at Jerusalem, Acts xi. 30. Whether elders in this passage are to be viewed as signifying deacons we do not stop to inquire. Perhaps the reason of sending the contribution to the elders might be, that the brethren at Antioch were not certain whether any apostles were then at Jerusalem. We know that, before the seven were appointed, charitable donations used to be laid at the apostles' feet. It was not, however, in the absence only of the apostles, that the elders were distinguished. They are frequently mentioned together, and the elders are placed next to the apostles, as second only to them by the appointment of Christ and in the esteem of the church. See Acts xv. 2, 4, 6, 22, 23. and xvi. 4. and xxi. 18.

Nay, the apostles style themselves elders, as accounting the name an honour even to them. Thus Peter calls himself "the co-elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory to be revealed," 1 Pet. v. 1. John also calls himself emphatically, "The elder," 2 Epistle i. and 3 Epistle i.; and speaks, 1 Epistle i. 1. of "that which was from the beginning, which," says he, "we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life." In comparison of these elders, Paul, the

great apostle of the Gentiles, speaks of himself "as one born out of due time," 1 Cor. xv. 8.

Other elders were those who were the earliest converts added to the church, after the ascension of Christ, in consequence of the preaching of the gospel with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. They are commonly called "the first fruits," or first converts to Christianity in the various places to which the gospel came with power. Thus, those who were early converted at Jerusalem were the first-fruits of the Jews and of the whole world. Peter urges on the Jews the consideration of the kindness of God, in commanding those who preached the gospel to begin at Jerusalem. "Unto you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities," Acts iii. 26. Paul also says of the gospel, that "it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek," Rom. i. 16. Accordingly James addressing Jewish Christians, in a part of his letter to the twelve tribes, says, "Of his own will begat he us, by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures," James i. 18. In like manner, Cornelius and his company at Cæsarea were the first-fruits of the Gentiles. In Rom. viii. 22, 23 *. primitive Christians at large seem to be distinguished as having "the first-fruits of the Spirit," from successive generations, to whom the gospel should be afterwards preached. In each particular church also, the first converts were the first-fruits or elders of that church. The circum-

* Compare in the original this text with Mark xvi. 15.

stance is frequently mentioned to the honour of such persons. "Salute Andronicus and Junia my kinsmen, " and my fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the " apostles, who also were in Christ before me," Rom. xvi. 7. Also, verse 5. "Salute my well-beloved Epenetus, who is the first-fruits of Achaia unto " Christ." And 1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16. "I beseech you, " brethren (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is " the first-fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints) that ye " submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that " worketh together, and laboureth." Mnason, likewise, is out of respect, called "an old disciple," Acts xxi. 16. Particular honour seems also to be given to the original converts to Christianity, of whom it is said, in Rev. xiv. 4, 5. "These were redeemed " from among men, *being* the first-fruits unto God and " to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no " guile: for they are without fault before the throne " of God." In Joshua xxiv. 31. it is said, "Israel " served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the " days of the elders who overlived Joshua, and who " had known all the works of the Lord that he had " done for Israel." Perhaps a similar observation might be made, concerning the elders of the primitive Christian church.

From among these elders, the first ordinary office-bearers appear to have been selected. The appointment of ordinary office-bearers never took place at the formation of a church. The original members of Christian churches were enabled by the gifts of the Holy Spirit to conduct the worship, and to edify one another. These were made overseers or bishops im-

mediately by the Holy Spirit. But this kind of bishops was not to continue; for such of them as upon trial were most approved, were afterwards ordained by apostles or evangelists, to be bishops and deacons. Thus, in Acts xiv. 21—23. it is said of Paul and Barnabas, “ they returned again to Lystra, and Iconium, “ and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, “ exhorting them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, “ that we must through much tribulation enter into “ the kingdom of God. And when they had ordain- “ ed to them elders in every church, and had prayed “ with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on “ whom they believed.” The expression, “ they had “ ordained to them elders in every church,” is elliptical, and supposes the reader to understand what they had ordained those elders to be. The persons ordained were elders before: they were now ordained to be bishops and deacons to the disciples in every church. The passage in the original is, *χειροτονησαντες δε αυτοις κερσ-
βυτηρος κατ’ εκκλησιαν*. Let this be compared with the only other passage in the New Testament in which the word *χειροτονω* occurs, 2 Cor. viii. 19. *χειροτονηθεις
υπο των εκκλησιων συνεδριος ημων*. “ Having been ordained “ or chosen of the churches TO BE OUR FELLOW TRA- “ VELLER.” Suppose this passage expressed actively, it must have run thus, *χειροτονησαντες αυτον αι εκκλησιαι
συνεδριον ημων*. “ The churches having ordained HIM to be OUR FELLOW TRAVELLER.” This is the complete expression. The reason why the purpose is mentioned, for which the brother was ordained, is, that being a particular purpose, it could not have otherwise been known; whereas the general purposes for which apostles ordained elders were so well known, that it

was unnecessary to mention them, and it would have been unnatural to have done it here, where the circumstance is noticed in so slight a manner. Had this not been the case, it is probable, from a comparison of the two passages above, that the reading of the first would have been, *χειροτονησαντες δε αυτους πρεσβυτερους, επισκοπους ειναι και διακονους, καθ' εκκλησιαν.* “And having ordained to them elders, to be bishops and deacons, in every church.” In like manner, Tit. i. 5. *και καταστησης καθα πασαν πρεσβυτερους,* ought to be understood, “and ordain elders to be bishops and deacons in every city †.” In vindication of this opinion, let the following passages, in which the same word for “ordain” is used, be considered. Luke xii. 14. *τις με καταστήσει δικαστην η μεριστην επ' υμας,* “Who hath ordained me to be a judge or a divider over you?” Acts vii. 10. *και καταστήσει αυτον ηγουμενον επ' αιγυπτον,* “and ordained him to be GOVERNOR over Egypt:” verse 27. *τις σε καταστήσει αρχοντα και δικαστην επ' ημας.* “Who ordained thee to be a ruler and a judge over us?” See also verse 35. Heb. vii. 28. *ο νομος γαρ ανθρωπους καθιστησιν αρχιερεις,* “for the law ordaineth men to be HIGH PRIESTS.” See also Rom. v. 19. 2 Pet. i. 8.

Because bishops and deacons were selected from among the elders, they are sometimes spoken of, under that general name. But the term elder is by no means confined to them, nor indeed to office at all. This is manifest from the transitions which we meet with from the elder to the younger, and from one sex to another. Thus 1 Tim. v. 1. “Rebuke not an

† See Macknight on the place, Note 3 and Note 1, on 1 Tim. v. 17.

“elder, but intreat *him* as a father, and the younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers, the younger as sisters, with all purity.” A transition of the very same kind may be seen, 1 Pet. v. 1—5. The word elder, and the word father, appear to have gone through the same succession of applications in the rise and progress of all societies, whether civil or sacred. At first, they had their literal meaning and signified superiority of natural relationship and of age. See Heb. xi. 2. Afterwards by a very obvious figure, they came to be used for those rulers, which were generally chosen at first from among the aged*. But these words have never been the exclusive and appropriate designation of office alone; far less has either of them ever been the most definite term for any particular office. The elders of Israel mentioned in Exod. iii. 16, 18. were very probably, either no office-bearers, or if they were, they were chosen out of those, who were heads of families, and whose age was revered for experience and wisdom. We know from Num. xi. 16—30. that out of such were the elders by office afterwards appointed. In like manner, in the Christian church, the word elder does not primarily signify an office-bearer, but an old disciple. Office-bearing is only its secondary acceptation. Neither does it ever appear, in the New Testament, to have become the proper name of a bishop. Peter and John, not fixed officers of any particular church, call themselves elders. On the other hand, Paul, who was not a whit behind

* This observation illustrates that step in the progress of any society, which is made from patriarchal to instituted government. Adam's Roman Antiquities, *patres.*

the very chiefest of the apostles, never assumes the name of elder *, although his enemies forced him to say much concerning the dignity of his office. In 1 Tim. iii. 1. we read of a man desiring “the office of a bishop;” but never of a man desiring to be an elder. In 1 Tim. iii. 13. we read of a deacon obtaining to himself “a good degree” or step, perhaps towards the office of a bishop, the only other office mentioned in the passage †; but there is no hint of a deacon being ordained an elder. When we read of the apostles ordaining elders, as in Acts xiv. 23. or commanding it to be done, as in Titus i. 5. we find no mention of the ordaining of deacons, as we do when the ordination of a bishop is spoken of, 1 Tim. iii. The probable inference is, that deacons as well as bishops, were included under the name elders. Unless this be admitted, we have no evidence, that, besides the seven at Jerusalem, the apostles, ever ordained deacons in a church at all, and yet Paul desired this to be done by Timothy. When Paul, in the first epistle to Timothy, directs him to ordain bishops and deacons, he never calls the bishops elders, as distinct from deacons, but, in the sequel of the epistle, uses elders, as a term which not only included both these offices, but was limited merely by the term younger. In the disputes between

* The expression in Philemon, 9. “Paul the aged,” signifies “Paul grown old” in the service of the gospel: not his office, but his long continuance in it.—Some think it should be read “Paul an ambassador.” See Benson and Macknight.

† The deacons being then taken from among the elders as well as the bishops were, and of course having gifts, it would naturally follow that the churches would choose those to be bishops, who had previously been approved of as deacons.

Presbyterians and Episcopalians, it is very clearly established by the former, that elder frequently includes the office of bishop. Had there been as much disputing on the subject of deacon, it would have by this time, been as generally understood, that elder frequently includes the office of deacon.

It has been affirmed, that the term elder is appropriated to the office of bishop, in the epistle to Titus, chap. i. because after saying that he was to ordain elders, the reason why they should be of a certain description runs thus; "for a BISHOP must be blameless," &c. This specification of one of the offices, and that the most important, to which elders were to be ordained, was sufficient to enforce the direction given, as to their qualifications, which was all the apostle seems to have had in view by descending to particulars. Concerning the qualifications there mentioned, it is very worthy of remark that those, in verse 6. which refers to the general word elders, are requisite for deacons as well as bishops, compare it with 1 Tim. iii. 12.; whereas when the apostle proceeds to enforce his doctrine from the particular office of the bishop, he adds the other qualifications which are requisite peculiarly for it, in verses 6—9. It is certain that deacons as well as bishops were to be selected from among elders; for if it is said of the one office, "not a new-convert," ("novice" in the common translation); similar language is used respecting the other, "and let these also first be proved," 1 Tim. iii. 6, 10. It seems much more probable, that Titus was left in Crete to do the same things which Timothy was to do at Ephesus, than that the mention of "the bishop"

only in the passage in question, should indicate a restriction of his commission to that particular office, and exclude the supposition that deacons also were there to be ordained.

The comprehensive acceptance of the word elder, even after ordinary office-bearers were supposed to be appointed, is exactly what might have been expected. If, for instance, a hundred men had been converted, the first week that Paul was at Ephesus, it is not to be imagined that they would all have been made bishops and deacons, when these office-bearers came to be ordained by Timothy, although that church had increased to a thousand by the apostle's labouring among them for three years. If all the elders must have been ordained bishops and deacons, Paul could have had no occasion to have so particularly pointed out to Timothy the character of such as he should ordain. It would have been quite sufficient to have required him to confine himself to elders, and to beware of mixing with them "new converts."

The addresses to elders in Acts xx. and 1 Pet. v. seem not to refer exclusively to the office of a bishop, although that being the principal office, is no doubt chiefly in view. In the former, particularly, the apostle seems to refer to the duties of a deacon, verses 34, 35. On both these passages, however, we shall speak more fully hereafter.

The supposition that elders were ordained at Ephesus, before Timothy was stationed there, is altogether unfounded. The directions about his behaviour to elders, are subsequent to those about the choice of bishops and deacons. They are by no means confined to office-bearing elders; and even when they do re-

fer to office, they may be considered as applicable, either to the gifted brethren, who had from the beginning conducted the worship and government of the church, or to the appointed office-bearers, after their appointment should have taken place, and they were actually engaged in discharging the duties of their offices.

Reasons, which have been given, for applying the term elder to a particular office, and for preferring it to terms which are more precise and appropriate, appear to be either puerile or suspicious. Elder it seems occurs frequently; but pastor only once in the New Testament. It is asserted that elder is not a metaphorical term like pastor, and is more descriptive of the qualities and duties of an overseer of a Christian church. Is it necessary to remark, that both these assertions are equally incorrect? It is even said, that the frequent use of the term pastor has a tendency to mislead, by making us forget some of the necessary qualifications for his office. We are sorry to meet with this sentiment where we should not have expected it. Let Mr. Gibbon sneer "at that favourite metaphor of the shepherd and his flock;" but let not Christians lightly esteem a mode of speaking which is confessedly scriptural. Any word indeed may be abused. That the frequent use of the word elder has a tendency to mislead we do not affirm; but some who frequently use it seem to be mistaken as to its meaning. This mistake is particularly evident in the case of those, who contend for a multitude of office-bearers of all kinds in every church; because, in every church, they find, as they say, a plurality of elders. It is of more importance, however, to define terms, than to

calculate the degree of frequency with which they are used. Fix their meaning, and the use of them will never mislead. To avoid ambiguity on the subject before us, we think it right to mention, that, in what follows, by elders shall be meant gifted brethren, or office-bearers in general: when particular offices are meant, each shall receive its proper name. One of the ordinary offices in a church, shall be called the office of a bishop, or of a pastor and teacher (understanding the two latter terms as referring to one person); another shall be called the office of a deacon.

In ordaining elders, the apostles and evangelists had in view, not only the edification of those who were already converted, but the increase of the churches by additions from without, and the benefit of future generations when gifts should have ceased, and the gospel should be propagated and preserved by ordinary means. A sentence from Clemens Romanus, the earliest Christian writer except one, after the apostles, will be found to correspond with the views which we have given in this Section. "They (the apostles) preaching through countries and cities, appointed their first-fruits to be bishops and deacons of those who should believe, having tried them by the Spirit. Neither was this any new thing; for it was written many ages before concerning bishops and deacons; for thus saith the scripture: I will constitute their bishops in righteousness, and their deacons in faith." Epistle to the Corinthians, section 42. Whether Clemens has given a just translation of the passage he quotes (Isaiah lx. 17.) or made a proper application of it, is of no consequence, at present. He shows what he understood by the elders of the primi-

five churches, and to what offices he knew them to be appointed by the apostles:

After attending to the privileges of the elders of the primitive churches, it may be useful to remember, that circumstances are no ground of confidence, no reason for despondency, among the people of God. Particular men are raised up and qualified for particular stations; but the mercy of Jesus has ever been manifested without respect of persons, or of times. Happily for us, his favour was not to be confined to the age of his appearance upon earth, but to be the salvation of sinners to the end of the world. "They shall come, (said he) from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last," Luke xiii. 29, 30.

OF THE NUMBER OF OFFICE-BEARERS IN A
CHURCH.

OUR Saviour appointed twelve apostles. These desired the church at Jerusalem to look out among them seven men to distribute the charitable collections. But on the number of ordinary office-bearers, in all churches, nothing appears to be explicitly said in the holy scriptures. Questions, therefore, on this subject, might be left, we presume, to be variously settled, according to the circumstances, and the common sense of Christian societies.

This inference is by no means universally granted. Many insist, that, in every church, there ought to be at least a plurality, and, though they cannot tell in what proportion, a rising number of office-bearers, according to the increase of the church. Plurality is contended for, we believe, both of bishops and deacons; but about the latter, there is less occasion of dispute.

In examining what light may be derived from scripture on the question which arises out of this difference of opinion, we meet with one express instance of a church having a plurality of bishops. The epistle to the Philippians is addressed "to all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." How many bishops there were in that church? why there were more than one? whether this continued to be always the case? we have no information. But the fact of a plurality, when Paul wrote his epistle, is manifest. Now, if there were reason to think that this fact, solitary as it is, were agreeable to what the apostles ordained in

all churches, we should acknowledge it to be conclusive in the present question. But, if it shall appear that there are other facts in scripture, which speak a contrary language; and that the very rules concerning the choice of office-bearers in churches, imply that the case was generally different as to the number of them from what it was at Philippi; we must hold ourselves obliged to consider the latter case as an exception, a singularity, or at least an uncommon circumstance, owing to causes of a local and temporary nature, which never did exist generally, and never were intended to become permanent and universal.

What were the peculiar causes of the plurality at Philippi, we are not told, and are not called to determine. Philippi was a Roman colony, and a chief town in that part of Macedonia. Paul had there converted several persons to Christianity, who seem to have felt great gratitude to the apostle, and to have distinguished themselves from other churches, by assisting him at different times with money. It seems then a probable conjecture, that the plurality of bishops was owing partly to the number of the disciples, partly to their ability and readiness to support labourers in the gospel, and partly to the very wide sphere of usefulness which their situation presented. The churches formed by the apostles were generally in populous cities, from which, as from central points, the light of the gospel might be diffused around. A number of bishops might sometimes be employed for the sake of members scattered through a wide surrounding region; and, though all in one church for a while, both bishops and people might soon be subdivided into distinct companies, in different quarters, in which new church-

es were thus formed. We state this merely as conjecture, and we take the liberty of doing so, because nothing certain can be said on the subject. In scripture we have not an account of all the churches, which were early planted, but only of a few of the most numerous and successful in propagating the gospel.

In the same style of conjecture we remark, that it is possible, there was for a little time a plurality of bishops in such churches as those at Jerusalem and Antioch. But we have no hint, in scripture, that this was the fact*, and all other history expressly denies it. To say the least, then, the single fact at Philippi stands alone; and, when we compare it with other facts in scripture, we feel warranted to conclude, that the general and permanent state of the churches was different. At the same time, we do not pretend to have divine authority for an absolute rule on either side. Perhaps Christians are here left to their own liberty; and, unless attempts be made to invade that liberty, by obtruding human theory as the institution of God, things will probably find their own level with regard to the number of labourers in a church, as well as in various parts of the economy of civil society.

In examining texts, which are supposed to bear upon this subject, it will be of use to remember, that when the apostles collected a number of converts in any place, they imparted to them some of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, formed them into as much order as circumstances would permit, and then left them to the

* The prophets and teachers at Antioch, which are mentioned, Acts xiii. 1. were not bishops, but evidently gifted brethren.

care of the gifted brethren for a time, till they could return, or evangelists could be sent, to ordain fixed officers among them. In this imperfect state were the churches of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, before Paul and Barnabas returned, and ordained their elders to be (as we suppose) their bishops and deacons. See, and compare, Acts xiii. 1—3. and xiv. 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28. and xv. 1. 2. In this state, indeed, all the churches, to whom Paul wrote epistles, seem to have been, when the epistles were sent to them, except the church at Philippi. In no epistle of Paul, but that to the Philippians, is any ordinary office-bearer mentioned in the inscription, or in any other passage. General words for the work of governing the churches are indeed used; but these, instead of implying the existence of bishops and deacons, seem to indicate the contrary. Thus, the “rulers” or “guides,” spoken of, Heb. xiii. 17. were possibly some of the apostles of the circumcision, to whom Paul gives testimony as Peter does to him; or they were the gifted brethren, the elders, “eye witnesses,” or “first-fruits,” having temporary management; but there is nothing which fixes the apostle’s language to the office of a bishop. In like manner, it is of gifted brethren, that we understand, 1 Thess. v. 12. where Paul gives them no name appropriated to the particular office of a bishop, but describes them in a general way, as “labouring among” the Thessalonians, presiding “over them in the Lord, and admonishing them;” and desires that Christian church “to acknowledge, and esteem them very highly in love, for their work’s sake:” while he seems to turn to the gifted brethren, and to exhort them to “warn

“the unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, and be patient towards all.” In 1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16. the meaning may be considered as certainly the same. “I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas that it is the first-fruits of Achaia (the country in which Corinth was situated) and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints) that ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that worketh together, and laboureth.” At Corinth, no bishops and deacons appear to have been yet ordained. The leaders of faction, there, were “false apostles,” 2 Cor. xi. 13. The factions themselves were named, not by the names of bishops, but of Christ, apostles, and evangelists, or if Paul transferred his remarks in a figure, to himself and Apollos, it was because the factions were led by persons claiming the authority of apostles or evangelists. Paul does not defend faithful bishops in that church, but what himself and his fellow-labourers had preached and done among them. In like manner, in the epistle to the Romans, although the salutations sent to individuals are very numerous, and although notice is taken of the services which several of them had performed for the advancement of the cause of Christ, chap. xvi. not a single bishop is to be found among them all. The presumption is, that no fixed office-bearer of that kind was yet appointed in that church.

If any hint be given, in scripture, about the number of office-bearers in a church, or about the proportion which those who hold one office ought to bear to those who hold another, we may expect to meet with it among the directions concerning the choice of them.

Whether any thing of this kind may be remarked in the epistles to Timothy and Titus, the reader may judge from the following quotations, of which we give a literal translation. " If a man desire the office of a
 " bishop (or a bishopric, as the word is rendered, Acts
 " i. 20.) he desireth a good work. IT BEHOVETH
 " THE BISHOP, then, to be blameless, husband of one
 " wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to
 " hospitality, apt to teach, not given to wine, no strik-
 " er, not greedy of filthy lucre, but patient, not a
 " brawler, not covetous, one that ruleth well his own
 " house, having his children in subjection with all gra-
 " vity; (for IF A MAN KNOW NOT HOW TO RULE
 " HIS OWN HOUSE, HOW SHALL HE TAKE CARE OF
 " THE CHURCH OF GOD?) not a new convert, lest,
 " being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condem-
 " nation of the devil. And IT BEHOVETH HIM to
 " have also a good report of them that are without;
 " lest he fall into reproach, and the snare of the devil.
 " *It behoveth* DEACONS also *to be* grave, not double-
 " tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of fil-
 " thy lucre, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure
 " consciencē. And let THESE also first be proved;
 " then LET THEM ACT AS DEACONS, being blameless.
 " —LET DEACONS BE HUSBANDS of one wife, rul-
 " ing their children, and their own houses well. For
 " THEY THAT HAVE WELL ACTED AS DEACONS, pur-
 " chase to themselves a good degree, and great bold-
 " ness in the faith, which is in Christ Jesus."——
 " For this cause, left I thee in Crete, that thou
 " shouldst set in order the things that are wanting,
 " and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed
 " thee. If any be blameless, husband of one wife,
 " having faithful children, not accused of riot, or un-

“ruly. For IT BEHOVETH THE BISHOP to be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate, holding fast the faithful word as HE hath been taught, that HE may be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort, and to confute the gainsayers,” 1 Tim. iii. 1—10, 12, 13. Titus i. 5—9.

In these passages, the reader will observe, that when Paul is speaking of a bishopric, he uniformly names a person who should be appointed to that “good work,” in the singular number, and with the definite article: whereas, when he speaks of acting as deacons, he uniformly uses the plural number, and omits the definite article. The definite article, which he uses when speaking of the bishop, though no where translated, that we have seen, except in some French versions, ought not to be omitted, because it seems emphatically to mark the contrast between the precise singular in the one case, and the indefinite plural in the other. Had Paul used the singular in speaking of the bishop, merely because each individual bishop must possess the qualifications required; there would have been the same reason for using the singular in speaking of deacons, and we can hardly suppose that he would have changed his style in the same passage. Nor is it the grammatical structure of sentences only, which, in these passages, attracts attention. The bishop must be one, who gives proof of ability to take care of the church of God, by the preservation of paternal authority in his own family. An analogy seems to be expressly intimated between the one relation and the other; and the presumption is, that both are,

with similar propriety, sustained by an individual: but no such analogy is suggested in the case of deacons. Of these passages, then, the fair interpretation seems to be, that Paul directed Timothy and Titus, when they ordained elders in a church, to ordain one man to be what is called **THE BISHOP**, and more than one to be what are called **DEACONS**. A bishop and deacons, there is reason to think, were the office-bearers, which, in obedience to apostolic direction, were originally ordained in the church at Ephesus, and in the churches in every city of the island of Crete.

When the bishop and deacons were first ordained in a primitive church, it would be very unnatural to suppose, that the other elders, "the first-fruits," who had been endowed from the beginning with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, were made to retire from the charge which they had previously taken. No, they would continue to cooperate with the ordained office-bearers till they finished their course with joy, and the churches were bound to honour both alike. If this remark be admitted, it will explain a much-tortured passage, 1 Tim. v. 17. respecting the church at Ephesus. "Let the elders who rule well, be counted worthy of double honour; especially those that labour in word and doctrine." Paul refers to one description of persons, namely elders; and to the good and diligent exercise of the distinct gifts of those who were called "governments," or "directors," and those who were called "prophets." The bishop and deacons being appointed to be chosen from among the elders, and to succeed them in their charge, would come to be included in the apostolic precept. But the reference is, by no means, to them exclusively, either here,

or in any other part of the epistle, where elders are mentioned. In like manner, in Acts xx. 17. where we are told, that Paul sent from Miletus to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church; if the bishop and deacons, were ordained a little before by Timothy, as some think*, they were, no doubt, among them; but the company, as a whole, consisted of the "first-fruits," probably the men in number "about twelve," who are mentioned in the beginning of the xix. chapter, as having been originally disciples of John, but, being baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus, and receiving the Holy Spirit by the laying on of Paul's hands, "spake with tongues and prophesied." In support of this opinion, there is much internal evidence in the apostle's farewell address. He speaks to them, not as office-bearers recently appointed in his absence; but as "first-fruits" of his own ministry in the place where they resided. "YE KNOW FROM THE FIRST DAY THAT I CAME INTO ASIA, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons." See also verses, 19, 20, 25, 26, 27, 31, 34, 35. When he speaks of their charge of the church, he says nothing of a recent, or of a future choice, of the bishop and deacons, or of the laying on of the hands of Timothy. These

* This is the opinion of Benson, Lardner, and Michaelis, but we prefer the chronology of Macknight, who supposes the interview with the elders at Miletus to have taken place in the spring of A. D. 58, and the first epistle to Timothy, not to have been written till the end of A. D. 64, or the beginning of 65. See his preface to 1 Timothy, and his life of Paul. Had Macknight taken our view of the passage above, it would have obviated one of the objections to his opinion as to the date of 1 Timothy.

things would have applied to a few only of the company. He says, therefore, "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which THE HOLY SPIRIT HATH MADE YOU OVERSEERS." Some render the last word "bishops," but that makes no difficulty, for as the word deacon is often used, where the ordinary office which has got that name is not intended, so may the word bishops be used here, without signifying the ordinary office of the bishop. We have before remarked, that their duties seem to have included an oversight in temporal as well as spiritual things, verse 35. At any rate, they were made bishops, not by the instrumentality of men, judging of their qualifications after they had first been proved, but by "the Holy Spirit," who had qualified them miraculously from the very beginning.

It has been asserted, that Rev. chapters ii. and iii. where epistles sent to the seven churches in Asia are especially addressed to THE ANGEL of each, is the only part of scripture which can be adduced, as seeming to say that there ought to be one bishop in one church. The rashness of this assertion has, we trust, already appeared. The attempts which are made to evade the force of the expression, the angel of a church, do, by no means, appear to be successful. It is pleaded, that the language of the book of Revelation is highly figurative. So it is, in general, but not in every instance, and particularly not in this instance. For the expression is introduced, not as a mystery, but as the explanation of a mystery. "The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are THE ANGELS OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES: and the seven

“ candlesticks, which thou sawest, are THE SEVEN
 “ CHURCHES,” Rev. i. 20. Here we have two em-
 blems, and two explanations. The word churches,
 which is the one explanation, is understood generally
 in its literal acceptation. What should prevent our
 understanding the word angel in the same way? Some
 may think, its obscurity. But, if a word be obscure,
 when considered literally, it is not likely to become
 plainer, by supposing it to be a figure. The fact
 seems to be, that however obscure it may be thought
 now, the word angel was, in this passage, as clear an
 explanation originally, as the word church.

But we are conscious of no particular obscurity be-
 longing to the expression, the angel of a church. A
 sufficient illustration of it will be found in the usual
 marginal reference to Mal. ii. 7. “ For the priest’s lips
 “ should keep knowledge, and they should seek the
 “ law at his mouth: for he is the messenger, or an-
 “ gel, of the Lord of hosts.” What! say some, are
 you going to make the bishop a priest? Certainly, as
 far as the Bible does. We do not make the bishop a
 type of Christ, the High Priest of our profession, as
 the priests were under the law. Neither do we deny
 that all Christians are both kings and priests unto
 God. But there is a sense, in which the bishop, and
 all who, agreeably to the will of God, devote their lives
 to the preaching of the gospel, and to the service of
 the churches, are, in scripture, compared to priests
 and Levites; and the comparison is founded on the
 similarity of their situation, as persons devoted to the
 public instruction of the people, and to the conducting
 of the public worship of the church. In remarking
 this similarity, we do nothing towards aggrandizing

human authority; for the priest, under the law, (unless he were inspired, which was not always the case,) had no more right to go beyond the written word, in his teaching or ministry, than the preacher has under the gospel. In support of what we have said, we refer the reader to Psal. cxxxii. 16. Isa. lxvi. 21. Jer. xxxi. 14. 1 Cor. ix. 13, 14. We understand the expression, then, the angel of a church, as intimating, that the bishop is a man sent, or appointed of God to that church. It is a divine promise, "I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding," Jer. iii. 15. We are also directed to "pray the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest," Matth. ix. 38.

It may still be asked, why is the expression to be confined to the bishop, when the above references seem to apply to apostles and evangelists, as well as bishops, and are indeed stated to be applicable to all who, with divine approbation, devote their lives to the preaching of the gospel, or, in any office, to the service of the church? In reply to this question, we remark, that the angel, here, is said to be the angel of a particular church. He is generally allowed to be an individual, and is manifestly considered as holding an office. But if we may not apply this expression to the bishop, to what other individual office-bearer shall we apply it? Shall we apply it to one of the deacons? This has not been done. It seems granted, then, that it must signify a bishop, and the only question is, whether it is merely the name of one bishop of a plurality, or of one bishop in a church? That it is the name of one bishop in a church is probable, because he is allowed

to be addressed as president ; because there is no appearance of the president's office being moveable and temporary, going round a number of colleagues by rotation ; because there is no notice taken of colleagues at all. The angel, then, is neither president by election, nor president by seniority, but president by office. Nothing seems so well calculated to confirm this interpretation as a careful perusal of the seven epistles themselves. In each of them, every thing will be found to be addressed to one angel, or to be divided between the angel and the church.

The plurality of elders, mentioned Acts xx. has been urged as a proof that the angel of the church of Ephesus did not imply only one bishop in that church. What we are to understand by the elders of the church at Ephesus has already been considered. It may be added here, that granting there had even been a plurality of bishops, when Paul took leave of them, this could not prove, that they were not reduced to one, thirty years after. Paul had foretold much calamity to that church, which was to arise partly from defection among the elders themselves. When the epistle was written, the calamity had happened. The angel had left his first love, and is called to remember from whence he had fallen. In circumstances so very different, the number of elders at one time, is no proof of their number at another. But we mention this argument, merely to lessen the confidence with which Acts xx. 17. has been held forth as explaining Rev. ii. 1. There seems to have been only one bishop in each of the seven churches, although some of them appear to have been in a flourishing state. What we believe to have been probably the fact is, that the gifted brethren

had by this time died out, or become superannuated, and that the ordained bishop; in each of the churches, now stood alone *. In all the epistles addressed to them, we have not observed the smallest allusion to the existence of spiritual gifts. The presumption is, they were by this time extinct.

It has been asserted, that the word "angel" denotes plurality in Rev. ii. 23, 24. where it is said that, in a continued address to the angel of the church at Thyatira, the plural number is used. Were this statement allowed to be correct, it would not support the assertion, because the epistles, though addressed to the angels, are expressly said to contain "what the Spirit saith to the churches." But let any one read the passage in its connection, and he will see that the statement is not correct; that the plural number is not used in a continued address to the angel, but in a manifest transition from the address to the angel, to an address to different descriptions of persons among the members of the church; and that this transition continues to the end of the epistle. The address to the angel does not extend further than the middle clause of the 23d verse, where it is concluded by a threatening of such punishment of Jezebel and her disciples, whom the angel had suffered, as should prove an awful example to all the churches. The Holy Spirit then turns directly to the members at large of the church in Thyatira, "And I will give to every one of you" (the plurality not of the word angel, but

* John is thought to have survived all the apostles, and perhaps the far greater part of the original converts to Christianity. The book of the Revelation is thought to have been written, A. D. 95, or 96.

of the word church) "according to your works." He next addresses particularly the sound part of the church. "But unto you, I say, and to the rest in Thyatira;" that is, "to you, I say, even to the remaining members of the church in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak, I will put upon you none other burden, but that which ye have, hold fast till I come." In these two last verses, there is not, as has been alleged, one clause to the plurality of elders, and another to the church members. The whole is expressly declared to be, to the sound part of the members, whether elder or younger, who had not been deceived and corrupted by Jezebel. The epistle concludes with these animating promises, "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations, (and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers,) even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

We are told that the phrase, "angel of the church" seems to be an allusion to the Jewish synagogue, and we are then referred to Mark v. 22. and Acts xiii. 15. to see that there was a plurality of rulers in each synagogue. But was there a plurality of angels in each synagogue? Were the rulers of the synagogue all of the same description? Prideaux, has been quoted, but he distinguishes between the plurality of rulers, and one of them called the angel of the synagogue. The rulers, he says, governed all the affairs of the synagogue, and directed all the duties of religion there to be performed. But the angel alone was the ordinary

conductor of the public worship. If the passage referred to has been read, it is really wonderful that it should be considered as making for the purpose. Prideaux was no believer in a plurality of bishops, and he expressly compares the angel of the synagogue to "the bishop" of a Christian church. After speaking of the rulers, his words are, (Part 1. book 6.) "Next to them (or perchance ONE of them) was THE MINISTER of the synagogue, that officiated in offering up the public prayers to God, for the whole congregation; who, because he was the mouth of the congregation, delegated from them as their representative, messenger, or angel, to speak to God in prayer for them, was therefore in the Hebrew language called *Sheliach Zibbor*, that is, *the angel of the church*. And hence it is, that the bishops of the seven churches of Asia are in the Revelation, by a name borrowed from the synagogue, called the angels of those churches. For as the *Sheliach Zibbor* in the Jewish synagogue was THE PRIME MINISTER to offer up the prayers of the people to God, so also was THE BISHOP THE PRIME MINISTER to offer up the prayers of the people to God in the church of Christ."

If the church had been understood to be formed on the model of the synagogue, and if in the synagogue, there had been a plurality of angels, it would have been extraordinary that the earliest ecclesiastical historians should so uniformly speak of one bishop, and one church, as the instituted proportion. Corruptions, no doubt, early began, but it is difficult to conceive how that should be a corruption, which was at once early and universal.

“ Whether in the apostolic and primitive days (says
 “ King) there were more bishops than one in a church,
 “ at first sight seems difficult to resolve: that the ho-
 “ ly scriptures, and Clemens Romanus, mention many
 “ in one church is certain *: and on the other hand, it
 “ is as certain, that Ignatius, Tertullian, Cyprian, and
 “ the following fathers affirm, That there was, and
 “ ought to be, but one in a church. These contradic-
 “ tions may, at the first view, seem inextricable; but
 “ I hope the following account will reconcile all these
 “ seeming difficulties, and withal, afford us a fair and
 “ easy conception of the difference between the ancient
 “ bishops and presbyters.

“ I shall then lay down as sure, that there was but
 “ one supreme bishop in a place, that was the *ὁ Ἐπισκο-
 “ πος*, † the bishop, by way of eminency and propriety.
 “ The proper pastor and minister of his parish, to
 “ whose care and trust the souls of that church or pa-

* The author's only reference here is to Clemens' epistle to
 the Corinthians, Sect. 2. We particularly beg the reader to
 observe, that the passage makes no mention of many bishops,
 but uses one of the general terms which were commonly appli-
 ed in the apostolic epistles to the elders, including under that
 name, apostles and gifted brethren, who took charge, originally,
 of the primitive churches, and most probably continued along
 with the bishop and deacons in the church at Corinth, at the
 time when Clemens was himself the bishop of the church at
 Rome, which, according to King, was as early as A. D. 70. The
 words of the quotation are *ὑποτασσόμενοι τοῖς ἡγουμένοις ὑμῶν*,
 “ Being subject to your GUIDES.” It is the very word used by
 Paul, Heb. xiii. 7, 17. The reader will perhaps recollect a re-
 mark on it in this Section, page 77.

† Let the reader remark the consequence of the apostle's hav-
 ing used the definite article in 1 Tim iii. 2. and Tit. i. 7.

“ rish, over which he presided, were principally, and
 “ more immediately committed. So saith Cyprian †,
 “ ‘There is but one bishop in a church at a time.’
 “ And so Cornelius objects to Novatian §, ‘That he
 “ did not remember, that there ought to be but one
 “ bishop in a church.’ And throughout the whole
 “ epistles of Ignatius, and the generality of writers
 “ succeeding him, we find but one single bishop in a
 “ church, whose quotations to which purpose, would
 “ be fruitless to recite here, since the constant prac-
 “ tice of the universal church confirms it, and a great
 “ part of the following discourse will clearly illustrate
 “ it.

“ Only it may not be impertinent to remark this by
 “ the way, that by the Διαδοχοι, or succession of bi-
 “ shops, from those bishops who were ordained by the
 “ apostles, the orthodox were wont to prove the suc-
 “ cession of their faith *, and the novelty of that of the
 “ heretics †. ‘Let them demonstrate the original of
 “ their churches,’ as Tertullian challenges the Mar-

† Unus in ecclesia ad tempus sacerdos. Epist. 55. § 6. p. 138.

§ Ὁμοῦ ἡπίστατον ἕνα ἐπισκοπον δεῖν εἶναι ἐν καθολικῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ. *Ad Fabium Antioch. apud Euseb. lib. 6. c. 43. p. 244.*

* Whether this was a good way of proving orthodoxy or not, is of no consequence to the point in hand.

† “ Edant origines ecclesiarum suarum, evolvant ordinem e-
 “ piscoporū suorum, ita per successiones ab initio decurrentem,
 “ ut primus ille episcopus aliquem ex apostolis vel apostolicis vi-
 “ ris, qui tamen cum apostolis perseveraverit, habuerit autorem
 “ et antecessorem. Hoc enim modo ecclesiæ apostolicæ census
 “ suos deferunt, sicut Smyrnæorum ecclesia habens Polycarpum
 “ ab Johanne conlocatum refert, sicut Romanorum Clementem
 “ a Petro ordinatum proinde utique exhibent, quos ab apostolis

“ cionites, and other heretics: ‘ Let them turn over the
 “ orders of their bishops, and see whether they have
 “ had a succession of bishops from any one who was con-
 “ stituted by the apostles, or apostolic men: Thus the
 “ truly apostolic churches have, as the church of Smyr-
 “ na has Polycarp there placed by John, and the church
 “ of Rome, Clement, ordained by Peter; and other
 “ churches can tell, who were ordained bishops over
 “ them by the apostles, and who have been their suc-
 “ cessors to this very day.’ So also says Irenæus *;
 “ ‘ We challenge the heretics to that tradition, which
 “ was handed down from the apostles by the succession
 “ of bishops.’

“ And in the next chapter of the same book, the said
 “ father gives us a catalogue of the bishops of Rome
 “ till his days, by whom the true faith was successive-
 “ ly transmitted down from the apostles; in which ca-
 “ talogue we find but one bishop at a time, and as he
 “ died, so another single person succeeded him in the
 “ charge of that flock or parish.

“ So that this consideration evidences also, that
 “ there was but one bishop strictly so called, in a church
 “ at a time, who was related to his flock †, *as a pastor*
 “ *to his sheep, and a parent to his children.* The titles
 “ of this supreme church officer are most of them rec-

“ in episcopatum constitutos, apostolici seminis traduces habeant.
De Præscript. advers. Hæret. p. 78.

* “ Eam traditionem quæ est ab apostolis, quæ per successi-
 “ ones presbyterorum in ecclesiis custoditur, provocamus eos.”
Lib. 3. c. 2. p. 170.

† “ A pastore oves, et filios a parente separare.” *Cypr. Epist.*
 38. § 1. p. 90.

“koned up in one place by *Cyprian*, which are †, *bishop, president, pastor, governor, superintendent, and priest.* “And this is he, which in the Revelations is called the *angel of his church*, as Origen thinks †, which appellations denote both his authority and office, his power and duty.” *Enquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity, and Worship of the Primitive Church. By an Impartial Hand. Chap. 1. § 5.*

Another scripture brought forward to prove that a plurality of bishops should be in every church, is 1 Pet. v. 1. “The elders which are among you, I exhort—feed the flock of God.” Without forgetting what has been said about primitive elders, which entirely destroys the force of this kind of reasoning, let us try the argument from this passage as it is commonly urged. What is meant, in the passage, by these words, “among you?” We learn from chap. i. 1. that it means, “among you, strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” The argument then amounts to this, that if a man shall use the plural number, when he addresses the elders which are among the Christians scattered throughout England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, we are to infer from his words, that he understands there are more than one in every church. Ay! but is not Peter, it may be said, speaking of each particular church in those countries, and exhorting a plurality of elders in each to “feed the flock of God which is among them,” that is, the particular

† “Episcopus, præpositus, pastor, gubernator, antistes, sacerdos” *Epist. 69. § 5. p. 208.*

† Πραξῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν ἀγγελοῦ λέγεσθαι παρὰ τῷ Ἰωάννῃ ἐν τῇ Ἀποκαλύψει *De Orat. § 35. p. 31.*

church, to which they, the plurality, happen to belong? Let us read the passage. “Elders which are among you I exhort, who am the fellow-elder (*of such*), and witness of the sufferings of Christ, the partaker also of the glory that is about to be revealed. Feed the flock of God which is among you, discharging the duties of oversight (acting as bishops) not by constraint, but willingly, neither for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, neither as domineering over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive the incorruptible crown of the glory, (the glory to be revealed,” see verse 1st.) Likewise, ye younger, submit to elders, and all being subject to one another, be clothed with humility.” In this passage, there seems to be nothing like ordained bishops and deacons. Peter is addressing elder Christians, as opposed to younger Christians; elders of whom he was “the fellow-elder.” Neither does there seem any thing like a settled church, far less a number of churches. The letter is addressed not to the churches of Pontus, &c. as Paul’s letter is “to the churches of Galatia;” but to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, &c. Those strangers formed, indeed, “the flock of God” in those parts of the world, but it was a flock in a state of wide dispersion. Having tasted that the Lord is gracious, and coming to him, in the habitual exercises of the life of faith, they had a spiritual union, and maintained a spiritual fellowship with God and with one another. They had, no doubt, occasional intercourse in person, and occasional meetings, probably partial and private. These would give some opportunity for elders, endowed with gifts, to

feed and inspect the flock, (see chap. iv. 10, 11.); and for all the members to discharge relative duties to one another. With exhortations, accordingly, on such topics as these the epistle is occupied. But in vain shall we seek here for information about the constitution or government of a church. No allusion is made to stated meetings, or to the observance of ordinances, far less to the ordination of elders. The scattered disciples are exhorted as strangers and pilgrims to behave unblameably among the Gentiles; as persecuted persons to sanctify the Lord God in their hearts; as persons, with whom judgment had begun at the house of God, not to think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try them, to commit the keeping of their souls to God in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator, and to humble themselves under his mighty hand, believing that he would exalt them in due time. And Peter concludes with a prayer, calculated to inspire the hope of better days even in this world, when they should yet enjoy the blessings of church order. "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered awhile, restore, establish, strengthen, settle you."

We endeavoured, in the preceding section, to show that the expressions "ordained elders in every church," and "ordain elders in every city," which occur, Acts xiv. 23. and Tit. i. 5. signify ordaining elders to be bishops and deacons. It may be proper to remark now, that the expression "ordaining them in every church, or in every city," determines nothing respecting their number. If, in an account of the church of Scotland, the following words should occur, "the presbytery

“ordains ministers in every church, within their bounds,” the expression would be perfectly similar to those under consideration, yet it would not enable us to discover whether there was one collegiate charge in the whole district.

The only other passage, which we remember to have seen urged for a plurality of bishops in a church, is 1 Tim. iv. 14. “neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.” This presbytery, it is said, evidently means the eldership of a particular church. That a particular church should have an eldership, consisting of the bishop and deacons, is freely admitted, and has been above explained. Our opinion, therefore, requires no further remark on this passage. It may be stated, however, that the presbytery or eldership, here spoken of, is not said to belong to one particular church. It was most likely the company of elders, who happened to be present, and to join with Paul, when he laid hands on Timothy. The only further light which can be obtained on the subject, is from the history of Paul’s taking him for a fellow-labourer. Now we learn, Acts xvi. 1—4. that the disciple Timothy, then at Lystra, “was well reported of by the brethren at LYSTRA AND ICONI-“UM,” which is much the same as if we should say, by the brethren at Edinburgh and Glasgow, for the places were about fifty miles distant. Is there, then, any thing unscriptural, or improbable in the conjecture (and we can pretend to no more than conjecture here on either side) that as Timothy was recommended by the brethren of two churches, so when Paul laid his hands on him, he was joined by a company of the

elders of those two churches? In scripture we find no jealousy of the cooperation of churches on such occasions, and no plan for making office-bearers prisoners at large within their own churches. Here too seems to be an instance of elders joining in the ordination of an evangelist. We see nothing in scripture to prevent us from being happy to attend a meeting of the eldership, or company of elders, belonging to the churches, for example, of Edinburgh, and Glasgow, and a dozen places more, for the purpose of ordaining either a bishop or a missionary.

Those who think that a very slight attention to the scriptures mentioned above, is sufficient for establishing their views, may feel that we have been rather tedious in our remarks; but it is often safe to give a more thorough attention to that which is offered as proof from scripture, than they deem it necessary to recommend. The result of our investigation is this, that the scriptures give no express direction respecting the number of office-bearers in a church; that the church at Philippi had a plurality of both bishops and deacons; that the rules given to Timothy and Titus seem to suppose the office-bearers of a church to consist of "the bishop and deacons," implying singularity as to the former, and plurality as to the latter; that, from the faithfulness of the two evangelists, it may be presumed, that the ordained office-bearers in the church at Ephesus, and in all the churches in the island of Crete, originally were for each church "the bishop and deacons;" and that there seems to have been only one bishop in each of the seven churches in Asia. The truth probably is, that if the meaning of the word elders had not been

mistaken, the necessity of a plurality of bishops in every church would never have been imagined.

We have no hesitation in admitting that churches may have more than one bishop, if the one bishop and the members be all cordially agreed upon the measure, and if it seem to be called for by some actual exigency, and not by the mere love of a theory. But we have found no evidence, that such a plan is either necessary, or generally desirable. To censure churches because they have not a plurality of bishops, is altogether unwarrantable. Christians will do well to repress with firmness the attempts of those, who thus endeavour to abridge their liberty. If we wish to give implicit obedience to the word of God, we must be as conscientious in observing where we are free, as where we are bound. Corruptions in the church have, in all ages, been most boldly and successfully introduced, when they assumed the form of addition to the law of God. To propose the neglect of a duty, or the commission of a sin, is a glaring, and therefore a hazardous attempt. But to discover new duties, and new sins, is a most popular thing. It is delightful to the discoverer himself, who is apt to mistake every thing that is new to him for an original curiosity, and a proof of the success of his researches. It has also a plausible appearance to others. They previously esteem the discoverer, and probably on very good grounds. They are now astonished at his superior discernment. They are delighted with his zeal for reformation, with his disinterestedness, with his boldness. They perhaps have nothing to say against his reasoning, or they made objections at first, which,

it was easily shown, were ill-founded; therefore they think nothing can be said against it. Quotations from scripture are liberally poured forth, a very slight attention to which is declared to be sufficient, in so plain a case. Why then should they hesitate? To deny the obligation of so obvious a duty would be to decline a ready and complete obedience to divine authority. That it has seldom been acknowledged, is all in its favour. Few can say, that they have seen it attended with any disadvantage, or that it may not be attended with all the advantages which a sanguine imagination can suggest. Who knows, but nine-tenths of the corruptions of the Christian church may be owing to the want of this single glorious improvement? And why should we be kept from it, by the contrary opinion of others, however numerous and respectable, when we know what a hold custom, prejudice, fear, and self-interest, have, of the minds of men, especially if they have been early imbued with any suspicious tincture of human learning.

Besides what is offered as scripture proof, a great deal has been said on the advantages, of a plurality of bishops in every church. It has been argued, indeed, that the duties of a bishop are absolutely impracticable while he stands alone. We have a few remarks to make, which have occurred to us, on the other side. Were it at all evident, that a plurality of bishops in every church, is required by the word of God, or can even be fairly inferred from it, most certainly it would be proper to adopt the plan, whatever might be the consequences. Being persuaded, however, that the very contrary is the fact, we must be indulged in a little

freedom with the strong language, which has been used on the subject.

First, then, the principle, that it is unlawful for churches to have only one bishop, seems to be attended with several essential difficulties. If Christians, in choosing bishops, may deliberate on the subject of number at all, the singular belongs to number as well as the plural. The number, it is said, should increase as the church increases, ought it not also to decrease as the church decreases? for this also is a very possible case. May the number of bishops decrease to two, and not to one? It has been said, that two Christians make a church: Is there any reason to prevent this church from having a bishop? Is there any reason to require it to have two bishops? If an additional member be added, shall this addition be a reason to introduce a plurality of bishops. If it be a reason for this, and if the increase of bishops must bear some proportion to the increase of the church, a question occurs, which may be stated thus: If one member requires the superintendence of two bishops, when the church consists of three, how many will he require, when the church consists of a hundred? It is often difficult for a learner to determine, whether a question in the rule of three, should be solved by the direct or the inverse rule: by which of these ways shall this question be solved? On the other hand, if a very small number of members be an objection to having bishops at all, at what degree of the scale of increase may they be introduced? If the increase of a church be generally by units, why should it be destitute of the office of bishops, till they can be introduced by pairs? We presume, that these questions, trifling and captious as

they may seem, must all receive a grave and satisfactory answer, otherwise it must be granted, that it is not unlawful for a church to choose one bishop, nor for one bishop to take the oversight of a church.

Secondly, Churches will more easily agree in the choice of one bishop, than of many. The choice of a bishop is the most critical duty in which a church can engage. How often has it occasioned misunderstandings in the most harmonious churches, and even complete separation! Surely then, all unnecessary difficulties should be avoided in the business, and perhaps churches should consider it as a great mercy, when such a business seldom occurs. But to insist on a plurality of bishops, and an increase of that plurality as a church may increase, must require a very frequent choosing of bishops. With greater frequency the duty will also have greater difficulty. It will, in these circumstances, be necessary to agree, not only on the qualifications of each, but on the number proposed, and on the willingness and fitness of the individuals to act together; and while we have, in scripture, a rule for the first particular, we are left entirely in the dark as to the others. That one bishop should be chosen, is a definite proposal, but, if more than one, all is uncertainty. How many more? In what proportion to the rest of the church? Shall it be one in ten?—in twenty?—in fifty?—in a hundred? No man can tell. No church, therefore, can rationally hope to agree; unless indeed they consider the business not as a bounden duty, but as a voluntary measure of mere lawful expediency, to be determined by the prevailing wish, when others are happily disposed to gratify their brethren.

Thirdly, Churches ought to beware of choosing more than one bishop, unless they be well able to support them. Besides personal, family, and public expenses, Christians have many calls made upon them for money, by the necessities of the poor, the measures pursued for the propagation of the gospel, and the instituted service of a church. They ought, therefore, to take care, not to embarrass themselves, by a disproportionate attention to one engagement, while they are equally bound to attend to others. The matter of expense is, indeed, made very easy, in general, by those who plead for a band of bishops. Pay some, say they, and let the rest work for themselves. You are not obliged to support any of them wholly, unless they need it. In many cases, it is their duty to take nothing at all.—Certainly it is the duty of all Christians to be devoted, with all they are, and have, to the service of God, whether they have any remuneration from men or not. It is especially the duty of bishops to be disinterested, and to follow the example of an apostle, in declining their right to honourable maintenance, when they have reason to think it would interfere with the success of the gospel. But to decline a right, is a man's own voluntary deed. The duty of a society can never depend on the voluntary determination of a few of its members. Those, over whom a man's right extends, have no title to put him into such a situation, that either he must decline his right, or be guilty of oppression. A bishop should decline his right, when a church has greater expense to bear than it is well able; and this may happen, in the course of providence, without the fault of any. But a church would be much to blame, if it should wilfully bring a burden-

some expense on itself. Now, this is exactly what it does, when it chooses more bishops than it is well able to support. Whatever arrangements may be proposed at first, for making the expense moderate, there is no ground to believe that they will be permanent. The same reason, which dictates to one to give himself wholly to his pastoral work, must apply also to the rest, and especially to those of them (supposed in the scheme to be the greatest number) who may be inferior to their colleagues in talents or acquirements. None of them, indeed, can tell before hand, how completely their time may be absorbed by the labours of their ministry. When chosen, some of them may be rich, but they may afterwards become poor, or their families may increase, and thus they also may require support. Evil may also arise from the dependence of some, and the independence of others. This may be particularly apprehended in pursuance of a scheme, which must often be impracticable, without such a diversity of circumstances. On all these accounts, it seems to be manifest, that whether a church shall actually support all their bishops or not; it has no right to choose a number of men to that office, unless it be well able to support them. The choice of one, indeed, is in any case vindicated by acknowledged duty. When means are scanty, individuals may certainly volunteer their services; and other churches should, if necessary, assist, as in any other hardship of poverty. But for the scheme of a plurality, these claims do not appear to exist. If a church were even able to bear the expense for the present, prudence should be consulted respecting futurity. To choose a number of bishops, without any sufficient reason, when

the members may not be able to support them, and must thereby expose their labourers to distress, or become chargeable to other churches, seems to be an impropriety of the very same kind, on the part of a church, as when an individual heedlessly incurs an expense above his income.—Besides, pecuniary matters between a bishop and a church are of so delicate a nature, that unless maintenance be cheerfully and easily given, as a mark of honour, which is due to every one in the same situation, a bishop must feel it disagreeable to receive any thing at all. The consequence accordingly is, that wherever churches are compelled, by their system, to choose a plurality of bishops, without stopping to consider how they are to support them, the bishops, aware of the situation, generally decline their right. Perhaps, indeed, the exercise of it is not always seriously proposed to them. At any rate, the fact is, that they usually prefer supporting themselves, by attending to other business. This cannot but be a loss to the church, even if those bishops have enjoyed every previous advantage of education. How much more, when this is not the case! Churches in this situation, may think that they are amply supplied with the means of edification, because they have a plurality of bishops; but most likely, the time, which can be spared for their service, by the whole plurality, does not, when put together, amount to so much as the whole devoted life of an individual, who might receive adequate support, without burdening any. And who does not know, that the spare hours of men of business, were they even more in the aggregate than we have now supposed, can hardly be occupied so advantageously, in pastoral duties, as the time of the

man, who has no other object? By all means, let the bishop work, if necessary: but let no scheme be adopted, which shall create a wilful necessity.

On the subject of the maintenance of bishops, we shall, in passing, make two remarks. The first is, that since scripture requires the bishop to be maintained, on that principle of common equity, "the labourer is worthy of his hire;" the wages of labour should be allowed to find their level in the church, in the very same way as in the world. To expect the hire of which one is declared to be worthy, and to be an hireling, are very different things. Speaking of the provision made in the law, for the sake of securing a liberal supply of temporal things to those who preach the gospel, Paul says it was written, "that he that ploweth, should plow IN HOPE; and that he that thresheth in hope, should be PARTAKER OF HIS HOPE," 1 Cor. 9, 10. We conceive, then, that it is not sinful conformity to the world, but dutiful conformity to the Bible, to recommend to the Christian man of speculation, to study the question of a minister's stipend, by the help of such a book as Smith's Wealth of Nations; and to the Christian tradesman to decide on that question practically, as he does on the prices, which he finds it necessary to demand from his customers for the articles of his manufacture.

The second remark which we shall make, is, that, after examining all that is said on the subject in scripture, we have not found a single check given to Christian liberality. On the contrary, the uniform strain of the word of God is, to encourage and commend it, see 1 Cor. ix. 7—14. 1 Tim. v. 17, 18. Phil. iv. 15—19. From this circumstance, we are led to conclude, that

no scheme, which is calculated to excite jealousy and grudging; which calls on churches to lessen their exertions for the support of the bishop, or to increase the number of bishops, without a proportionable increase of the means of supporting them; which proposes to place bishops in such circumstances, that working shall not be the occasional choice of the disinterested labourer, but the constant and necessary condition of his life; whatever pretexts be urged to render it plausible, we conclude, that no such scheme has received any countenance from the Spirit of God. We add, that when those, who are not bishops themselves, speculate on the support of bishops, they will surely agree with us, in the propriety of remembering the much-admired words of our Saviour, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets," Matth. vii. 12.

Fourthly, Churches cannot so easily deal with a bishop who falls into sin, when he is one of many, as when he holds his office alone. The fall of a bishop into sin, must, in all circumstances, be very distressing to a church. But there never was an assertion more completely contradicted by facts, than that which maintains, that a single bishop is less within reach of the discipline of a church, than one who has a number of colleagues. In this latter case, the tendency of things has ever been, that the colleagues have been inclined to screen one another, and the discipline has been settled among themselves. Some may think that we wish to exalt the power of bishops. In fact, however, we are pleading for the most effectual check on it. It is truly wonderful how invariably extremes meet.

A scheme for appointing a number of bishops in every church, is recommended, under the notion that they will the more faithfully exercise discipline over one another, or at least enable the church to do so, when it is notorious, that the most glaring errors and immoralities among office-bearers, such as those which disgraced the church of Rome, and turned it from an apostolic into an antichristian assembly, were fostered by an unnecessary increase of the number of those office-bearers. An unbounded zeal prevailed for a plurality of elders, till the elders became a consistory; the consistory became a conclave; and the conclave became an inquisition—for every body—except themselves.

Fifthly, If due pains are taken to fit men for the ministry, churches will have less difficulty in obtaining a succession of labourers, where there is usually one bishop, than where there are many. Where there are many, the influence of the official band may amount to patronage, if they be united: may cause dissolution, if they be at variance. Bodies of this kind have always been apt to interfere unduly in elections. Whereas, where there is usually but one bishop, the matter may be either deliberately provided for, by the choice of a helper and successor; or settled, in case of a vacancy, as when the first bishop was chosen. Here too, there will be no difficulty about the question, who shall preside? which might occasion much dissension among a number of perhaps equal standing, whom it might be impossible to satisfy by the rule of seniority, of rotation, or of periodical election.

Sixthly, When churches have usually but one bishop

each, they can all be supplied more easily with able workmen, and more labourers can be sent forth as missionaries through the world. Why tempt Christians to choose any body, rather than be without a plurality? Or why monopolise a plurality, and coop them up in one insulated church, when they might serve as many churches as there are individuals in the plurality; or might all but one, be sent through districts and kingdoms, which are completely destitute, and in some of which Christ has not yet been named. Let labourers accumulate where they have no call to disperse—but is this the case with us?

Seventhly, The duty of the bishop, when he stands alone, is more simple and easy, than when he has to act with colleagues. In the former case, the bishop has to deal with the people: in the latter, he has to deal with bishops and the people. Coalition is difficult in any kind of executive government. Would it help or hamper the general of an army, to receive half a dozen associates in the chief command? How seldom can even two men be found so perfectly congenial, as to be able to act together with cordiality and confidence, in so delicate a connection as that of collegiate bishops! Congeniality would not be a universal case, although that connection were, like marriage, to be formed by the mutual choice of the colleagues themselves. How rare, then, must it be, when the connection so much depends on the choice of others! If these remarks be just, respecting a single pair, much more surely respecting an unlimited plurality. Nor is it merely among themselves, that cordiality is difficult. There is still greater difficulty in preserving it among the people. Even when the bishops may

be true yoke-fellows, the people are in great danger of making unpleasant comparisons, and of getting into parties. This is no attempt to sound a false alarm. Never were two fellow-labourers of God more united, than those ministers by whom the disciples at Corinth believed; (and, for aught we know, the teachers of whom Paul figuratively spake under their names, were sufficiently cordial with each other;) yet, among them, one said, "I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos." The same wisdom and goodness, then, which sent forth disciples two and two, when they travelled through the world to propagate the gospel, when the company of a friend must have been such a comfort, and they were not statedly connected with any other society, appear in placing them singly as overseers in particular churches. It may, in general, be said with perfect safety, Tell us the number of colleagues in any church, and we shall tell you the number of parties, more or less discernible, in the same church.

Except as to the rotation of public duties, how seldom can a bishop, who has got a colleague, lay his hand upon his heart, and say, this man relieves me of the half of my burden. The private duties of oversight are so necessarily the work of one, that where a plurality of bishops exists, they generally divide the people into separate portions, to get rid of the plurality, that each may attend to his own division. When this is not done, much confusion and inconvenience are likely to ensue.

Increasing the number of labourers, seems to be thought both augmenting the quantity, and improving the quality of the labour. Men do not think thus in ordinary cases. Is a plurality of teachers ce-

sential to the improvement of a school? Would it aid a student in any science, to attend lectures on it by half a dozen professors, during the same term? The one bishop will be likely to follow some plan in preaching, and the hearer will profit by a method with which he gets familiar; but he will be rather disturbed than edified by the diversity of the many. It is generally allowed by judicious Christians, that a stated ministry is preferable to a constant succession of preachers. We presume that the stated ministry of one, is, on the same principle, preferable to that of a number. In private labours, each, in a multitude of bishops, may be thought to have more leisure for his duty, in proportion to the number of his colleagues, and may therefore be expected to do it with greater care and punctuality; but unless they get rid of the plurality as mentioned above, the probability is, that unavoidable confusion will more than counterbalance this supposed advantage. One thinks a duty will be done by his brother, while his brother thinks it will be done by him; and this leaving of duty to one another, with all the bad consequences of unseasonableness, irregularity, and total neglect, are likely to increase, in proportion to the increase of their number. It will perhaps be said, these evils are indeed likely to arise in a worldly society, but the question here respects those who are born again: it respects churches, scriptural churches.—In those who are born again, there is, while in this world, an old, as well as a new man. What are churches? what are scriptural churches? but assemblies of sinful creatures, who have been taught to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” While we

use this prayer, there can be no impropriety in "abstaining from all appearance of evil."

These remarks are strengthened a thousand fold, by the proposal of collecting a plurality of bishops, of various abilities, of different degrees of information, and of different habits of life. It seems equally agreeable to scripture and to common sense, that those, who are to act together on the same footing in any employment, should be, in all respects, as similar as possible. But here it is absolutely part of the plan, that the learned, and the unlearned; the eloquent, and the slow of speech; some receiving support, some not; every conceivable diversity of temper, character, and circumstance, shall be mingled. What Swift somewhere says, no doubt in ridicule, is in this plan held forth as a rational expectation; "They will all meet and *jumble* together into a perfect harmony." We shall as soon believe the Epicurean theory of the formation of the world. If, instead of seeking unanimity, the object were to ensure endless embarrassment and vexatious opposition, as the greatest blessings which either bishops or people should desire, could a more appropriate principle be contrived for the purpose?

The fellowship of Christians as a church, has occasioned many inquiries respecting church-government. But if there must be a fellowship of bishops within a church, it is high time for us to enter on a new field of inquiry, at least as necessary as the other, namely, bishop-government. The men must not be left in a state of equilibrium; neither must we turn them out to labour at random. Where there is plurality, were it but of husband and wife, there must be subordination. Now, in scripture, the bishop has many instruc-

tions for his individual conduct towards the people, but where are the regulations for the college of bishops?

It is said, that a bishop alone, may more easily fall into a state of backsliding, than where there is a plurality. The scripture preservative of bishops from backsliding seems to be the fellowship common to all the members of a church. No intimation is given, that a bishop must have a fellowship of bishops. A bishop is not alone when he is in the midst of the brethren; and the work he is called to, not the circumstance of having, or not having, companions in it, will, through the blessing of God, lead him to take heed to himself, and to the doctrine, that he may both save himself, and them that hear him.—Again, it is said, that a bishop alone is in great danger of either being lifted up with pride, or sinking under heavy trials, and important duties, which he is unable to overtake. The scripture preventive of pride in bishops is, not grouping them together, but directing that the bishop shall not be “a new convert.” As to heavy trials, they may arise from associates, as well as from the circumstances of a situation which a man occupies alone; but God is faithful, and will not, in any situation, suffer us to be tried above that we are able. As to the duties of a bishop, we intend to speak more fully of some of them afterwards. They require diligence; and in many things we all offend, and come short of the glory of God; but “let us work while it is day.” “Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find doing his will.” The race set before us does not contain duties, which it is impossible for us to overtake. We are not at liberty to divide with another.

er the task which infinite wisdom hath assigned to ourselves; far less to subdivide it, at will, again and again. Such unwarranted attempts may increase our burden, but cannot lessen it.—It is surprising to find, that Eccles. iv. 9, 10. is considered as levelled against the condition of a solitary bishop. Let the passage read from the beginning of the 7th, to the end of the 12th verse, and, we believe, the reader will see, that it is levelled against the condition of a worldly-minded solitary bachelor.—Bishops, it is said, should be provided of all the diversity of conditions which can be found in a church. The rich must be taught by the rich; the poor by the poor; the learned by the learned; the illiterate by the illiterate; masters by masters; servants by servants; and, by the same rule, we should suppose, children by children. If these things be right, how deficient are the directions given by Paul to Timothy and Titus, on the subject of bishops!

It may be thought, perhaps, to be an unsocial temper, which leads us so strenuously to resist the proposal, of having in all the churches fellow-labourers. But the comfort of voluntary friendship is one thing: the delicacy of systematic official connection is another. Sympathy, advice, encouragement, and admonition, may be obtained by the bishop among his people, who are directed in scripture to say to him, “Take heed to thy ministry, which thou hast received of the Lord, that thou fulfil it.” Frequent opportunities may also be had of consulting neighbouring brethren in the same office. No scripture forbids this, and when men are not themselves immediately concerned, they are generally in the most favourable situation for

aiding others by their judgment.—A church has no reason to be afraid of committing any charge, however important, into the hands of one man, when the word of God gives a warrant to do so: neither should any man be afraid to bear the weight of it, when God approves his “desiring the good work.” Of the duties of a bishop, as well as of an apostle, it may indeed be said, “Who is sufficient for these things?” But if a thousand were joined in attempting them, instead of one, they would all find it as necessary as ever to confess their insufficiency.

Eighthly, When a church becomes too large for one bishop, it may often be more advisable to form a new church with the new bishop, than to remain together with the bishops as a plurality. An amicable separation on such an occasion as this, seems a most natural step in the progress of the gospel, and indeed the best way to regulate the multiplication of churches in the same neighbourhood. The effect of it generally is, an increase both of hearers, and of church members. The bishops are more useful, and the churches less unwieldy apart than together; and there is no reason why a friendly intercourse may not be maintained. It is not easy to say, indeed, how large a church may be both gathered and superintended by one bishop. When a church, however, becomes so numerous, as to wish for separation, merely to avoid the inconveniences of number, or to open for some able workman a new sphere of usefulness, without weakening the hands of him who occupies the old one; it is a circumstance which calls for joy and gratitude, which we know by experience to be really beneficial, and which we should be happy to meet with again and

again. Shall we not welcome the accomplishment of such predictions as these? Is. xlix. 18—20. “Lift up
 “ thine eyes round about, and behold: all these ga-
 “ ther themselves together, *and* come to thee. *As* I
 “ live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee
 “ with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them
 “ *on thee* as a bride *doth*. For thy waste and thy de-
 “ solate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall
 “ even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants,
 “ and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away.
 “ The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast
 “ lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The
 “ place is too strait for me: give place to me that I
 “ may dwell.”—If any be disposed to ridicule the
 reasons which we have given, for the formation of
 new churches in the same neighbourhood, we beg them
 to compare those reasons with the scheme, which sup-
 poses it necessary, that in whatever is considered as
 one place, be it large or small, there should be but one
 church. This is the only other principle of regulat-
 ing the distinction of churches, with which we are
 acquainted, and grievous, indeed, are the difficulties
 which attend it. For instance, in a circuit of ten
 miles, there may be ten churches, if there be as many
 scattered towns or villages within its boundary. But
 if that circuit shall happen to be covered by half a
 million of people, as in London, there must be but one
 church, because they dwell in what is called one
 place.

Ninthly, After all the strong language which has
 been used, about the impropriety and even impossibili-
 ty of one man discharging the duties of a bishop to a
 whole church, some of those who use it most loudly,

are in the habit of doing what they condemn. For years, have they been acting alone as bishops in churches. From this fact, it seems to be a fair inference, that the impossibility which they speak of, must be entirely of a theoretical nature. An expedient, indeed, is commonly provided for saving the theory. The man is willing to be the bishop in reality, but not in name. Wherever he goes, indeed, he proposes doing every thing which the bishop should do, although his labours may be only the supply of the passing day. This is thought to be scriptural; to be useful for enabling the church to get the better of prejudice, and for leading them on to the next step of improvement, which consists in all acting as bishops together, when they can find opportunity. But if a church shall propose to appoint this man to the office which he is discharging; to recommend him to the grace of God for the work which he is performing; to call him by the name which scripture uses to denominate his character and actual situation; presently his system wounds his conscience. Mountains of misinterpreted scripture rise up before him. The thing is impossible. How can he undertake so weighty a charge alone? You may make him the chief speaker, if you please; you may distinguish him from the rest by temporal support; but unless you have a plurality, you cannot have him.

Tenthly, The hostility of some to the appointment of one bishop in a church, seems to be entirely directed against the bishop's office. They have no objection, on general principles, to the exercise of superior power by an individual, in a church of Christ. A person, without office, may have an effective, though

nameless influence, not only in one, but in fifty churches; yet all is well.

Some may think, that many of the preceding remarks, must militate against a plurality of deacons, as well as of bishops. But the cases are different. A plurality of deacons is expressly supposed, in the language of scripture, to be proper. This circumstance alone, precludes all reasoning on the subject. We may notice, however, that a plurality of deacons seems advisable, on the same principle as that on which the apostle directed a plurality of persons to be sent with the collections of the Gentile churches for the saints at Jerusalem. We refer to 1 Cor. xvi. 1—4. and 2 Cor. viii. 16—24. which we beg may be read with attention. Pecuniary trusts are matters of delicacy. The duties of deacons are commonly private and confidential. Their disbursements cannot, with propriety, be published to the church. Sometimes, in case of murmurings, they ought perhaps to act as a jury, which was probably done by the seven at Jerusalem. There seems a propriety, then, in always having more than one deacon: “Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us: providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.”

Upon the whole, one church, one bishop, as it was the maxim of early ecclesiastical writers, so does it appear to have been the general rule of scripture. Two bishops may, indeed, be sometimes admitted, when the appointment of them is considered merely as a lawful voluntary measure of mutual agreement and accommodation in a particular church; but no part of the word of God shows it to be necessary, and therefore

we ought to assert our liberty from any interposition of divine authority in the case. An increase of the number, till we get a church of bishops within the church, is unscriptural, irrational, and fraught with mischief.

OF THE QUALIFICATIONS OF OFFICE-BEARERS
IN A CHURCH.

IF we may judge of the importance of a subject by the degree of notice taken of it in the holy scriptures, we shall readily conclude, that questions which relate to the number of office-bearers in a church, are of inferior consequence to those, which relate to their qualifications.

The first remark, which we think it necessary to make at present, on the qualifications of office-bearers, is, that when we read the directions given by Paul to Timothy and Titus, respecting the choice of the bishop and deacons, we have reason to believe, that the possession of gifts is, in each case, supposed. These had been previously bestowed, in great abundance, on the primitive churches; and as those who possessed them, appear to have been the only persons who conducted the public worship, it was not likely that the apostles or evangelists would think of appointing others to offices in the church. If we may look upon the seven, chosen Acts viii. as an example of primitive deacons, it is certain, that gifts were required in them. "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business," verse 3. see also verse 8. If gifts were necessary to deacons, much more surely, to bishops. The silence, therefore, of Paul to Timothy and Titus, respecting gifts, when mentioning the qualifications of those who were fit to be made office-bearers in the

churches at Ephesus and in Crete, is no proof that they were not considered necessary. Now that gifts have ceased, we must include suitable acquirements among the qualifications which are requisite for office-bearers in a church. If asked, whether we mean to apply this remark to deacons, as well as bishops, we scruple not to reply, that a certain degree of improvement is necessary for both; although the education which may be suited to the one, is by no means so great, or so particular, as that which is suited to the other.

Our next remark, on this subject, is, that the qualifications of office-bearers ought not to be separated from one another. Because men cannot be found, who excel equally in them all, it seems to be imagined, that a choice may be made of persons who excel in a few of the most remarkable, although comparatively deficient as to the rest. It is not indeed supposed, that such a man could act in the office alone. His fitness depends on other people with whom he is to be matched. It seems to be thought, not only that what one wants may be found in another, but that defects and excellencies of different men, may be made to tally and to unite, like the corresponding parts of a dove-tail joint. By this means, it is hoped, that, though the individuals be imperfect, the aggregate body will be so nicely proportioned, and so firmly fixed together, as to form, upon the whole, something very superior. So delighted are some with this idea, as to affirm, that no office in the church was ever intended to be held by an individual. If you want a good bishop you must obtain him thus. Choose one man because he is a good preacher, though he may have little fitness for ruling; and choose as an help meet

for him another man, or half a dozen men, who seem qualified for ruling, although endowed with little utterance. The supposed necessity of this plausible scheme, is strongly urged as an auxiliary argument, for a plurality of bishops in every church.—We confess, however, that the piecing out of a bishop, appears to us to be a most absurd idea. It obviously defeats the purpose which it is intended to serve. It gives, indeed, a plurality of men, but not a plurality of bishops, for, by the very argument, it requires them all to make one bishop.—Besides, the scheme is evidently inconsistent with the doctrine of scripture. Paul states all the qualifications as requisite in each individual who may be appointed a bishop; and although no man can be expected to excel in them all equally, yet unless a man excel in them all to such a degree, as to render him, on account of each of them, a proper object of choice, he ought not to be chosen. He must appear to be a fit man, when viewed by himself, and not merely when taken in connexion with colleagues. A good preacher but bad ruler, and a good ruler but bad preacher, seem equally disqualified for a bishop. Considering the nature of the office, indeed, it seems doubtful, whether a man can be really good in the one respect, and bad in the other, on either side. Ruling requires explaining and applying the scriptures to every case which occurs; and a degree of readiness and utterance, even greater than that which is requisite for preaching, must often be necessary to the ruler, that he may convince the church of its duty, and bring all the members to agree concerning it. On the other hand, the preacher must understand the meaning and application of the laws which

Christ hath given for the government of his church, otherwise his preaching, to say the least, must be extremely defective. The choice, then, of office-bearers, on this principle, must be wrong as to each individual. If so, what can be more monstrous, than supposing that it will come to be right, by repeating it again and again, and uniting a plurality of errors into one mass?—In speaking of the several qualifications of a bishop, we do not stop to prove that we may distinguish between qualifications of character, and qualifications of circumstances, such as being married, and having children, because we suppose this is not disputed.

A third remark on this subject is, that the qualifications of office-bearers do not vary with mere situation. It seems often to be imagined, that a man who could not be a bishop in a large church, or in a populous and refined neighbourhood, may answer very well for the office, among a few, in a retired part of the country. This opinion is now carried so far, that every society of Christians is advised to choose the best they can find among themselves, in the persuasion that some of themselves must be the fittest bishops for them. No doubt, however deficient they may all be, some will be found in every society superior to the rest; so that, if the rule of qualification were the mere esteem of the members, every society might be supplied from among themselves. But the qualifications of a man who “desires the good work” of a bishop, must be judged of, not by comparing him with the rest of his brethren, nor with the people among whom he lives, but with the rule of scripture. There we certainly learn, that some regard ought to be had to peculiarities of situation: Paul reminds Ti-

tus, that the bishop must "be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to confute the gainsayers," with a particular view, it should seem, to the vain talkers of the circumcision, and the unprincipled sensual character of the Cretians. The qualifications of the bishop, however, are evidently supposed to be always the same. A man, therefore, who is not fit for a bishop every where, is fit no where; and a man who is fit any where, is fit every where. Circumstances, indeed, occasion differences of a subordinate nature, between one situation and another; but it is every where the same gospel, and the same kingdom; the same vineyard, and the same labour.

When gifts were bestowed upon every church, men might be found in each, who were qualified for the office of a bishop. This at least appears to have been the case at Ephesus, and in the island of Crete. But there seems to be nothing in this fact, which forbids, while probability leads us to think, that some of the smaller churches might even then have been supplied with bishops from churches which were larger and more richly endowed both with gifts and with grace. Much less need we scruple about supplying churches in this manner now, when gifts have ceased, and men must improve in knowledge and utterance, by the use of ordinary means. It will not be affirmed that means of improvement are equally within the reach of the brethren in every church. Why then should it be insisted on, that brethren in every church will be found sufficiently improved, for performing the work of a bishop? When primitive churches were in different circumstances, as to temporal things, the brethren in one place readily agreed to supply the brethren in another.

But is it merely because we have scripture example for it, that we would help our poor brethren at a distance? Would not the general principle of love be sufficient to constrain us, without any search for precedents? In like manner, though there be no precedent in the case, one way or other, the general principle of love ought to constrain one church to supply suitable persons for the office of a bishop, when they have them to spare, and when they are called for by the poverty of other churches. That churches recently formed, few in number, and in unfavourable situations, are commonly destitute of any, who are fit for the pastoral office, is a fact too evident, we presume, to be denied. Where such a fact exists, the path of duty requires no special illustration. Christians do not hesitate to remove from one place to another, and of course, from one church to another, when called by worldly business. Are such removals then only unlawful, when the object is the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom? We are shocked to hear all measures of this kind ascribed to the desire of worldly reputation, and all who pursue them, from a wish to enjoy the divine institution of a bishop, charged with making the chief part of religion to consist in having a minister. We have not a doubt, that the chief part of their religion may be found, after all, to consist in having a Saviour. Harsh language is not argument. How little impression would the insinuation make, were it turned the other way, and those, who had used it, told, that the chief part of their religion consisted in not having a minister. The unqualified assertion is unjustifiable on either side. "Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we

“ shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ,”
Rom. xiv. 10.

A fourth remark on this subject is, that since qualifications are necessary for the offices in the church, they are necessary for performing those duties, in which the work of the offices consists. It must be granted, we apprehend, that the offices are appointed for the sake of the duties which belong to them, and cannot be separated from those duties. What is a bishop, but a man who is to do the duties of a bishop? Hence Paul says, 1 Tim. iii. 1. “ If any man desire the OFFICES of a bishop, he desireth a good WORK.” If then any male members of a church may do any of the duties of a bishop, or all of them put together, is not this the same thing, as saying, that any Christian man may be a bishop? The want of the name, or of the formal appointment is surely of little moment, when a man discharges the duties of the office in fact. Is it for the appointment and name, or for the duties, that the qualifications are required? Surely for the latter. Now, the very requiring of qualifications marks a distinction between some who may, and some who may not, discharge the duties of a bishop; and warrants us to say, that those only, who may be chosen to the office, ought to do the work of a bishop. Where such are found, the orderly way certainly is, to have them previously appointed, and commended to the grace of God by fasting and prayer, for the work which they are to fulfil. Where they are not found, and cannot be obtained elsewhere, it seems better to feel the want, and seek to God for a supply, than to substitute in its place, the form of the work of a bishop, which is all that can be said of the duties of that office, as perform-

ed by persons who have not the required qualifications.

The principle, that churches may, and ought to do every thing, by its private members, which Christ appointed bishops to do, seems to render churches entirely independent of the pastoral office. But this supposes that office to be superfluous. If it be an advantage, it is at least no longer necessary. If it be said, the authority of Christ makes it necessary, whether a church can do without it or not; the answer is, Christ never does any thing which his people can do without. He never sent prophets to declare what would have been known by the church without them: neither did he ever desire bishops to be appointed to feed a flock, which possessed the right and the power to feed themselves. Prophets had, indeed, one kind of office: bishops have another. But both are equally the institution of Christ, and equally requisite in their several places.

The principle, which we oppose, will, if followed to all its consequences, set aside not only the institution of a bishop, but also the institution of a church. If a church may do without office-bearers, what those office-bearers were appointed by Christ to do; why may not Christians do, without church fellowship, what that fellowship was appointed by Christ to do? The only way of evading the force of this argument is, to make the existence of a church as inseparable from a company of Christians, as a man is from his own shadow. This is accordingly done. Any two Christians, it is said, are a church. The formation of churches is an erroneous expression. Meet with

your friend, and the shadow appears: Leave him and it is gone. 'Tis here!—'Tis there!—'Tis gone!

To many, the remarks which we have made, on the qualifications of office-bearers in a church, will seem so obviously true, that they will wonder how it should have been thought necessary to make them. There is a call, however, even for such remarks as these. Some among us are eagerly contending, that every male member of a church may lawfully perform every duty, which belongs to the office of a bishop. When speaking of elders, one might really imagine, they were seriously disposed to maintain, that none but those who have age, or the qualities of age, might presume to do any of the things for which elders are to be ordained. But the mistake is soon corrected, for, from what they assert, in the most positive manner, it is sufficiently manifest, that there is not man nor boy in any church, who, according to their opinion, may not do every duty of every office. The principle is carried into practice. Young men are in the habit of acting, in every respect as bishops, in churches. They often act thus in churches to which they have been very little known, and in which they are not likely to continue. Wherever they go, acting as bishops is, with them, matter of course. When they meet with a church which shows any disinclination to such a plan, they do not fail to admonish them for their error. Nor is this practice at all confined to stated preachers of the gospel. When such happen to be called away, they desire the brethren to serve themselves. The point is thought, indeed, to be so completely settled, that bishops "arrogating to themselves" (as it is expressed) "the exclusive right of dispensing ordinances,"

has been classed with "the pomp and ceremony," the "splendid edifices," the "ecclesiastical dignities," the "robes of the clergy," their pretensions as "successors to the apostles;" in short with all the grossest corruptions of antichristian apostacy. Facts and doctrines like these are calculated to alarm the minds of many, who were enjoying, as they thought, the benefits of Christian fellowship in a scriptural manner; but who may now be ready to quarrel with their bishops, or with one another, because there is not a ready and universal submission to the demand, that people should give and take among themselves, without regard to office or qualification, whatever ordinances a church should observe. Bishops, on the other hand, cannot but be greatly distressed by the apprehension, that while they dispense ordinances, in the belief that it is the proper business of that office, in discharging the duties of which they would very gladly spend and be spent; some of the most promising and dearly beloved seals of their ministry, may be learning to look on their ministrations with a jealous, if not a contemptuous eye, and to doubt whether they are indeed complying with institutions of Christ, or acknowledging claims of a petty Pope.

Before taking leave of the subject of the qualifications of office-bearers in a church, it becomes us to confess, that wherever they are found in any measure to exist, they call for gratitude to God who giveth them, and lay the person on whom they are bestowed, under a strong obligation faithfully to improve them. Before God we are all as nothing, and are counted to him less than nothing and vanity. It is by grace that we are saved from our sins; and it is a wonderful proof

of divine condescension, that any of us should, in the lowest station, be employed as instruments in his service. Individual endowments are intended for the common benefit. Let Christians beware, then, of pride on the one hand, of envy on the other. What Paul said to the gifted brethren at Rome may well be accommodated to the subject before us. "I say through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another," Rom xii. 3, 4.

OF THE DUTIES OF OFFICE-BEARERS IN A
CHURCH.

BESIDES fitting saints for the work of the ministry, already taken notice of, the duties of the bishop may be summed up under the following heads: Preaching, teaching, exhortation, and reproof; conducting the public worship in praise and prayer; dispensing the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper; administering discipline; conversing with persons in private, who desire admission into the church, or who want his instruction and advice in any private business; visiting the sick, and the houses of mourning.

Our remarks, in this section, shall respect chiefly, the dispensing of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, and the private duties of the bishop.

A question has been moved whether the dispensation of ordinances be at all peculiar to the bishop's office. The dispensing of baptism seems to belong to the office of the bishop, whenever that ordinance is called for in the meeting of a church. Whether it ought, in all other cases, to be confined to bishops, we do not stop to inquire. The dispensing of the Lord's supper, seems also to belong to the office of the bishop, and as this ordinance seems always to suppose the meeting of a church, we presume, it falls more exclusively than the other, within his province.

But it has been proposed to render the observance of ordinances by a church, entirely independent of the bishop's office. Churches may observe, it is said, nay,

they ought to observe all social ordinances, and particularly the Lord's supper, whether they have a bishop or not, whether a bishop be present or not. Any of the members may dispense it. The very expression, dispensing the Lord's supper, is declared to be unscriptural and unintelligible; and we are desired to consider, that the brethren are said to eat the Lord's supper, but that no notice is taken of any body giving it to them.

The objection to the expression dispensing the Lord's supper, that the brethren are merely said to come together to eat it, can have little weight, when it is considered, that the phraseology referred to, occurs in short general accounts of the observance of the ordinance. "The society had a feast," is an expression sufficiently explicit, in a general account of the matter. But if a similar society is to have such another feast, it remains for them to inquire, not only what it consisted of, but who presided, and did the honours of the table. It is sometimes said, in scripture, that persons were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus, Acts viii. 16. and xix. 5. Rom. vi. 3. Gal. iii. 27. Is this any proof, that those persons were not baptised also in the name of the Father and the Holy Spirit? or that it is of no consequence, in the administration of baptism, whether more than one of those adorable names be named? In like manner, when it is said, "the brethren came together to break bread," or "to eat the Lord's supper," the concise general language used, is no proof, that there was not a person appointed among them, whose office it was, among other things, to dispense that ordinance.

The attempt to explode the idea of dispensing an

ordinance seems so exceedingly irrational, that, we suppose it would hardly have been made, but for the sake of some favourite opinion, which rendered it necessary. In baptism, the baptiser is surely as essential as the baptised. There can be no ordinance, without both a subject and an administrator. Can there be any material difference in the Lord's supper? In that ordinance, indeed, he who gives, will also join the receivers in partaking. But is giving, therefore, no part of the observance of the ordinance? May the elements be placed before the members of the church, without ever considering who is to give them? Shall any one, or every one, take them at pleasure? This perhaps is not proposed, yet such questions are necessarily occasioned, by the assertion, that dispensing, is no part of the observance of the ordinance.

It may be of advantage to compare this assertion with Paul's account of the institution of the Lord's supper. That account is the more likely to assist us, because it was introduced by the apostle, on purpose to regulate the manner in which the ordinance should be observed. After describing the improper behaviour of the church at Corinth, he says, "What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I do not praise. For I received from the Lord *that* which also I delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and, having given thanks, brake, and said, Take, eat: this is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also *he gave* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do, as often as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye

“ eat this bread, and drink this cup, show the death of the Lord, until he come.” Can any one read this passage, and think, that dispensing is no part of the observance of the ordinance of the Lord’s supper? The coming together to eat every one before other, his own supper, as was done at Corinth, was no doubt a peculiarly gross indecency. But to say, that, if a church eat the supper, the dispensing of it is of little or no consequence, really appears to be proposing an indecency of the same kind.

Some suppose that we are contending for what is unintelligible, and ask, what dispensing the Lord’s supper means? To dispense, means, to deal out, to distribute. To dispense the Lord’s supper, means an individual leading the worship of the church, on occasion of observing that ordinance, by imitating the example of Christ, when he took bread, and gave thanks, and gave it to the disciples, saying, take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you; and when, in like manner, he gave the cup, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do ye as oft as ye drink it in remembrance of me. So far from being a matter of inferior concern, the duty of the dispenser of the Lord’s supper, appears from the passage quoted above, to be the principal means appointed of God, for preserving his people, in all ages, from confounding this ordinance with a common meal. The thanksgivings, in which the dispenser conducts the devotion of the church, and the words of Christ at giving the elements, repeated by the dispenser on the same occasion, furnish matter for meditation, raise the mind to spiritual recollection, and excite gratitude, while the church is eating and drinking. The members are kept in mind,

that what is said and done, is confirmed by the authority, and illustrated by the very example of our blessed Lord. And as Jesus spake those beautiful words, which are recorded in the xivth. chapter of John, after the disciples had received the supper the first time, and concluded by singing a hymn with them before they went out; it has been most reasonably inferred, that it is proper for him who dispenses the ordinance now, to follow up the observance of it with a few suitable remarks and exhortations, and to conclude in the same triumphant manner. This is the substance of what we conceive to be meant by dispensing the Lord's supper. We are not conscious of any obscurity, either in the phrase, or in the thing expressed by it. There is reason to believe, that a scriptural mode of dispensing the Lord's supper has ever been found most edifying and comfortable by the great body of Christians. When a bishop excels in this part of his duty, it generally endears him to his people in a remarkable degree; yet so it is, that some think it hardly worth mentioning at all, and, at any rate, not worth the inquiry, who shall discharge it.

It surely is not too much to say, that if there be in the church an office, one object of which is to conduct the public worship, the conducting of this very delightful part of it in particular, must be the business of him who holds that office. If we have given any proof from scripture that gifts were miraculously bestowed, for enabling men to conduct the public worship of the churches, till men could be appointed bishops in such a way that successors might be found to resemble them, without miraculous preparation; we are supported by all that proof, in maintaining it to be

the duty, and a part of the peculiar business of bishops, to dispense to churches the ordinance of the Lord's supper. That this service should belong to the office of deacons, nobody maintains. Unless, therefore, it belong to the office of the bishop, it is not attached to office at all, so that even when the bishop does dispense, he must be understood not to be acting as the bishop, but merely as one of the members of the church. Now there is no hint in scripture, that churches should appoint any one occasionally to dispense the Lord's supper; far less, that they should eat the Lord's supper, without appointing any one at all to dispense it. The "feeding of the flock," enjoined on all the primitive elders, and "the taking care of the church of God," enjoined on the ordinary bishop, seem to refer particularly to dispensing the Lord's supper, and administering discipline, because these two branches of duty, are the only ones which strictly relate to "the flock," or members of the church alone. At any rate, it is allowed by all Christians, that bishops may dispense the Lord's supper. It lies then upon those, who say that others also should do it, to support their opinion by scripture proof.

It is confessed, however, that neither precept, nor example, nor explicit declaration of any kind, can be produced from scripture, in support of this opinion. We are told, that this is one of those points which must be supported by inferences from scripture; yet it seems to be insisted on with no less confidence, than if it had a place among the ten commandments. And when we attend to the inferences which are drawn in this case, the arguments which the advocates of the opinion are obliged to use, and the unavoidable consequences of

adopting their system, have the most powerful tendency to show the importance of the opposite principle.

For instance, they are obliged to maintain, that the office of a bishop contains in it nothing peculiar at all; that the man who has been commended to the grace of God by fasting and prayer, because he was chosen to that office, has, in fact, nothing to do, in consequence of his ordination, which it might not have been his duty to do before, and which it may not be still the duty of any of the brethren to do, as well as himself. This assertion is the more extraordinary, that it is levelled exclusively against the office of the bishop. It is admitted, that deacons have power to do something peculiar, in virtue of their office. “Deacons have no power,” say they, “in virtue of their office, to do any thing which another member of the church may not do, *except what they are ordained to do, namely, to take care of the poor.*” Now all we desire is, that this reasonable way of speaking, should be impartially used. “Bishops have no power,” say we, “in virtue of their office, to do any thing which another member of the church may not do, *except what they are ordained to do, namely, to take care of the church of God.*” To object to this doctrine, seems to betray disaffection to the ordination and office of the bishop. We are sorry to remark more symptoms than one of this unhappy temper. Can any thing pour ridicule more directly on the divine institution of a bishop, than to say, that there is no distinction beyond what is nominal, between him and the rest of the people? Can any thing more boldly reproach the wisdom of God? Can any thing more evi-

dently tend to the contempt and destruction of all the arrangements of the church of Christ? It is in vain to undervalue one divine institution, and think of preserving another. Had the precept of the apostle been the reverse of what it is, had it been, "Let all things be done indecently and in disorder;" we cannot conceive a principle which would more effectually have ensured its observance.

Again, they maintain, that any two Christians make a church, and that any meeting of Christians on the Lord's day, however casual, ambulatory, and even private (if strangers be not absolutely excluded) may act, in all respects, as a church. In short, any company of Christians is a church; and a church, though destitute of office-bearers, is every thing. If two or three of my family be agreed, as Christians, to meet together on the Lord's day, whether we be visited or not by a neighbour or two of the same description; it is only necessary for somebody to give thanks, before bread and wine are handed about, and this may be done, as showing the Lord's death till he come, although the meeting were purely accidental. This is no overcharged imaginary picture. It is taken from what is known to have been done. If the advocates of this scheme happen to be from home, with a Christian party, they eat the Lord's supper every Lord's day, whether they meet with a Christian church or not. Their practice may show whither they would lead us.

Concerning that practice, it seems quite sufficient to say, what can never be gainsaid, that in all the scriptures, there is not a single instance of any man, who was not an office-bearer, ordinary or extraordinary, or who was not endowed for acting as an office-bearer

with miraculous gifts, performing in any church, any one, of the peculiar duties of "feeding the flock," or "of taking care of the church of God." Neither is there a single instance of any company of Christians, whose meetings were merely occasional, who were not united for the purposes of stated fellowship as the church of Christ, in a particular place, observing the ordinance of the Lord's supper. And as we have no example, we have no precept for such things, not so much as a hint that they may be done. Are churches, then, to be required, without the shadow of scriptural authority, to consent to these things? Are they to be treated as prejudiced and corrupt, unless they will comply with them? Is it for edification, that the minds of Christians should be occupied, agitated, and alienated from one another, especially from their office-bearers, by questions, to say the very least, of so doubtful a nature?

But, it is urged, that the propriety of a church eating the Lord's supper, without office-bearers, is so clearly deducible from scripture, that it is wrong to doubt it.

For instance, an argument, in favour of this practice, is drawn from the truth, that the observance of ordinances is a duty. All social ordinances, it is said, are the same. Churches, therefore, ought to observe them all, in all situations.—All social ordinances are appointed, indeed, by the same authority, but they are not the same in kind. There may be circumstances, therefore, which admit of the observance of some, and do not admit of the observance of others. It is no where said in scripture, that churches ought to observe all ordinances in all situations. Circumstances may render

a duty impossible, and impossibility always supersedes obligation. One duty must also be taken in connection with another. The same Lord who enjoined the observance of the supper, enjoined the ordination of bishops, whose business it is, among other things, to dispense that ordinance. It is a duty, then, to have the bishop, as well as to eat the supper, and the one should be provided, that the other may be enjoyed: But churches are not criminal for not having a bishop, when they cannot get one, (as may often, in the course of providence, be for a while the case): neither are they criminal for not eating the supper, while they are without the office bearer, whose duty it is to feed them, by dispensing it. The proposal, then, receives no support from the truth, that it is a duty to eat the Lord's supper, because the question necessarily occurs, who shall dispense it? This seems as unavoidable, as the question, who shall receive it? Nay, it would not be more absurd for a church to sit down to the Lord's supper, where the elements were not provided, than to do so, where the office-bearer appointed by Christ to feed the flock is not provided.

Again, it is said, churches execute discipline without bishops, why not also eat the Lord's supper?—Because discipline may be often necessary to their very existence as a church: the Lord's supper is not. It is only on the plea of necessity, that we could justify the exercise of discipline in a church without a bishop. But something of this kind is often necessary in the very origin of churches. The brethren may be brought together in the course of providence, and may receive one another on a mutual profession of faith, without the instrumentality of any other church, or of any

preacher of the gospel. Churches must, in all situations, receive members, otherwise they might soon become extinct. They must also exclude members who give offence, otherwise they would no longer be a select body. They must also choose bishops, else they could never obtain them. These are cases of necessity. They must occur at the original formation of every church, and they must be expected to occur afterwards, in every church occasionally. But the Lord's supper, though very comfortable and edifying, is not necessary to the existence of a church, for many churches have existed for a time without it. If the want of it be wilful, it is no doubt wrong; but, if it arise from unavoidable circumstances, it is a privation which they ought to submit to, with resignation to the will of God. Nor can they reasonably expect that edification and comfort from the ordinance, which it is calculated to yield, if they observe it at the expense of neglecting the order which the account of the institution appears to prescribe.

Further, it is remarked, that the primitive churches ate the Lord's supper, immediately on being gathered, and yet they seem to have had no bishops for some time; from which an inference is drawn, that they must have eaten it without bishops.—How the worship of the primitive churches was conducted, we have already seen. The necessity of now having men fitted for the work of the ministry, and appointed bishops, to discharge the duties of that work, cannot be more strongly shown, than it is by this fact, that, until they could be appointed in an ordinary way, a miracle was wrought to answer the exigency. All the primitive churches had, from their very formation, miraculous gifts distributed among them. Where these were not

enjoyed, there might be association, and such exercises as prayer, reading the scriptures, and religious conversation, probably in private; but no observance of ordinances. We are led to make this distinction, from the circumstance mentioned in Acts xix. that Paul found certain disciples at Ephesus, to whom he said, "Have ye received the Holy Spirit since ye believed?" These disciples were evidently associated, and we are told their number was about twelve. As they happened to be disciples of John, their exercises could only be such as John taught his disciples to practise. For any thing the apostle saw, however, they might have been disciples of Jesus: nay, he actually supposed them to be so. His question seems to have been put, merely from a desire to know whether they were in a condition to enjoy ordinances. This fact surely implies, that disciples of Christ might have been associated, might have been in the habits of a more private worship, and might have abstained from the observance of ordinances, till apostles or evangelists visited them, or till they received the gifts which were necessary for that purpose, before bishops were appointed. It appears to have been customary with the apostles, to lay hands on persons who already believed, that they might be enabled to discharge to one another, and to others who might be added to them, all the duties of church fellowship. Thus, it is said, Acts viii. 14—17. "Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem, heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John, who, when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptis-

“ ed in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then laid they “ *their* hands on them, and they received the Holy “ Spirit.” Thus also, when Paul found, upon inquiry, that the disciples at Ephesus knew not whether the Holy Spirit were yet given, and had only been baptised unto John’s baptism; he called them, by a testimony which John had given, to believe on Christ Jesus, (see verse 4.); and when hearing this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus, the apostle laid his hands on them, and “ the Holy Spirit came on “ them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied.” All the apostles probably acted in the same way, wherever they went. Now what churches might do, while miraculous gifts were among them, is no rule for churches, in which such gifts do not exist.

We certainly have no desire to prevent our fellow Christians from enjoying all the edification and comfort of the Lord’s supper, when their situation permits them to observe it, in a scriptural manner. But to observe it, on principles subversive of the pastoral office, and of all the provisions which have ever been made for the utility and decency of public worship; appears to us to be extremely dangerous. In such a way, Christians are not likely to derive from the ordinance, any real advantage, and may, contrary to their intention, cause it to produce upon the minds of others, a very different impression from that which it is calculated to produce, when properly conducted. For the reasons stated above, we conclude, that dispensing the Lord’s supper is a part of the good work of a bishop. That a bishop may discharge this, and similar parts of his office, wherever he may, in providence, meet with a church; that a bishop may invite another

Bishop to officiate in his room; and that a church may avail themselves of the occasional services of a bishop, in the absence, or want, of a bishop of their own, we shall afterwards endeavour to show.

It was also proposed, in this section, to make some remarks on the private duties of the bishop.

The private duties of the bishop are so described by some, as to make it appear impossible that one man should be able to overtake them among more than a very few. This kind of representation may serve the purpose of recommending the scheme of a plurality, or rather a multitude, of bishops in every church; and it is much used for that purpose. But it does not seem to be scriptural, it narrows the sphere of the bishop's usefulness, and it has a very pernicious effect on the sentiments and habits of the people.

The office of the bishop seems to require, that, in private, he should converse with every one who makes profession of faith, with a view to admission into the church; both, that he may, as overseer, be satisfied himself, and that he may be able to concur with the testimony of the two or three witnesses, on which it will be lawful for the church to admit, or to reject the application. He ought also to be peculiarly attentive to the rule of going to a brother, and telling him his fault alone, when a brother shall trespass against him. Acting in this way, is exceedingly suitable to the character of a shepherd, and is likely to have the happiest effect, as members of a church will often hear the bishop, when they would not hear one another. It seems proper, too, that he should receive information in private, of every offence which must be told to the church, because a man cannot well preside in any

society, unless he previously know whatever business is to come before it. By this means, he will often have an opportunity of acting as a peace-maker, and may succeed, when the attempts of others have failed. Thus, he may often prevent the necessity of telling the church at all, (and surely, to avoid going to extremities, is always desirable, when it can be done consistently with faithfulness;) or, if the affair must be told, he will be able to give a distinct and full account of it, so that the witnesses will have nothing to do, but to establish every word by their testimony, and the church will easily understand the case, and their duty concerning it. His house ought also to be open to those who desire private instruction, on any portion of scripture, or private advice on any particular circumstance in their own situation. Wherever he sees a real desire of information, he ought to encourage it. In cases of difficulty, he ought to act as a friend and a father, listening with attention, sympathy, and patience, preserving inviolable confidence, and showing great faithfulness, affection, and prudence. At the call of sickness, or of any kind of distress, he ought ever to be ready to attend; and he ought to show that he thinks it better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting.

In all private duties, the bishop ought to show the same cordial attention to the rich and to the poor. He ought to be distinguished for circumspection in all his deportment, whether among his people, or among other men; that he may retain the good report which he ought to have of them that are without, and that he may be habitually promoting the cause of his Lord. He should study, with a union of gentleness and persevering

zeal, to improve opportunities of stating and enforcing the truths of the gospel, and of testifying against unbelief and all sin. This habitual endeavour to promote and adorn the gospel, both in public and private, seems to be what was exemplified by the apostles, when "daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ," Acts v. 42.; and what was recommended by Paul to the imitation of the elders of the church at Ephesus, when he said, "Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations which befel me by the lying in wait of the Jews: *and* how I kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house; testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance towards God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Acts xx. 18—21. These words do not necessarily require periodical rounds of visitation. Neither do they suppose that the bishop should distinguish himself by going from house to house, unless particular occasion call for it. Their plain meaning is, that the bishop should never lose sight of the object to which he is devoted; that he should use unwearied diligence in Christian instruction; that, besides public labours, he should, like the Israelites of old, talk of the word of God, when he sitteth in the house, and when he walketh by the way, and when he lieth down, and when he riseth up.

His oversight of the church requires a continuance of the same kind of knowledge of the character of each

member, as that on which the member was received into the church. It seems scriptural to acknowledge any one a Christian, who makes a credible profession of faith. Now if the credibility of a profession may be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses at first, it may continue to be so confirmed afterwards. The original testimony supposes, that a sufficient degree of acquaintance with members of the church was established at the beginning, which will naturally continue, or rather, increase; and this seems, not only all that is necessary, but, generally speaking, all that is proper.

The scheme of "intimate acquaintance" with all the members of a church, and such a host of bishops as should be able to be daily visiting every one in the church, and observing all their personal and family affairs, and that with the view of qualifying themselves to interfere in all these things, and to allude to them, if they thought fit, in their several sermons; seems to be as completely subversive of the Christian morality of private life, as the endless succession of allusions in public, giving pleasure to some, pain to others, and exciting curiosity among those who were not immediately concerned, must be of the harmony and benefit of public worship. This scheme may suit a system of suspicion, but never of love. Something like it may be found among worldly institutions, when men have shown that they are not to be trusted, and that they are apt to combine for the purpose of screening one another in fraud. Thus, troops of inspectors and supervisors (all overseers such as they are) have been long employed for collecting the customs and excise. But if they should be introduced into a church of Christ,

a profession of faith might soon come to be as little regarded as a customhouse oath; purity of communion might be considered as depending entirely on the vigilance of the officers; sin might indeed be hunted after in the one case, as smuggling is in the other; yet it might be difficult to determine whether the evil was likely, by such means, to be cherished or restrained. Private intimacy does not necessarily extend with the sphere of church offices or of church fellowship. It is, in every case, a select, a mutual, and a voluntary thing. Christ had his disciple whom he loved, and his chief intimates, distinguishable from the rest of the twelve apostles. It is wrong in a Christian to form close friendships with persons who are not Christians, but within the denomination of genuine Christianity, private intimacy, whether of bishops or people, is, and must be, perfectly free.

We are the more disposed to dwell on this subject, because where the contagion of universal intimacy creeps in, its pernicious influence spreads from bishops to people; and where it may not be encouraged, mistakes may give rise to discontent, as if a blessing were withheld. It is to be feared too, that what is profitable here, has often been kept back, because it is unpopular. The consequence is, that, under the notion of scriptural fellowship and great brotherly love, such plans are proposed, as would absolutely render it impossible to be a member of a Christian church, and at the same time to enjoy any of the advantages of a life of retirement. This "intimate acquaintance" between bishops and people, and among the people themselves, interferes with the duties of men in their several stations; with an industrious quiet attention to busi-

ness; with the love of home; with regular hours; with family and secret worship; with the attention due to near relatives according to the flesh; with the diligence and fidelity of servants; and with habits of serious reading and meditation. Religious conversation degenerates, in these circumstances, into mere table talk, including all the evils of captious, trifling disputation, idle curiosity, tale-bearing, and private scandal. In short, matters may be carried to such a length, that a man cannot be a member of a church without molestation. Hence, many of the most painful cases of discipline, with which, indeed, some may be delighted, regarding them as the proper means of keeping alive the zeal and activity of the church; but which we must ever regard as symptoms of prevailing corruption, and requiring a preventive, rather than an excitement.

If we examine the doctrine of scripture upon this subject, we shall see, that there is no occasion for forcing, but much for restraining, intimacy of private intercourse among the people of God. “Withdraw thy
“foot (says Solomon, Prov. xxv. 17.) “from thy
“neighbour’s house: lest he be weary of thee, and
“hate thee.” Literally thus, “Let thy foot be sel-
“dom in thy neighbour’s house: lest he be full of
“thee, and hate thee.” As a proof of the importance of this precept, we can say with truth, that of all the quarrels among Christians, which we have had occasion to attend to, in nine cases out of ten, at the very least, the first fault was excessive intimacy. We beg Christians to consult their own recollection, whether they ought not to bear a similar testimony. Our Saviour cautioned the seventy disciples against gossip-

ing, when he sent them out to preach the gospel. "In
 " the same house remain, eating and drinking such
 " things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of
 " his hire. Go not from house to house," Luke. x. 7.
 " We hear (says Paul, 2 Thess. iii. 11, 12.) " that
 " there are some who walk among you disorderly,
 " working not at all, but are busy-bodies. Now them
 " that are such we command, and exhort by our Lord
 " Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat
 " their own bread." Again, in 1 Tim. v. 13. " And
 " withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from
 " house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also,
 " and busy-bodies, speaking things which they ought
 " not." In like manner speaks Peter, in his 1 Epist.
 iv. 15. " Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a
 " thief, or an evil doer, or a busy-body in other men's
 " matters." Such, without a single instance to the
 contrary, so far as we remember, is the strain of the
 doctrine of scripture, respecting private intimacy a-
 mong the servants of God.

There seems to be no impropriety in saying, that
 the habits of the bishop ought to be in unison with
 these precepts of scripture, and that with regard to
 them, as well as to other things, he should be an en-
 sample to the flock. The flock will derive more be-
 nefit from the fruits of his secret devotions and studies,
 than from an incessant frequency of visiting. The
 knowledge, which enables him to preach suitably to
 various characters and situations, is the knowledge of
 human nature and human life, which by no means ne-
 cessarily supposes an intimate acquaintance with every
 individual of a church, but may be collected, (besides
 what books can teach), within the circle of private ac-

quaintance, and private observation. The effect of suitable preaching is generally lost, if the hearer perceives that the preacher is, from personal knowledge, aiming at him. In case of speaking agreeable things, the attention which it discovers will gratify: in case of reproof, it will always be likely to offend. Both effects are distinct from the proper effect of the truth. On the other hand, nothing is so striking to hearers, as to find that, while the speaker does not, and cannot, know particular circumstances, he is nevertheless directed to say what is exactly suited to them. In this case, encouragement or reproof comes home with double advantage, because it is equally free from the suspicion of adulation and malice.

Upon the whole, it would be uncandid and foolish, not to confess, that a bishop may be too reserved in his manners, and may herein offend, as in all other parts of his duty. Perhaps studious habits may sometimes tempt him to improper seclusion. And if his reserve arise from pride, it is utterly detestable. But when a church feels no inconveniency from its numbers in other respects, the bishop may learn so to arrange his duties, as to discharge with faithfulness and success, those which are private, no less than those which are public. There is no necessity for what has been called "making deacons a kind of pastors." From their appointment to oversight in temporal things, they are presumed to be men of approved fidelity and judgment; and they are, no doubt, encouraged to distinguish themselves, by general usefulness, among brethren, of whose confidence and attachment they have received so striking a proof. One kind of oversight has a natural connection with another, in any society. Hence the busi-

ness which always belongs to a president, a secretary, and a treasurer, aided perhaps by a committee of directors. In a church, a peculiarly close connection is evidently supposed to exist between the bishop and deacons. It would be most unseemly, if he and they did not, on all occasions, act cordially together; and they will do so with the greater certainty and ease, that they severally remember their proper department.

It is painful to be compelled to vindicate the duties of an office, as if, from the circumstance of holding it, we were contending for a right, an honour, or a privilege, of a personal nature. All that has been said, will, perhaps, obtain from many, no other reply than this; the bishops are always for arrogating every thing to themselves. No doubt, ambition is natural to them, as it is to other men. But ambition operates two ways. Some men it inspires with a desire to climb up on high: others with a determination to pull down all that is above them. The inquirer will find it the part both of wisdom and of safety, to disregard the imputation of motives on either side. The only question ought to be, what is the will of our blessed Lord? and this, however it may distinguish particular offices, or those who hold them, it must be equally the interest of all to maintain.

In discussing questions respecting duty, the Christian ought surely to confess his own utter inability and his absolute dependence on divine direction and strength, whatever the nature of the duty may be. "Abide in me, (said Christ) and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine: no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth

“ in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” John xv. 4, 5.

OF FEMALE OFFICE-BEARERS IN A CHURCH.

WHEN gifts were bestowed on the primitive Christians, they were enjoyed by persons of both sexes. Women as well as men were endowed particularly with the gift of prophecy. We have already had occasion, however, to remark, that although several of the gifts possessed by the men, were bestowed for the purpose of enabling them to conduct the public worship of the churches, this was not the case with the gifts which were bestowed on the women*. No argument can, therefore, be drawn from the primitive distribution of gifts, for the propriety of employing women as public office bearers in a church.

At the same time, it is a fact, that women have been, and may be, employed by churches, in a private way, and in particular circumstances. In Rom. xvi. 1. Phoebe is called “ a deaconess of the church in Cenchrea;” and in 1 Tim. iii. 11. and v. 3.—10. and Tit. ii. 3. directions are thought by many to be given respecting female deacons and female elders, who were to be employed in the churches in Ephesus and Crete. In these passages, the duties which they were to discharge, are all supposed to be of a private nature, and

* See Pages 30—32.

there is reason to think that the employment of them was not a general practice.

The scriptures never speak of female office-bearers, in any of the churches in Judea. On this negative fact we should lay little stress, were it not that the employment of females in the Grecian and Asiatic churches, is allowed to be owing to a circumstance*, which, it is known, did not exist in the country of Judea. In Greece and Asia, women were not in the habit of seeing persons of the other sex, in private, except such as were their near relations; so that the ordinary office-bearers of a Christian church could have had no conversation with the female members privately, without giving offence. Now, since this was the state of manners, wherever female office-bearers are spoken of, and since no mention of them is made in any church, where the same jealousy did not exist; the proper inference seems to be, that churches should have recourse to them in those situations only, where the state of manners may require their assistance. They have been found highly useful, for instance, in churches established in various missionary settlements. But the want of them, where they are not thus called for by circumstances, is no scriptural defect. It is a proof rather of a wise, because a discriminating, conformity to scriptural precedents. There can be no propriety in always having deaconesses to attend to the wants of the female poor, as some have pleaded, because it was expressly to attend to the wants of female poor, that the seven men were at first appointed†.

* See Macknight on Rom. xvi. 1. Note 3. and on 1 Tim. iii. 11. Note 1.

† See Acts vi. 1.

Even where female office-bearers may be necessary, it seems altogether without scripture authority, to make the appointment of the individuals employed, matter of church election, or public ordination. It may be perfectly proper, that the proposal of having such persons should be made in the presence of the church, and executed with their consent; and that prayer should be made in the church for a blessing on the measure, when it has been adopted. But to suppose, that the qualifications of particular women should be made the subject of church deliberation, and perhaps discussion; and that when their respective merits were settled, they should either at first, or ever after, appear in any manner as office-bearers before a church; is surely repugnant to all those feelings of decency, which even nature possesses, and which scripture approves.

OF A CHURCH.

IN Matth. xviii. 19, 20. our Saviour says, “If
 “ two of you shall agree on earth as touching any
 “ thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them
 “ of my Father which is in heaven. For where two
 “ or three are gathered together in my name, there am
 “ I in the midst of them.” This gracious promise is
 a very seasonable encouragement to private social pray-
 er, and to the mutual confidence and friendship of
 fellow Christians, in their private intercourse with one
 another. Occurring as it does, immediately after the
 case had been supposed, of one brother offending an-
 other, and continuing obstinate in the offence, it is
 well calculated to prevent the frequent occurrence of
 such a case. Christians, remembering the advantage
 of cordial unanimity, with a friend who can unite in
 their supplications at the throne of grace, will be lothe
 to forfeit that advantage, and will, on all sides, en-
 deavour with the greater earnestness, to maintain the
 unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The parti-
 cular promise made to two disciples who shall agree in
 prayer, is confirmed by a general declaration, “ where
 “ two or three are gathered together in my name, there
 “ am I in the midst of them.” The connection shows,
 that being gathered together in the Lord’s name, signi-
 fies meeting in consequence of being agreed as touching
 any thing that they shall ask in his name, and his being
 in the midst of them is the security that his Father in
 heaven will do for them what they ask. The general
 declaration is very comprehensive. It assures us, that

every meeting of Christians for the exercises of worship, few as well as many, in private as well as in public, and in any place, shall enjoy the presence of the Lord. Viewing the passage in this most extensive sense*, we nevertheless conceive it to be a very great mistake, to argue from the words of our Saviour, as some do, that any two Christians may consider themselves a church of Christ, and may act in every respect in that capacity.

The agreement of the two individuals, mentioned verse 19. is evidently distinct from "the church," mentioned verse 17. to which the two individuals are supposed to belong. Addressing the church, our Lord says, verse 18th. "Verily, I say unto you, "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound "in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, "shall be loosed in heaven." He then makes a marked transition from "the church," to particular members of the church, considered, as meeting privately, by mutual agreement, for a particular purpose, and in a separate place from the rest of their brethren, "AGAIN," (the true reading is, "AGAIN, VERILY,"†) "I say unto you, that if TWO OF YOU," &c. The general declaration, in verse 20. does not at all determine what is a church, or what either a church, or any meeting of Christians, ought to do. It supposes the exercise to be lawful, and it simply confirms the belief, that two shall be heard when they make their united supplication, because wherever two

* See another view of verse 19th, in Doddridge's Family Expositor, note *b*

† See Wetstein and Griesbach.

or three are gathered together in the name of the Lord, whether as a church or not, he is present. If the declaration were confined to the meeting of a church, it would afford no encouragement to the two individuals, who are evidently supposed to be only members of a church. Although, therefore, it certainly includes church meetings, it must be understood here in an application to private meetings; for, in this sense alone, has it any connection with what goes before. It would be a perversion of the promise to the two individuals, if we did not explain it with limitations elsewhere mentioned, such as "if they ask any thing according to his will," and "in the name of Christ." In like manner, it would be a perversion of the general declaration respecting the presence of Christ with two or three gathered together in his name, if we understood it as a warrant for every two or three Christians to observe among themselves all things whatsoever Christ hath commanded his people, without ever inquiring whether they were in that state, which the right observance of some of those things seems to require. After all that is said, then, in this passage of scripture, to encourage any two or three to meet together in the name of Christ, and particularly for private social prayer; the questions return, What is a church of Christ? And when can a church of Christ observe, in a scriptural manner, the ordinances which he hath appointed?

We have already endeavoured to show, that a church of Christ, whether many or few in number, is a fixed society; and that this fixed society should have the appointed officers of a church, at least the officer whose duty it is to conduct the public worship, in order that

it may, with propriety, observe public ordinances. The same authority hath commanded both, and the one hath been appointed for the sake of the other.

Those, who contend, that any two Christians may act as a church, say, that it is lawful for them to do so, only when it is impossible for them to observe the ordinances with a larger society. This condition is attended with manifest difficulty. In a populous place, where there are many Christians, it requires that they should all meet in one society for the observance of ordinances. Now it is surely possible for many more to meet together, than can with any comfort worship together. Is it not better, then, to regulate the question about the observance of ordinances, not by the possibility of meeting with a larger society, but by the conveniency with which a society can enjoy the services of the same bishop and deacons? Again, in a place whether populous or not, where there are few Christians, this condition requires those few to observe all ordinances, although from simplicity, and want of utterance, they may all be equally incapable of doing it, either to their own edification, or to the conversion of others. In this way, the gospel may be least recommended, where it requires most a strong recommendation. The notion, that, because the doctrines of the cross are offensive to the natural man, therefore whatever gives offence to such men, in Christian worship, is on that very account likely to be right, receives no sanction from the word of God. The precept, that "all things should be done decently and in order," is a direct appeal to that sense of decency and order, which is common to Christians, and to all mankind. Besides, if Matth. xviii. 19, 20. be of it,

self a sufficient warrant for any two Christians to act as a church, there can be no authority for this condition at all. The two or three are laid under no obligation to inquire about any other society. No reason can be given, why a man, who has a fellow Christian, in his family, should ever go for the sake of ordinances, beyond the threshold of his own door. Let the two meet in "the guest-chamber;" let the rest of the family be invited to attend; let the stranger who calls at the house be admitted; and here is a church. This consequence, which to state is sufficiently to expose, seems to be a necessary result of the opinion which we combat. Nor do we know any suitable remedy, except this principle, that the ordinances of a church require the organization of a church.

Next to the impropriety of observing ordinances without office-bearers, is that of confining all attempts to obtain them, to the circle, be it wide or narrow, of the church, in which they happen to be wanted. That God will supply his church with all things needful, is a well-founded expectation. But has he limited himself, as to the quarter, whence that supply shall come? Has he promised so to supply each particular church as to cut off all communication with the rest? Has he ever done this in temporal things? Why should we assert that he does it in spiritual things? Were not the churches of Macedonia and Achaia in the right, when they made a contribution for the poor saints at Jerusalem? This was of carnal things, but were not the contributors previously indebted to the others for spiritual things? Why should supply from a distance be a lawful thing, as to apostles, evangelists, and missionaries, for the propagation of the gospel,

and not as to bishops, for the continuance of it? We have already seen, that the qualifications of the bishop have little connection with circumstances of a local nature. A man, fit to be chosen the bishop in one church, cannot be very unfit in another. What is one church, and what is another? Are not both, portions of that "ALL, that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours?" Why then insist on excluding one of the most important occasions of friendly communication between them? Can we hope to profit by a promise of supply from God, when we object to any lawful means, which he puts in our power, for obtaining it? Would that school be likely to prosper, in which the scholars should meet without a teacher, till one or more of them were supposed to have made sufficient progress to undertake that office? Bidding churches wait till members become qualified for bishops, is like bidding Christians wait till they become qualified for sitting at the Lord's table. If the only, or the most likely person, which a church knows, and judges fit for the bishop, be a person residing at a little distance, and therefore belonging to another church; shall this local, trivial, circumstance, be a solid objection to his being invited to remove his abode, and to join his neighbouring brethren, with the view of discharging among them those duties, on account of which they stand in need of him? Are those, who contend for this principle, able, with the conviction of their own minds to say, that, if it had been acted upon, in all the lately formed churches in this country, it would not have retarded the progress of knowledge? Are they now prepared to act on the principle, which they recommend; or are they not still doing, in fact, what

they condemn in theory? What shall we think of an advice to churches to confine themselves for bishops to their own number, given by persons who deal more largely and freely in the transplantaion of ministers, than any we have ever known?

We are aware of the language commonly held for the principle which we are combating. The apostles, it is said, directed the church at Jerusalem to "look out among them," men who should be chosen deacons; and Paul speaks to Timothy and Titus, as if the choice of both bishops and deacons were to be among the members of the respective churches, in which the choice was to be made. As to the direction given to the church at Jerusalem, where could they look out men, except in their own church, when as yet there was not another church on the face of the earth? And although there had been ever so many, the church at Jerusalem was so richly endowed with "men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom," that there could have been no occasion to seek beyond their own company. This last remark will apply to all the primitive churches, of the ordination of whose office-bearers we have any account, and distinguishes their condition from that of modern churches. The church at Ephesus consisted at the very beginning, of about twelve men, who "spake with tongues and prophesied." There is no reason to doubt that the churches in Crete were in a similar situation, for Paul had been there, and after laying his hands, as we may suppose, on the believers, left Titus to set in order the things that were wanting, and to ordain elders in every city. If any of the churches in Crete had been destitute of gifts, nothing said by Paul to Titus can lead us to conclude,

that the evangelist would not have recommended that a member of a church in one city, should be invited by a church in another, to come among them, with the view of being chosen the bishop.

The same common sense, which will lead a church to choose one of her own members, when judged fit, will lead her to choose one from another church, when her own are judged not fit. It may be thought, indeed, that a recommendation from others, is not a sufficient ground to choose a man a bishop. We do not say that it is. But it is a sufficient ground for inviting him to labour, upon trial, in word and doctrine. Letters from the brethren at Ephesus procured Apollos reception as a preacher among the brethren in Achaia, Acts xviii. 27. There could have been no harm, if one of the churches in that country had afterwards chosen him the bishop.

When we combine the principle, that any two Christians make a church, with the principles, that a church may, in any state, observe all ordinances, and that it may expect every thing needful for its edification within itself; it seems evident, that the consequence must be a system of continual subdivision. Let all, who, in a large church are weak, ignorant, and slow to learn, be distributed by twos or threes, into distinct churches. Presently they come within the hope of the supposed promise, that every thing needful for a church shall be found within itself. The men, who were before slow as learners, may be expected now to become fit for constituting a plurality of elders. Here is an easy way of promoting the improvement of the saints: an easy way also of increasing their number. "Let them meet together," it is said, "on the

" Lord's day, and attend to his ordinances. He will
 " add to their number, and bestow on them every ne-
 " cessary gift for their edification." We have al-
 ready seen, that the condition attached to this advice,
 that it must be followed only when it is impossible for
 the few to meet with a larger society, has no authori-
 ty. The obvious tendency, then, of the advice, is, let
 the churches be divided and subdivided to the utmost
 possible extent; and, whenever increase admits repeti-
 tion, let the divisive course be followed again and again.
 Let there be a church not only in every city, but in
 every street and lane of the city. One place is mere-
 ly a relative term. It may apply to one house, as
 well as to one kingdom. One church in one place, is
 a maxim, which admits of being explained by conveni-
 ence and inclination. In one sense, indeed, it can
 never be violated, for it is impossible that two churches,
 or two things of any kind, should be in one place at the
 same time. Subdivision, then, to the utmost extent,
 with all possible frequency, and with unwearied perse-
 verance, comes to be the true method, both for the
 improvement of Christians, and for the enlargement
 of the Redeemer's kingdom. Naturalists tell us, that
 the polypus possesses all that is essential to life, in every
 part of its body, so completely, that if cut to pieces,
 each piece becomes a polypus. Some have therefore
 gone so far as to maintain, that a pair of scissars might
 be used as an effectual means of multiplying the species.
 It may be so; yet it must be a cruel experiment. Such
 is the experiment recommended by the subdivision
 system. We earnestly hope, that Christians will not
 rashly consent to treat a church like a polypus.

In Mr. ROBERTSON'S pamphlet about lay-preaching,

there are certainly many things, which we are not likely ever to approve. One sentence, however, has struck us of late, with peculiar force. "It is clear as noon day, says he, that any system which holds forth a slight preparation as necessary for the ministry, tends to degrade that office in the eyes of mankind; and *is likely in the end, to terminate in another system, in which any few individuals may erect themselves into a church, and mutually administer the ordinances of the gospel to one another.*" This sentence we once treated as an unfounded and wild conjecture; it becomes us honestly to confess now, that events have given to it the appearance of a prophecy: Our practice hitherto, has, no doubt, favoured the opinion, that a slight preparation for the ministry is sufficient. But there is nothing in the plan of congregational churches, which requires a continuance of this practice. There is a learned, as well as an unlearned, independency. Many churches of the independent denomination, in different countries, have as well educated bishops, as any churches whatever. We rejoice that so many among ourselves see the importance, in this particular, of imitating their example:

As we have mentioned what is called the independency of churches, it may be useful to remark, that in holding it, Christians should take care, that they do not violate the unity of churches. The preaching of the gospel, began at one place, and, as it proceeded through the world, churches were gathered in various places, in full communion with one another. The intelligence of a new church was received with joy, and paved the way for friendly intercourse. Members of one church were members of every church to which

they were recommended, when providence called them to change their residence; and we have reason to believe, that exclusion from one church would infer exclusion from all the rest, till repentance was manifested. No doubt every church had a right to judge for itself; but it would have been a great breach of confidence, if a church had lightly reversed the discipline of another, or had even been willing to review it on the mere representation of the subject of that discipline. In most cases, at least, he would be advised, to seek reconciliation with the brethren whom he had offended. But for this mode of proceeding, discipline must have been soon brought into contempt, and the unity of the churches utterly destroyed.

In the disjointed state of things, which hath long existed in the world, Christians may often be in situations where they must protest against prevailing corruption, and begin to walk with one another in fellowship anew, according to the directions given in the holy scriptures. But when the new fellowship begins to be diffused, the progress should resemble that of the gospel at first. Every additional church should be acknowledged by those which have been previously gathered, and should acknowledge them in its turn. A friendly intercourse should be opened, and all occasions of cultivating it should be readily embraced. Hence, the propriety, and the general practice among churches, of supplying one another's wants, whether of the good things of this life, or of suitable labourers in the one vineyard of their common Lord. Hence, the friendly attendance of office-bearers from neighbouring churches to conduct the worship, and of other members to join in it, when office-bearers are ordained in a church where

they are wanted; and the desire which a church, in such circumstances, generally manifests to enjoy these visits. Hence, the happiness, which the bishop of one church feels, in having the occasional assistance of the bishop of another; and the engaging affection with which the church receives his service. Hence also, the disinterested sympathy with which a right-hearted bishop will labour, as he may have it in his power, in a church destitute of an overseer; and the gratitude, both to providence and to the instrument, with which the church will enjoy the occasional supply. Is not all this exactly as it should be? Do not the recommendations in scripture of persons who bore office in one church, mention the office, when they were going to another. Even Phoebe the deaconess at Cenchrea, is introduced to the church at Rome, as a deaconess, and not merely as a sister, Rom. xvi. 1. that the Christians, to whom she was recommended, might receive her with the greater confidence, and be more excited to assist her in whatsoever business she had need of them. Titus is introduced in a similar manner to the church at Corinth, 2 Cor. viii. 23. Tychicus is mentioned both to the Ephesians and Colossians, as a faithful minister of the Lord, Ephes. vi. 21. Col. iv. 7. Epaphras is approved of in the same way, Col. i. 7. and iv. 12. Timothy also in 1 Thess. iii. 2. And we remember no instance of an office-bearer in one church, being acknowledged only as a private member in another. It will be a poor subterfuge to say, that these references apply chiefly to evangelists, and therefore prove nothing concerning bishops. There is no proof that those who are called ministers were all evangelists. The words rendered minister and ministry are applied

in scripture to all the offices, ordinary and extraordinary, in the church of Christ*. Since, therefore, we see, that all who held an office, were recommended to other churches, not merely as Christians, but as holding their particular office, we are naturally led to conclude, that this is proper as to every office, and that, on all such occasions, there ought to be a respectful acknowledgement of the office-bearer as fit for his office, and as likely to refresh the brethren by the exercise of it, as far as circumstances permit, in whatever church he may be occasionally received. Accordingly, it has always been a custom, and a very comfortable and edifying one, to ask bishops from other churches, when such were present, to preach, and to dispense ordinances. Surely, if, in choosing the bishop, as well as in other things, what is done, agreeably to the will of Christ, by a church on earth, shall be ratified in heaven; it may well be acknowledged thus far, by other churches, in every part of the earth. No! say the advocates of the subdivision system. Bishops may be admitted to communion as members of other churches. We cannot refuse that. But they are bishops at home only. Let them keep silence here. We do not need assistance, and we will not have it, except among ourselves. What sour repulsive language is this! We are happy to say, that we "have not so learned Christ."

If it be the duty of churches to endeavour to maintain union with one another, it is also the duty of individuals to endeavour to maintain union with the church to which they belong. His private affairs, a man may

* See Macknight on Ephes. iv. 12. Note 3.

manage, as he pleases, provided he do it not in a sinful manner. But there seems to be a difference as to the general interests of the gospel, and the supply of what is wanting in churches. The fitting of men for the work of the ministry; the sending of them away from churches to which they belong, to labour in the gospel elsewhere; the going oneself from year to year on so important a business; are measures, which are so exceedingly excellent in themselves, that wherever they are pursued, we could wish to find, that the church is acknowledged, and consulted, and asked to bid the labourers, God speed!

OF THE WORSHIP OF A CHURCH.

It has been a custom in the recently formed churches in this country, for the bishop to call on brethren to pray, and to give them a general invitation to speak or exhort from a portion of scripture. This is usually done on a week day, when the meeting is not so numerously attended by strangers; and, in some of the churches, the subject of exhortation is confined to the passage of scripture, which occurs in a regular course of reading, that all the members may be prepared on it, if they please, and that the bishop may not be taken by surprise, on a subject with which he is not familiar, while, at the same time, he may feel the necessity of an immediate attempt to give further illustration, or to correct something which has been said amiss.

This custom is both comfortable and edifying, when modestly followed as a social exercise of Christian liberty. Viewing the meeting, while employed in this manner, as a fellowship society on a large scale, we have much pleasure in attending it, and should be very sorry to see it discontinued. By a fellowship society, we mean a voluntary society for worship, reading the scriptures, and religious conversation, such as is practised among many serious people in this country of all denominations. When these exercises are carried on in so large a society as a church commonly is, it is requisite that a president should be employed to keep order. Where there is a bishop, and he is present, the duty will naturally devolve upon him. This general kind of society is enjoyed by all the

members, both male and female; and is free from some disadvantages to which smaller fellowship societies, containing only portions of a church, and having no president, or overseer, are certainly liable.

It is highly probable, that in fitting out men for the ministry, and in order to discover who should be fitted out for it, the early bishops encouraged brethren to engage in prayer, and to speak from scripture, either in a more private, or more public way, as they thought them capable. Thus would individuals give proof of their abilities and improvement, by preaching in the churches, and be the more qualified to preach to the world. In a church, as in any other society, those only have a right to speak, who have the consent of the society to do it: elsewhere, any Christian may speak; and if he be not found to speak what is erroneous, or little to the purpose, churches should rather encourage, than restrain him. But, if brethren ever spoke in a church meeting, after the cessation of miraculous gifts, they did it by permission of the overseer, and under his superintendance. The exercise, which is commonly called exhorting, when agreed to by a church, ought, with their consent, to be still regulated in the same way; and the circumstances of time, place, and manner of conducting it, are, like the exercise itself, matters to be judged of entirely by Christian prudence.

This view of the practice of exhorting by the brethren at large, is by no means satisfactory to some, who have written on the subject. They conceive that exhorting is nothing less than prophesying; that all the passages of scripture where exhorting is mentioned, without express reference to office-bearers, should be

expressly understood of the brethren in general; that because exhorting is enjoined, in connection with assembling, therefore exhorting by the brethren at large, is an ordinance of Christ, to be observed at every meeting of a church; and that, because the churches meet on the Lord's day, therefore this ordinance ought to form a part of the stated exercise of the churches every Lord's day.

The difference between prophesying and exhorting, we have already attempted to explain*. A few remarks remain to be made on those scriptures, which enjoin exhortation; from which it will probably appear, that the voluntary exercises of the members at large, in a fellowship meeting, as described above, do not necessarily interfere with the ordinary public labours of the bishop.

Our first remark is, that the scriptures seem to represent public exhortation; as substantially the same with preaching and teaching. Thus, it is said of the Baptist, Luke iii. 18: "Many other things in his EXHORTATION PREACHED he unto them;" of Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost, Acts ii. 40. "And with many other words did he testify and EXHORT." We are informed, Acts xiii. 14, 15. that when Paul and his company went into the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, and sat down, it was understood as signifying a desire to speak †, for which leave was given in

* See pages 22—30.

† It was customary, in the synagogues, for any one who taught, to sit down. The congregation at large, were not accommodated with seats. Hence, the act of sitting down, attracted notice, because it intimated an intention to teach. See Matth. v. 1, 2. and xxvii. 55. Luke iv. 20. John viii. 2.

these terms, "The rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, brethren, if ye have any word of EXHORTATION for the people, say on." Here was nothing like any Jew, who thought proper, beginning to exhort. An invitation was given by the rulers, on their perceiving the ordinary signal of a desire to address the congregation; and Paul, on receiving the invitation, preached the gospel. In like manner, the work of Paul and Barnabas in revisiting several of the churches which they had planted, is expressed thus; Acts xiv. 22. "confirming the souls of the disciples, EXHORTING them to continue in the faith, and saying, that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Again, Acts xx. 2. it is said of Paul, "And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much EXHORTATION, &c." In 1 Thess. ii. 2—4. the language is very explicit. "We were bold in our God, to SPEAK unto you the gospel of God, with much contention. For our EXHORTATION was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor of guile: but as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we SPEAK, not as pleasing men, but God, who trieth our hearts." Nothing can more distinctly represent preaching, teaching, and exhortation, as substantially the same.

A second remark is, that public exhortation in churches is expressly said to have been practised by apostles and prophets, and enjoined as a duty upon both evangelists and bishops. Of apostles exhorting we have given some instances already. The following may be added. 1 Thess. iv. 1. "We beseech you, brethren, and EXHORT you by the Lord Jesus,

&c." Chap. v. 14. "Now we EXHORT you, brethren; " warn them, &c." 2 Thess. iii. 12. "Now them " that are such, we command and EXHORT by our " Lord Jesus Christ, &c." 1 Tim. ii. 1. "I EX- " HORT, therefore, that first of all, supplications, &c." Of prophets it is said, Acts xv. 32. "And Judas " and Silas, being prophets also themselves, EXHORT " ED the brethren with many words, and confirmed " them." 1 Cor. xiv. 3. "He that prophesieth " speaketh unto men to edification, and EXHORTA- " TION, and comfort." In like manner, exhortation is enjoined on evangelists. 1 Tim. iv. 13. "Till I come, " give attendance to EXHORTATION." 2 Tim. iv. 2. "EXHORT with all long-suffering and doctrine." Tit. ii. 6. "Young men likewise EXHORT to be so- ber-minded:" verse 9. "EXHORT servants to be o- bedient to their masters:" verse 15. "These things " speak, and EXHORT, and rebuke with all authority. " Let no man despise thee." As to the bishop, one reason why distinguished qualifications are to be sought in him is, that he also is called to the duty of exhort- ing. Tit. i. 9. "Holding fast the faithful word; " as he hath been taught, that he may be able by " sound doctrine, both to EXHORT, and to confute the " gainsayers."

A third remark is, that public exhortation is no where said to be the duty, or the practice, of private members, in the primitive churches. Exhortation is often spoken of in a general way, as we shall see presently; but there is no instance in which private mem- bers are distinctly enjoined to exhort, or said to have exhorted, as in the cases stated above, of apostles, pro- phets, evangelists, and bishops. If, then, it be an or-

dinance of Christ, that, besides the labours of the bishop, public exhortation shall be practised by private members of a church: it must form part of the exercise of every Lord's day; if the bishop must be silent till it be observed; it seems a reasonable question, Where is the account of the institution of this ordinance? To this question, we confess that we have never seen, and are unable to give, a satisfactory answer.

A fourth remark is, that where exhortation is spoken of in a general way, it may be fairly referred, either to the possession of miraculous gifts, or to the exercise of the church in singing the praises of God, or to the performance of the duties of the bishop, or to the daily improvement of occasional intercourse. It may be referred to the possession of miraculous gifts, in Rom. xii. 6—8. "Having then gifts, differing according to
 " the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, *let*
 " *us prophesy*, according to the proportion of faith; or
 " ministry, *let us wait on our* ministering; or he that
 " teacheth, on teaching; or, HE THAT EXHORTETH,
 " ON EXHORTATION."—A reference to gifts, though not so express, seems to be made again, in Rom. xv. 14—16. "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my
 " brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with
 " all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.
 " Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you, as putting you in mind, because of the
 " grace that is given to me of God, that I should be
 " the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, &c." When Paul spoke of gifts, in the former passage, he mentioned the distribution of them among the Roman believers. He now declares his persuasion, that they

had such a share of those gifts, as to be “able to admonish one another.” That he is referring to gifts, in this passage, will seem very probable, if we compare the language of the 14th verse, with that of 1 Cor. i. 4—7. where gifts are certainly spoken of. The words are very much the same. “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; so that ye come behind in no gift.” Now, to return to Rom. xv. while the apostle acknowledges the gifts of the Roman believers, he reminds them of his own superior gifts as an apostle, and the apostle of the Gentiles, “because of the grace that was given to him of God;” and declares, it was on this account that he had so boldly written to them.—Col. iii. 16. has been thought to refer to exhortation by the brethren, but it is evidently to such exhortations as are contained in the psalms, which the brethren call mutually to remembrance, when they sing the praises of God. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching, and admonishing one another, in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” This sentence is sometimes, indeed, pointed in such a manner, as to refer the “teaching and admonishing” to what goes before; and the “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” to the exercise of singing, which is mentioned afterwards. But the natural interpretation will be found in the parallel passage, Ephes. v. 18, 19. which ought to be translated thus; “Be filled with the Spirit: speaking to one another in psalms, and hymns, and

“ spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” Both these passages speak of an exhortation, which is given in the singing of praise; and when we examine the psalms, we find them abounding with exhortation, addressed, indeed, both to the servants of the Lord, and to mankind at large, inso-much, that singing them may be considered as an animated way of preaching the gospel.—1 Thess. iv. 18: and v. 11. have also been thought to support the same view of exhortation. The first passage seems immediately to refer to what Paul had just been saying, about those who sleep in Jesus. Having given the most consolatory information concerning them, he adds, “ Wherefore comfort (or exhort) one another WITH THESE WORDS.” Is this the institution of an ordinance? Is it not simply the improvement to be made by women, as well as men, of the particular information which he had given; while they heard it read, and rehearsed it to one another in conversation; especially when they visited brethren who had been bereaved of Christian friends, a thing peculiarly frequent in a church under persecution? The second passage is little more than a repetition of the first, after exhorting survivors to be in habitual readiness to live or die, as the Lord should call them; “ Wherefore comfort (exhort) yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.” This practice does not appear to be the giving of public exhortations by the brethren at large. Like the former, it was what the women were called to, no less than the men, and public exhortation seems to be alluded to, in the very next verse, as the distinct employment of those gifted brethren, who then conducted all the exercises

of public worship. "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." —The only other passages, which we remember to have seen brought forward on this question are Heb. iii. 12, 13. and x 24, 25. It is obvious, and seems indeed to be admitted on all hands, that the first of these refers to the daily improvement of occasional intercourse. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God, but exhort one another DAILY, WHILE IT IS CALLED TO-DAY; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." The other passage is, "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Many understand the exhorting here recommended, to be mutual encouragement, given by individual Christians to one another, to assemble stately for the observance of ordinances, notwithstanding the persecution which deterred some from the practice. Thus Newcome's translation is, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting *to it*; and so much the more, &c." But, granting that it does speak of the exercises of their assembled churches, it cannot be understood as referring to a particular ordinance, far less, as fixing the manner in which a particular ordinance should be observed; because the word "exhorting," is, in the acceptation supposed, a general term for all the exercises of social worship taken together. We know

from chap. xiii. 7, 17. that the Hebrews had persons among them, who either as apostles, gifted brethren, or bishops, had “the rule over them,”—“watched for their souls”—and “spoke to them the word of God.” We have seen that persons of these descriptions were enjoined to give public exhortations. If we allow that, in the passage in question, Paul, in a single word, alludes to the whole exercises of their assembled church; ought we not to refer this allusion to the work of those, whose duty it is known to have been, to conduct those exercises? Must we set aside the exhortation of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, in order to make way for exhortation by other brethren, who are never said in scripture to have attempted any such thing? May we even add this last sort of exhortation to that of the others; when it cannot be done, without taking the unwarrantable liberty of understanding in a particular sense, a word which is evidently used in a general one; and doing so, without support from any other more explicit portion of scripture?

From these remarks, it appears, that the exercises of church members in a fellowship meeting, have no claim to be brought forward as an ordinance, to the setting aside of any of the public labours of the bishop.

Many inconveniences must attend the practice which has been recommended. If churches shall silence the bishop, for a part of the time, in which he has been accustomed to address them on the Lord’s day, that any other members, who choose, may address them in his stead; they are not likely to be, during that time, so well taught. They must, in some de-

grec, be deprived of the choice of their teachers. They cannot tell who may choose to be their teachers. Some may rise, who had no previous intention of doing so, and of course, without any premeditation what they shall say, merely to carry on the exercise. Others, who are most ready, may be most unfit. It is allowed, indeed, that the bishop may check any one, who speaks improperly, and may admonish such as are very incapable, from again making the attempt. But much time may be occupied to little purpose, before matters can be carried this length. There can be no preventing a first attempt. In the continual accession of new members, therefore, there must be continual risk of improper attempts at exhortation. The exhorting brethren themselves, cannot be very sure when they shall have an opportunity to exhort; for no previous arrangement is proposed; while one is yet rising, another may be up before him. If any of them, then, prepare what they are to say, they must do it under the disadvantage of uncertainty, whether they shall, after all, have it in their power to speak.

These inconveniences do little harm in more private meetings; but if the practice which they accompany, be introduced at all meetings of a church, much evil may be justly dreaded. The bishop may, indeed, be tempted to encourage the plan, because it exempts him from a portion of that public labour, which he may have been in the habit of protracting, or repeating on the Lord's day, to a degree beyond his strength. But the church had better remain together for a shorter time, or meet less frequently, and occupy the time that remains, in the exercises of family and secret worship, than spend it in public, in a way little adapt-

ed to the general edification of the members, and very likely to diminish the attendance of others, by giving them just ground of offence. We have granted, that advantages may arise, from sometimes allowing brethren to pray, or to speak from scripture, in a church. Nor should we absolutely object to such liberty being given on the Lord's day, when churches are collected from distant parts of an extensive district; when they cannot meet conveniently on another day of the week; when they can overtake the exercise, without unduly shortening any of the ordinary exercises of public worship; and when they are willing to keep it in its own place. In short, if it be adopted on that day, by particular churches; as mere matter of expediency, leaving others to that liberty, respecting such arrangements, to which they are left in the word of God, we have no desire to make any objection. But when it is contended for as an ordinance, which must be observed by all churches, on the Lord's day; for which room must, at all events, be made in the order of public worship; and for want of which, a church is judged to be in a state of corruption; we hold ourselves bound to resist the scheme. It is not required by the word of God. And if we should allow it, without contradiction, to be said, that the occasional observations of private members, who profess that they come together to be taught, are as much for edification, as the stated labours of the bishop, whom they have chosen to be their teacher; we should feel ourselves guilty of a false modesty, or rather of the vilest affectation. No! instead of yielding to the stream of what seems to be popular on this question; we must remember the salutary admonition of the apostle James,

“ My brethren, be not many teachers, knowing that
 “ we shall receive greater judgment,” James iii. 1.

Another subject, connected with the worship of a church, on which it may be proper to touch, is the proposal, which has been made, to alter the time of eating the Lord’s supper, from the afternoon to the morning. It would never have occurred to us, to object to the hour of the day, at which a church may find it convenient to observe this ordinance. But since a discussion is moved on a point of this nature, it is obvious to remark, that the Jewish passover, and the ordinary meal, anciently called the supper, were eaten about three or four o’clock in the afternoon*. This then, was about the time of the day when the Lord’s supper was originally dispensed. Hence the name of the ordinance. It was probably observed afterwards, about the same time. That this was the case at Corinth, may be gathered from the name of the common meal with which they confounded it. “ This is not
 “ to eat the Lord’s supper,” saith the apostle, “ for
 “ in eating, every one taketh before other, HIS OWN
 “ SUPPER,” 1 Cor. xi. 20, 21. Now, it so happens, that the churches, who observe the Lord’s supper every Lord’s day, are generally in the habit of doing so, about the very same hour as it appears to have been observed at, in the primitive times. Surely, it is an inordinate love of alteration, which, rather than not change, proposes to change from the right to the wrong, and uses a great deal of reasoning to persuade us, that even such a change as this, must be a great improvement.

* See Ainsworth on Exod. xii. 6. and Adam’s Roman Antiquities, *Coena*.

Another subject, which has often agitated the Christian world, and has of late been revived with considerable zeal, is the actions or postures of body which may be proper in the worship of a church. Although these are incidentally mentioned in scripture, we conceive that there is no interposition of divine authority respecting them. If any Christian be of a different opinion, that Christian does not act according to his principles; because he does not yield to the authority which he acknowledges, except in one or two instances of his own choosing. In praise, the first bodily exercise, which we read of in scripture, is dancing. "Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her, with timbrels and with dances," Exod xv. 20. "David danced before the Lord with all his might," 2 Sam. vi. 14.; and he says, Psal. cl. 4. "Praise him with the timbrel and dance." We do not understand these passages as intended to signify more than a reference to what was of old customary; yet, according to the undistinguishing mode of interpretation adopted by many, we might say, that here is both precept and example of the most explicit nature, and might take it upon us to reprove our brethren, for not yielding a ready obedience. The point, however, which is insisted on at present, is, standing while we sing praise. That churches may stand during this exercise, if they please, we fully grant. But we are required to admit the duty of standing, among the articles of our creed; and if we will not do this, and act accordingly, we sometimes see individuals, in the warmth of their zeal, bearing a practical testimony against the heresy of a sitting congregation, by stand-

ing in the midst of them, during the praises of God. In these circumstances, we hold it our duty to say, what we know to be truth, that there is not the shadow of an interposition of divine authority on this subject. Israel was called to "stand up, and bless the Lord their God," Neh. ix. 5. but on reading the passage, it will be found, that this was a call to stand up at prayer. Psalms cxxxiv. 1. and cxxxv. 1—3. have been quoted as proofs, that they stood and sang the praises of God. It may be added, that they stood and performed every other part of divine service. They did so, for this good reason, that in the court of the tabernacle and temple there were no seats. These passages do not call for a particular posture in singing; they do not say, "Stand, ye who praise the Lord;" they call for singing from those who are in the habit, and in the general posture of watching and attendance. "Bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, who by night stand in the house of the Lord."—"Praise ye the Lord,—O ye servants of the Lord, ye that stand in the house of the Lord." If these words prove any thing respecting bodily attitude, they prove, that we ought to stand throughout the whole continuance of public worship. In all the New Testament, there is not a single hint, what posture was customary among the primitive Christians, in singing the praises of God, or whether any one posture was preferable to another. Standing is, indeed, the posture in which the saints are represented before the throne, Rev. vii. 9. Yes! "the great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, STAND before the throne, and before the Lamb, CLOTHED WITH WHITE ROBES, and

“PALMS IN THEIR HANDS:” a description not of primitive worship, but of future glory; an object of hope, surely not a pattern for present imitation.

If standing in praise, be pleaded for, merely on the ground of a sense of decency, we are perfectly reconciled to it. We will stand with the standers, and sit with the sitters; and sometimes we will do the one, sometimes the other. A sense of decency, is a thing entirely distinct from divine authority. With our sense of decency, we may very lawfully compare our circumstances of accommodation. When congregations could not sit, without sitting on the ground, it seems to have been common to stand, during every part of divine service. But places of worship came to be seated, that the practice of standing constantly might be discontinued. If it be decent to stand in praise, it is important that the mind be not distracted in that exercise, by the fatigue of standing. Standing in praise, is less likely to fatigue a congregation, where a change of posture is provided for, in the accompanying part of worship, by kneeling in prayer. This posture is quite as evidently scriptural as the other, although not at all insisted on at present in this country. But if the manner in which our places of worship are seated, be sustained as a reason, why we do not kneel in prayer, (and we know no other reason why we do not); our standing in prayer, is a reason equally good, why we should not always stand in praise. To do so, in a crowded congregation, and in narrow pews, during both prayer and praise, is distressing to many, who cannot be numbered among the infirm. At any rate, if a thing is urged on us, under the notion of scripture authority, when, in fact, there is no scripture autho-

erty in the case, it is of consequence for churches to assert their invaded liberty, not merely for their own sake, but for the sake of preserving the holy scriptures from that contempt, to which they must be exposed, however unintentionally, when they are applied to purposes which they were never intended to serve.

On the subject before us, all the Christians in the world, however they differ in other things, agree in this, that none of them follow all the examples in scripture. Points of universal agreement are so rare, that when they do occur, they are worthy of notice. In this point, we are happy to think our brethren in the right. We should be shocked to see worshippers dancing to their praise. Neither would it greatly delight us (though we shall not be surprised to hear that it is recommended) to see a church reclining on sofas at the Lord's supper. It might easily be shown, were it necessary, that we are not required to view such things as precedents. Now, if God desires not uniformity of worship, why should it be desired by man? How carefully should we avoid moving "foolish and untaught questions, knowing that they do gender strifes!" 2 Tim. ii. 23. We read with wonder, of the furious zeal, which fined, and imprisoned, and banished men, because they would sit, and would not kneel, at the Lord's supper. We exclaim, were not the persecutors, and the persecuted, equally conscious, that neither of these postures was the primitive one? But is the case very different, when men argue from the scriptures, to alter our faith, about sitting and standing, during the singing of praise? It is time we had done with such trifling discussions. "The hour cometh," said Jesus, "and now is, when the true

“ worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in
“ truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.
“ God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must
“ worship him in spirit and in truth,” John iv. 23,
24. “ We are the circumcision,” said Paul, “ who wor-
“ ship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus,
“ and have no confidence in the flesh,” Phil. iii. 3.

OF THE DISCIPLINE OF A CHURCH.

UNDER this head are included the admission of members, and the treatment of such as are guilty of offences. The question, respecting these particulars, which requires our attention at present, is, whether they ought to be transacted privately, or in public?

When the application, which any one has made for admission, is mentioned to a church, it never can be known, whether he will be finally received, or rejected. Whatever may be the excellence of the profession of his faith, or the strength of testimony given by two or three witnesses to his character; facts may be known to others, which shall form a solid objection to his admission, or at least require that it be delayed for the purpose of investigation. On this account, the applications for admission, are very properly mentioned, in most of our churches, after strangers have been requested to withdraw. It is not thought reasonable to publish people's names to the world, as believers of the gospel, before we know, whether we shall ourselves acknowledge them in that character.

When a person is received into a church, the fact is published, by his appearing among the brethren, when they come together in public to break bread. In the scripture accounts of people being added to the church, we have no intimation that their names were read out, or that they were received with any particular address or ceremony. All we learn is, that they were joined to the multitude of the disciples, that

is, were allowed to associate with them, as belonging to their number; met with them when they assembled for public worship, and especially when they engaged in that part of worship, which makes it necessary for disciples to form a distinct company from strangers.

When a person, who has been received into a church, behaves in such a manner as to suffer exclusion, the fact is published, by his ceasing to appear among the brethren, when they come together in public to break bread. When he is dealt with by the church, his offensive behaviour is not mentioned publicly, for the same reason, that his original application was not mentioned publicly, namely, that it cannot be known, in the first instance, to what it may amount. Facts of aggravation, or facts of extenuation may be known to some of the members, in addition to what is originally stated, although on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Much also may depend on the behaviour of the offending brother, when he is called to account. It must surely be premature to call the attention of the public to a case, before the nature of that case be ascertained.—In like manner, when he comes to be excluded, his exclusion is not mentioned publicly, because his original admission was not mentioned publicly. Agreeably to what appears to have been the primitive mode, he was received into the church, without any particular publication of his name and character, and became known to the world as a member, merely by being seen among the disciples at the table of the Lord. He is now excluded from the church, without any particular publication of his name and character, and becomes known to the world

as no member, by ceasing to be seen among the disciples at the table of the Lord. Why should a person be admitted tacitly, and be expelled by proclamation? This would not be a fair, but a partial publicity of discipline. Perhaps some churches make too great a noise about the members whom they receive; and may therefore be under a temptation to make too great a noise about those whom they put away. But the gospel does not enjoin that eager disavowal of one who has deceived us, or that clamorous vindication of ourselves from the suspicion, under which we may, for a moment, lie on his account, which is so congenial to human nature, and so common in all kinds of worldly society. If it should even be at the risk of leaving it uncertain, whether the excluded person were cut off, or had himself withdrawn, it seems advisable, that the church should preserve a silence, at once full of dignity, of meekness, and of self-denial. The interests of holiness are sufficiently provided for, by the fact of the offender's separation. If he be disposed to misrepresent their conduct towards him, they will be simple, indeed, if they appear along with him at the bar of the public.

The argument, which is sometimes used, for public discipline, stands thus. Paul ordered the incestuous person among the Corinthians to be put away, when they were gathered together. But, from what is said about the exercise of the gifts of tongues and prophecy, we find, that when they were gathered together, a stranger might come in. Their meetings were therefore open and public; and whatever is to be done in the meeting of a church, must be done in public.—This reasoning can stand only on the suppo-

sition, that what was the case during one exercise of a church, must be the case during all its exercises. But this is a supposition for which we have no authority, either in the laws of reasoning, or in any declaration of scripture. That a stranger might come in, during the exercise of spiritual gifts, is expressly mentioned, and we see a reason for it, namely, that tongues were for a sign to them that were without, and prophecy equally adapted to the conversion of strangers, and the edification of the church. During the exercise of these gifts, therefore, there can be no doubt, that the meeting was public, just as it is with us, during public worship. But that a stranger might come in when the incestuous person was put away, is not mentioned, and we see a reason against it, namely, that the measure was enjoined for the safety of the church, but had no immediate reference to those "that were without." Executing discipline publicly has been called a necessary way of exhibiting the gospel to the world. But the alleged necessity of this kind of exhibition seems to be entirely a refinement of modern speculation. We see nothing of it in scripture. The exhibition of the gospel, to the world, which is instituted there, is, "PREACH the gospel to every creature." This is an exhibition, not by the administration of discipline, but by public speaking. The Corinthian believers were to put the offender away, knowing that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." They were to "purge out, therefore, the old leaven, that they might be a new lump, even as they were unleavened. For even Christ our passover (saith the apostle) is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven, neither with the

“leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” These considerations are entirely of an internal nature. They have no application to any, except members of a church. The very account of their meeting, on the occasion, seems to imply, that none were present, besides themselves, and the great Head of the church. “For I verily as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, *concerning* him that hath so done this deed; in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the Spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus,” 1 Cor. v. 3—5. The manner too, in which the apostle concludes the discussion of the subject, shows, that he viewed the business of the church, in such cases, entirely as an internal concern. “For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth,” verses 12, 13.

The rule given by our Lord, Matth. xviii. respecting offences, is in the true spirit of that love, which “covereth all sins,” Prov. x. 12. Absolute secrecy is the first step. A limited privacy the second. The last resource is, “Tell it to the church.” Is not that a bold inference, which would interpret this last direction as of the same import with, “Proclaim it on the house tops?” Yet it must be understood as at once enjoining equal publicity with the preaching of the gospel, if all discipline is to be administered in public. We believe the fair interpretation to be, Tell it to the

church when met by themselves. There is no warrant, and there ought to be no inclination, to tell it to another living creature.

One of Paul's directions to Timothy, respecting the treatment of elders, has been sadly hackneyed on this subject, for no reason, which we can see, except that it is thought to call for public discipline. The fact, however, is, that, while it calls for discipline before the whole church, it is absolutely inconsistent with the supposition of having it in the presence of strangers. "Against an elder, receive not an accusation, except upon *the testimony of two or three witnesses.* "Them (those elders) that sin; rebuke before all, that the others also may fear. I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality," 1 Tim. v. 19—21. When Timothy was to behave towards elders, as here directed, the presence of none is supposed, except that of all the members of the church, together with that of the Head of the church, and the elect angels. The reason subjoined to the direction confirms this remark. The rebuke was to be given before all, that the others, or the rest (*οι λοιποι*), might fear. But the rest could have no cause, from such rebuke, to fear, unless, as being members of the church, they were liable, in case of transgression, to the same discipline.

We recollect no part of scripture, which hints at the presence of a stranger, during the administration of Christian discipline. The fact, that a stranger might come into the primitive churches, while the gifted brethren were prophesying, no more proves that he might

also come in, while they were administering discipline; than the fact that a stranger may come in, while we are engaged with preaching, -proves that he is also welcome to do so, while we are engaged with discipline.—In like manner, the fact that churches came together to break bread on the Lord's day, is no proof that they did not occasionally meet for other purposes on other days. When James said to Paul, "the multitude must needs come together;" it was not because of the coming of the Lord's day, (which, it is contended, is the only day, on which a church should meet, for any purpose;) but because, "they will hear (says he) that thou art come," Acts xxi. 22. As the administration of discipline is always occasional, there seems a propriety in having occasional meetings for the purpose. The supposition that "meetings for business on week days have been called "church meetings, *by way of eminency above* the meetings on the Lord's day," would hardly have occurred to any man's mind, who was not endeavouring to bring them into disrepute.

There is something in the scheme of administering discipline in public, which seems by no means congenial with the spirit of the gospel. So far from requiring us to drag every offender forward, and to exhibit him as in a theatre before the world, we find a sacred writer commending the desire of concealing a supposed culprit, whose conduct, had it been such as appearances indicated, must have been of the most flagitious nature. When Joseph suspected his wife of adultery, he was not willing to make her a public example. O what false delicacy! would some be ready to exclaim, in such a case now. What a corrupt way

of huddling up matters! How improper, to deprive the world of so edifying an exhibition of the nature of the divine law! We find, however, a very different language made use of, in the gospel according to Matthew. "Then Joseph her husband, BEING A JUST *man*, and not willing to make her a public example, "was minded to put her away privily," Matth. i. 19. We cannot but add, that it is very unpleasant, to see sinful creatures, labouring to stretch the rules of discipline, either in the interpretation or application of them, to the utmost possible degree of severity. In the case of penal laws among men, it is allowed to be an excellency of the administration, when the most lenient interpretation is followed. We see no reason why the same principle should not be admitted, in administering the laws of the church of Christ. "So "speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged "by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment "without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and "mercy rejoiceth against judgment," James ii. 12, 13. We have heard it remarked, by a person of great experience in such matters, that the most severe creditors are generally people on the brink of bankruptcy themselves. We should be sorry to see reason given for a similar remark, by the indulgence of severity of spirit among the disciples of Christ.

Those, who do not agree to administer discipline in public, are charged with attempting to conceal discipline. This is an unfounded charge. We do not unnecessarily expose the persons, who may happen to be under discipline, but we give the discipline itself all that public manifestation by its consequences, which the word of God appears to us to require.—

We are told that cases of discipline will be reported at any rate, and probably with exaggeration; that therefore it would be much better to publish them ourselves. This is really like prescribing the guillotine as a cure for a headache. Is there no difference, between using tenderness to individuals, as far as we can; and saying, to preserve you from whisperers, we shall set you on the pillory?—To say, that administering discipline privately, and on a week day, is to do it, as a secular society manages worldly business, is a very unwarrantable assertion. Who hath told us, that the churches of Christ cannot act in faith, except in public, and on one day in the week? We have had as much reason to be convinced of the faith and obedience of a Christian church, when assembled by themselves, and on a week day, as ever we expect to have, in any other circumstances. Nor does it seem presumptuous to hope, that, if a church be found to have obeyed the laws of Christ, by conscientiously applying them to every case of discipline which may have occurred; it will not be condemned for having done so, on one day of the week, rather than on another. In all that the Spirit saith to the churches, there is nothing like distinctions of this nature.

On the question respecting public discipline, we are exposed to assaults from various quarters. The vindicators of national churches boast much of the publicity of their church courts, and affect to compare our secret meetings, (as they sometimes term them,) with the hidden tyranny of the inquisition.—Were our churches political institutions, like a national church, it would certainly be proper to transact all the business of them in public, because the interests of the public,

in the country where they were established, would be involved in the measures which might be pursued. But our churches are voluntary societies, unknown among the institutions of human legislation. Their measures affect the interests of their own members alone. The presence of all, whom it may concern, is surely publicity sufficient for the prevention of tyranny, and the security of every possible privilege.

There is one case, however, in which we cheerfully allow, that strangers should be admitted into any meeting of a church. If the civil magistrate shall think it necessary for the safety of the state, either to demand admission for himself, or messengers; or to ordain that no society shall, under pretence of religion, do any thing with shut doors, we are willing to remove all jealousy of suspicious practices, by opening our doors. Our discipline contains nothing, which in itself requires concealment. However innocent ourselves, yet, in the case supposed, we should hold ourselves bound to believe, that there must be good reason, as to the country at large, to require the demanded security, for our loyalty as subjects of the state. It is one thing to admit strangers when circumstances require it: another, to do every thing purposely in their presence. A frank disclosure of our principles and conduct, for the satisfaction of the civil government, in the land in which we live, is equally distinct from an uncalled for exhibition of internal affairs to every occasional spectator, and an acknowledgement of the right of civil power, in things sacred, if it should endeavour to interfere with the administration of the laws of Christ.

OF CHARACTERISTIC HABITS AMONG MEMBERS
OF A CHURCH.

IT is a curious fact, that the members of almost every religious society may be known, by something remarkable in their appearance, manner, or language. These distinguishing features may, in a great measure, arise naturally from the mutual attachment of the society in which they exist; but they are often greatly strengthened and multiplied, by the stress which happens to be laid on things of an external nature.

Some religious societies wear a uniform dress, as precisely defined, as that of the army. Others content themselves with a general imitation of some eminent example. In many, there seems to be a continual fermentation going on, (though often gently and slowly), owing to mistakes about the doctrine of scripture on this subject. Although all may acknowledge that there is no authoritative rule for dress; yet it is very common, to see individuals endeavouring to establish the authority of their own notions on the subject, which, of course, are various, and contracted or enlarged, indulgent or austeré, according to their respective age and situation in life. At times, too, a violent ebullition takes place. We have even heard of ministers and brethren making particular articles of dress, the subject of animadversion, in their sermons and public exhortations.

Such a practice, popular and frequent as it has been among Christians of all denominations, could only have

arisen from a misapprehension of the doctrine of scripture. We have no reason to think that particular articles of dress are there prohibited. It is the pride, and vanity, and impudence of dress, which the sacred penmen condemn. See Isaiah iii. 16—26. On the contrary, they do not prescribe what Christians shall wear, but what they shall consider as their “adorn-
 “ing,” or rather the adorning of the doctrine of God our Saviour. “In like manner also, that women A-
 “DORN THEMSELVES IN MODEST APPAREL, WITH
 “SHAMEFACEDNESS AND SOBRIETY: not with broi-
 “dered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but
 “(which becometh women professing godliness) WITH
 “GOOD WORKS.” 1 Tim. ii. 9, 10. “Whose ADORN-
 “ING, let it not be that outward *adorning*, of plaiting
 “the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on
 “of apparel: but *let it be* THE HIDDEN MAN OF THE
 “HEART, in that which is not corruptible, *even the*
 “*ornament* of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the
 “sight of God of great price. For after this manner
 “in the old time, the holy women also who trusted in
 “God adorned themselves, being in subjection to their
 “own husbands; even as Sara obeyed Abraham, call-
 “ing him Lord: whose daughters ye are as long as
 “ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement,”
 1 Pet iii. 3—6. In these passages, it is not so much
 dress, as temper and conduct, which are the subjects
 of exhortation. It is true, indeed, that temper may
 be shown by dress; but the cure contains not the pro-
 hibition of particular articles, but a general caution a-
 gainst an imitation of the proud, the vain, and the las-
 civious. What! it may be said, is there not an ex-
 press disapprobation of “plaited hair,” and wearing

“gold, and pearls?” Yes; and, in the same way of interpreting, there is an express disapprobation “of putting on of apparel.” No man supposes that Peter disapproved of the use of clothes. He is understood as disapproving of expensive clothes, of “costly array,” as Paul calls it. But, expensive, is a relative term. What is expensive to one, is not so to another. It is not the high price, but the fondness of wearing what is of high price; neither is it gold and pearls, but the fondness of wearing them, that Peter condemns. It is worthy of notice, that where he gives this exhortation, he refers to the holy women in old time as a pattern. Now, there is no doubt, that they adorned themselves as the apostle here recommends. There is as little doubt, however, that their sobriety of dress did not imply the absolute refusal to wear gold. See Gen. xxiv. 22. Exod. iii. 22.

We are sensible, that very improper dispositions may be both manifested and excited by means of dress. It is, therefore, of great importance, that Christians be prudent and exemplary in this particular. Whatever people wear, and in whatever station they be, it will easily be seen, whether this be the case. In proportion as we are desirous that the utmost propriety and decency be observed; we should be desirous that all mistakes about the nature of the duty be removed; that as little food should be furnished by the homely garb to spiritual pride, as by the “costly array,” to wantonness and vanity. It may be proper to add, that no dress can be decent, which is wilfully nasty. Deep poverty may be a difficulty in the preservation of cleanliness. But it is wonderful how much even the poorest can attain, when they are really inclined

to it. Their endeavours, in this way, are health, honour, economy, and comfort. But want of cleanliness, is a fault which may be found among many, who are not poor. Many are guilty of it, who could easily afford more than all the expence, which opposite practice would require. When dirtiness is an attendant on idleness and debauchery, it is where it ought to be. But it is a most degrading notion of godliness, which supposes, that it renders people slovenly in their persons, or houses, or habits of life. The typical dispensation of Moses strongly contradicts it; and, although we have no desire to confound the literal, and the figurative, meaning of purity, we confess that we can hardly conceive, how any man can be said to respect his brethren with whom he sits in fellowship, to possess his vessel in honour, or so much as to cherish his own flesh, who is disgustingly negligent of that important quality, even in the lowest sense.

While some religious societies may be known by their dress, many more distinguish themselves by their mode of speaking. How easy is it, in many instances, to recognise the phraseology of those preachers, or writers, who were the founders of the society! Some fall insensibly into the continual use of certain terms or phrases, which they find in scripture, and which they think peculiarly suitable in the conversation of Christians. Attachment to one class of words, commonly begets antipathy to another. Because scripture words may be held sacred, other words are condemned as profane. At last, it becomes exceedingly popular, to affect nicety about language; to discover faults in words, in which they were never discovered before; to dwell upon other words, as if they alone

had the privilege of expressing things that are right; and to denounce all, who deviate from the authorised diction, as friends of corruption and error. Surely, if we must have a human form of sound words, it will be better to compose a written standard at once, that we may all subscribe, or sing, or say it, and so become orthodox beyond contradiction. That the words so employed, have been taken from scripture, is no effectual preventive of abuse. Nay, such words, when used in this manner, are liable to an abuse peculiar to themselves. Those, who attempt to find scripture terms for every thing, are sure to pervert many of them from their original application. Modern and colloquial applications are consequently affixed to them by many readers, when they meet with them in the scriptures. Hence errors far more numerous and obstinate, than those which have often brought on their adherents the denunciation of heresy.

Although these evils have not greatly prevailed among those, on whose account chiefly, these pages are written; yet as they are not wholly unknown, and as practices have been gaining ground, and attempts zealously made, which seem calculated to nourish them, we think it right to make a few remarks on the subject. Far be it from us to insinuate, that language is of no importance, and that all terms are indifferent. Many current ones, on religious subjects, are not only unscriptural, but contrary to scripture. On the other hand, many which occur in scripture, are so appropriated to scriptural truth, that it may be difficult to convey it without the use of them. There are some, however, which appear to us to be worthy of notice,

because they have become objects of undue favour, or of unmerited jealousy*.

Under the first class, we mention the words, brother, and sister. Better words, in themselves, we could not desire. O that they were more generally applicable! We cannot but feel, however, that, among some, they are used with a frequency, which indicates mistake, respecting the proper language of address among the people of God. Go into some of our churches, and you will hear, that brother —— is desired to pray; that brother —— is expected to speak; that brother —— has gone abroad to preach the gospel; that brother —— and sister —— desire the prayers of the church; and that, next Lord's day, brother —— will preach in the morning, brother —— in the afternoon, and brother —— in the evening. This phraseology of the church meeting is multiplied many thousand fold, in the private intercourse of the members. It is introduced into the forms of salutation, into the style of conversation, and of epistolary correspondence. How do you do, brother ——? hope you are well, sister ——? These are a brother and a sister of ours.—Every letter too, between members of a church, or of churches in communion with each other, is begun, and ended, with, My dear brother, or, My dear sister. Now, we are very sensible, that a member of a church is sometimes called in scripture, “a brother or a sister,” and that on one or two occasions, a phraseology, like the above, has been used. See Acts ix. 17. and xxi. 20. 1 Cor. vii. 15. Philem.

* On the abuse of scripture language, see Foster's Essays, vol. 2, Letters 3d and 4th.

7. Rom. xvi. 1. 2 John 13. An occasional imitation of it, then, is perfectly proper. But how many hundred times are members of churches mentioned in scripture, without any such epithets at all!

When those, who are accustomed to the continual use of this phraseology, meet with Christians, who use the ordinary language of address, calling one another Mr. and Mrs. or using the first name, according to the degree of familiarity, or the station which they hold in civil society; they are apt to take offence at what they suppose to be sinful conformity to the world. They are perhaps confirmed in their prejudice, by observing, that, although in the human writings which they have seen, they read of Mr. ——'s travels, Mrs. ——'s letters, or Lady ——'s poems; they see nothing of this in the bible. There it is plain Peter, James, and John; Mary, Priscilla, and Phoebe. Such persons ought to be informed, that, in these instances, there is no such difference between inspired and human compositions, as they have been led to suppose. It is true, there is a difference between the style of one country, and that of another. There is also a difference between ancient and modern style. The fashion of speaking and writing is altered, since the scriptures were completed. But as to all modes of address, they are perfectly conformable to the human compositions of the day, or country, in which they were given. When speaking of Chaldeans, the penmen of scripture give them their lordly titles, Rab-mag, Rab-shakeh, Rab-saris, and so on. The bold and upright Nehemiah had no objection to use the ordinary form of address to an eastern monarch, "Let the king live for ever," Neh. ii. 3.

Daniel used the courtly style of "My lord," in speaking to Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. iv. 19. "I am not mad," said Paul to a Roman governor, "most noble (or most excellent) Festus," Acts xxvi. 25. In like manner, Luke, to a fellow-Christian, "most excellent Theophilus," Luke i. 3. Elihu says to Job and his friends, "Let me not, I pray you, accept any man's person; neither let me give flattering titles, to men. For I know not to give flattering titles; *in so doing*, my Maker would soon take me away," Job xxxii. 21, 22. But, in these words, he does not refer to any customary forms of address. His style is not, and could not have been, plainer than that of the other speakers. He had no controversy with them about titles; he was displeased with them, because they seemed to him to be under the influence of prejudice and partiality. He, therefore, conveys to them an indirect censure, by protesting that he will deliver his sentiments with that noble freedom and honesty, which truth and the honour of God, in such a discussion, demanded. The crime, which he apprehended, would expose him to danger, could be no other than that respect to the persons of men, which would make him timid and unfaithful in the cause of God. Among the Greeks and Romans, the style of address was as simple as it could be, either among Jews, or primitive Christians. If the Bible has plain Peter, James, and John; other authors of ancient times, have plain Socrates, Plato, and Cæsar; Helen, Lucretia, and Cleopatra. In short, the usual style of civil intercourse is not the conformity to the world, which the Bible condemns. If we avoid it, we are not the better: if we use it, we are not the

worse. Some may be ready to say, if this matter be absolutely indifferent, why say any thing at all about it? We reply, what we say, is to prevent its indifference from being forgotten. The very origin of a singular mode of address proves that a difference is imagined, and its continuance must strengthen the imagination.

Under the class of words, which have become objects of unmerited jealousy, we mention the word minister, and the phrases, minister of Christ, minister of the gospel. These are not called unscriptural, or wrong in themselves; but it becomes wrong, it is said, to use them, because they are misunderstood by the world. When we recollect the strong language used by the same persons, about the impossibility of the world understanding the gospel, and the nature of a Christian church, we cannot suppose them serious in recommending to Christians the disuse of scriptural terms and phrases, merely because they may be misunderstood by the world. The true reason of their hostility to the language, which we have mentioned, is the respectability which has come to be attached to it. We scruple not to assign this reason, because, we believe, it is not denied. Too much honour, it is said, has been paid to the office of the bishop; and therefore, it seems to be concluded, that too much cannot be taken away. On the degree, or the kind of honour, which may be either given, or taken away, we mean not at present to enter. Our only remark shall be, that the objection betrays a want of attention to the nature of language. Words and phrases will always acquire, by association, a good or a bad, a reputable or an ignominious, sense;

according to the quality of the things to which they are applied. The humblest word, if used to signify what is respectable, will itself become respectable. The word minister, signifies servant, but minister of state, is an honoured appellation, by all who value the institutions of the state. In like manner, minister of Christ, or minister of the gospel, is an honoured appellation, by all who value the institutions of the gospel. Nor will any change of language be a sufficient barrier against that honour, which the Head of the church hath been pleased to bestow on all his institutions.

It was once pretended,* that, in an old English translation of the Bible, Paul, instead of "a servant," was Rom. i. 1. called "a knave, of Jesus Christ." The word knave, originally signified a boy, then like the word *puer* in Latin, a servant; and it has long since become so extremely humble (to use the softest language) that if any English translation were now to use it, instead of "minister" of the gospel, the term would not surely be objected to, as likely to occasion excessive veneration. Yet, if such a term could, in the supposed application, obtain currency at all, it would soon lose its low association, and acquire, in spite of all the efforts of controversy, a degree of respectability suited to its new situation.

Names, have, no doubt, a great influence on public opinion. But wherever a name is the sign of a reality, it depends for its meaning on that reality, not the

* See a curious account of the forgery in Lewis's history of the translations of the Bible into English, pages 46—50, of the 2d. edition.

reality on it. The offices of the Christian church will not be altered, either to the better, or to the worse, by quarrelling with the respect which men have attached to the names, by which the apostles were directed to distinguish them. Their language is at least as safe, as any that is now likely to be proposed in its stead. Disusing the phrase, minister of the gospel, will not deliver ignorant men, from any mistake, which they may entertain of the nature of the Redeemer's kingdom. On the other hand, let men learn the latter, and they will sustain no damage from the use of the former. It is equally superstitious, to dread some words as ominous, and to be attached to others, as if their sound were a charm.

CONCLUSION.

THESE remarks appear before the public under many disadvantages. Although the result of serious and deliberate investigation, they have been written in haste, and with great reluctance. If there had been any probability of a publication, to the same purpose, from another quarter, we should have most gladly declined the task. How pleasant would it have been to have undertaken a work of an opposite kind! Believing as we do, that duty requires a declaration of the sentiments, which we have stated, we have endeavoured to make it, in simplicity and godly sincerity, with a desire to be faithful, but to offend no man. We feel, however, that the situation of the churches is, at present, extremely delicate and critical; and, although blessed with many brethren whose judgment we highly value, we have, in this publication, preferred standing alone, that we alone may bear whatever blame, may be imputed to our principles. We hope they will forgive us this wrong, which has prevented us from enjoying many a needful friendly correction. On the subjects discussed, let every man judge for himself. We freely acknowledge this right in others, and we hope to retain the quiet enjoyment of it ourselves. We have made no intentional concealment of any principle; and we are willing to hear what can be said on the other side.

Although we acknowledge no rule but that of the word of God, we have avoided using the tone of divine authority. Where scripture seems to speak ex-

licitly, we profess our faith; but where the conclusion is an inference, we study to remember our proneness to error. When the matter is uncertain, we love the language of the most hesitating conjecture, better than that of decisive assertion. On these accounts some may be ready to despise views, which seem to be feebly maintained. We doubt not, however, that others will at least give them a candid examination, and will compare both them, and views which are opposite, with the holy scriptures. Many mistakes will probably be perceived in what we have advanced; yet we hope and pray, that some check may be given to the restless spirit of alteration, which has long been working among us privately, and has at last been publicly displayed in a system, which threatens to lead to continual anarchy and subdivision, till ignorance should triumph over all means of instruction, and the fellowship of saints be completely annihilated. This wild scheme will not be at once held true, because some of our views may be thought erroneous. Christians will surely feel it a duty, to consider the subject again and again; to consider not only particular measures, but their connection and tendency when combined; to consider the actual consequences of some things which have been adopted, and the probable consequences of many things which are now in contemplation; before they consent to abandon so much of what they have hitherto held and practised, in obedience to scripture, as the duty and privilege of the churches of Christ.

Nothing would we contend for, a single moment, beyond what the holy scriptures appear to sanction. We earnestly pray, that Christians may be enabled duly to distinguish the institutions of God, from the

institutions, and customs, and projects of men. Changes occasioned by a disavowal of the latter, when contrary to the former, will ever be salutary: but a departure from the former must be equally criminal and injurious. Such is the disposition of mankind to go to extremes, that some who have burst the fetters of superstition, are ready to use unwarrantable freedom with regulations of every kind. Of late, we have derived unspeakable benefit from the rejection of human standards. Since withdrawing our subscription from a confession of this nature, and requiring every one who applies for communion, to confess his faith himself; we have had a confidence in our brethren, and have studied the scriptures with a degree of liberty and comfort, which we never knew before; our situation has constantly led us to the Bible; and the doctrines, which we preach, are no longer modified by feelings of previous stipulation, but, so far as we know ourselves, are, to the best of our judgment and attainments at the time, the truth, as it is revealed in the word of God. The benefit of such a change as this, has been felt by many. Now, it need not surprise us, if the benefit of one change should sometimes occasion a predisposition to changes in general. Men are often too simple, sanguine, and hasty, to discern the difference between one scheme and another. Those, who wish to subvert the present order of the churches, are disposed to represent their new proposals, as things that follow of course, from the steps which have been already taken. Our progress, they tell us, is only partial. If we have conquered some prejudices, we should also conquer others. If we

stop where we are, we were inconsistent in having ever made any change at all. This way of talking is the more plausible, that certainly our progress in knowledge and holiness is partial. But the question is not, whether should we be willing to make progress? That nobody denies. But, whether is the path recommended, the path of progress, or of error? When we come to a place, where two roads meet, is it any proof that those, who change their course, are in the right, that there was a turn in the road before, which we took along with them, and which we are still satisfied was right? We may have been directed right through many turns and windings, but if, on that account, we become partial to them, and follow those, who take them most frequently, and with least deliberation, it will be a miracle if we do not go wrong at last. In short, there must be a limit somewhere, however difficult it may be, completely to trace it. The order of a church is not one of those subjects, on which we cannot expect adequate information till we get to heaven, or which successive generations must employ themselves gradually to explore. It is on earth that we must understand it, otherwise our knowledge will be too late. Neither can we conceive it to be of difficult attainment, where men enjoy the privilege, and know the benefit, of reading the scriptures? Is the fellowship of the saints, the immediate privilege of every believer, and is he to spend his life, in asking, what that fellowship is? The subject must be within the easy comprehension of ordinary capacities. It does not, therefore, present a boundless field of experiment and discovery to the man of speculation; and unless we be warranted to compare its sa-

ered institutions, to the momentary arrangement of the chaff, which the wind driveth away, there must be a difference between the occasional correction of manifest and flagrant abuse; and the sudden, violent, incessant, ever-varying, sweeping, dissipating, blasts of innovation.

Without pretending to much precision, on a subject, which has baffled the discriminating powers of many, we beg leave to suggest, that innovation may be distinguished from improvement, in the following cases.

First, When the confidence of a disputant exceeds the evidence, which he is able to produce. A modest reasoner is most likely to be a deliberate and an accurate reasoner. Where evidence may be had, it is seldom kept out of view, and when produced, it will speak for itself. But when arguments are built on uncandid statement; when scripture is quoted with little regard to its connection; when all conclusions, on a complex subject, are maintained with equal decision and pertinacity; when, on the failure of proof, it is declared to be needless; when objections are either bullied down, or not replied to at all; and when the principles of those who dissent, are accounted for, by the ever-ready charge of prejudice and corruption; it is to be feared, that something is wrong, in the reasoner, in the cause, or in both. “The dogmatist
 “ (says Dr. Campbell) knows nothing of degrees,
 “ either in evidence or in faith. He has properly no
 “ opinions or doubts. Every thing with him is either
 “ certainly true, or certainly false. Of this turn of
 “ mind I shall only say, that far from being an indi-
 “ cation of vigour, it is a sure indication of debility, in
 “ the intellectual powers.”

Secondly, When zeal and diligence appear, rather in the gratification of fickleness, than in the exercise of patience. If we see a man, in conversation or in writing, taking every opportunity of censuring that which exists, and of extolling that which is yet to be tried, we have reason to suspect, that the darling object of that man is alteration, and that his darling object has deprived him of candour.

One of the boldest ways of gratifying a fickle disposition, is, the urging of religious opinions and practices upon others, of the truth and propriety of which we are not thoroughly persuaded ourselves. This seems to be nothing less than attempting to make changes, in the institutions of Christ, and in the faith and obedience of his people, as mere matter of experiment, if not of amusement. We should have conceived ourselves greatly to blame, if, in the foregoing pages, we had hazarded so much as the suggestion of a bare conjecture, without a conscientious belief, in the sight of God, that, as far as light could be obtained, it really was the truth. We confess, that we are shocked at the system, which leads people to encourage, directly or indirectly, what they cannot defend, and what they will even confess that they do not decidedly and fully believe. If the question be still under deliberation, why drive the simple headlong into practices, which suppose that it is brought to the most positive determination? It must be a very heinous sin, indeed, to tamper with the minds of the people of God. We cannot do this, without tampering with the word of God. To make use of religious opinions, to serve a purpose, without believing them, is the crime for which statesmen have been so loudly condemned, in the e-

establishment of national churches; it is converting religious opinions into a political engine; nay, it is reviving the principle of pious frauds. In addressing immortal souls, respecting eternal interests, there is surely responsibility enough, in the obligation we are under, not to mislead, through culpable ignorance. How awful, then, the guilt of doing so, by availing oneself of the advantage of superior discernment!

Another illegitimate way of gratifying the love of changes, is, promoting them by means of the appearance of religious conversation. It is a duty to "avoid foolish and untaught questions" in private discourse, as well as in public preaching. What a pity, then, that private parties should be so often formed, for the very purpose of agitating them. Even when the subject may deserve attention, this does not appear to be a promising way of doing it justice. Sober religious inquiry is not likely to be most calmly and safely pursued, amidst the frivolity, the collision, the desultory illustrations, and the fascinations of superior information, address, and kind attentions of individuals, which occur in colloquial discussion. Conversation may furnish hints for future consideration; but we deprecate that plan of getting people into company, with a view to mould their minds into some new fashion, which has been so frequently effectual, among various denominations of Christians, for leading the young and inexperienced into schemes, which they had never heard, or thought, of before, which they were induced to adopt, from the impression of the moment, and from which others of their brethren could use no means to preserve them, not being aware that such an impression had been made.

When objections are made to any of these ways of unsettling the minds of Christians, we often hear an answer, which seems to be borrowed, from a mistaken view of the doctrine of providence. "Oh! it will do much good. Inconveniencies must attend all improvements. The measure is, no doubt, pretty strong, but that is necessary, when people are strongly prejudiced. The subject may be difficult. Perhaps none of us have yet arrived at the truth concerning it. But the present plan will be useful, in the mean time, for removing bigotry, and preparing us for whatever further light may be obtained." Under such language as this, may be discovered, we presume, what seems to be the distinguishing principle of the system, which we oppose. The word of God exhorts believers to steadfastness, in maintaining the doctrines, and observing the ordinances, which have been delivered to them; and calls them, in this way, to make progress in personal holiness. But the system, in question, acknowledges no difference between bigotry, or blind zeal, and the steadfastness of the faith and practice of Christians, as to what has been delivered to them. It seems to estimate men's progress, according to the degree of their dissatisfaction, or at least, scepticism, as to what is already known, because this will, of course, render them more flexible to any scheme which may yet be started. Now, we know that there is much bigotry in the world; but all firmness is not bigotry. We know that bigotry is an obstacle to improvement; but discontent and scepticism are not the cure of bigotry. A man may be a sceptic and a bigot still, for he may be filled with the blind zeal of calling every thing in question. To bring Christians into a state of

present uncertainty is a hazardous way of preparing them for future information. Men may, no doubt, be thus rendered tractable, and kept on the alert. Soldiers of fortune, having no particular attachments, and drilled into the single duty of following their leader, are ever ready to march at an hour's warning, and habit makes change not only easy, but agreeable. But this unthinking volatile character is not the picture of the improving Christian. If he is to change, it must be for the sake of an improvement, already discovered and ascertained, not for the sake of a mere peradventure, far less of a mere variety.—That the great Head of the church will make all things work together for good, to them that love him, is a most consoling truth; but surely it would be a perversion of that truth, if we should therefore do all things with equal audacity, or willingly plunge our brethren or ourselves, into any circumstances of a doubtful and dangerous nature. The efforts of infidels have been justly thought to have served the cause of Christianity. They are such, however, as no Christian could lawfully make. In like manner, we have no doubt, that He, who bringeth good out of evil, will overrule for good, those attempts which are now making, under the notion of scriptural simplicity, to level the most important scriptural institutions. But the guilt of those attempts, and their mischievous character, are, by no means altered, because the power of God will prevail in resisting their effect. Let it be observed, we are not raising the pusillanimous cry, “the church is in danger.” We are telling our brethren, that “they are in danger.”

Thirdly, When undue stress is laid on outward things. This is done, when the discourse and writings

of Christians are more occupied about plans of external arrangement, than were the discourses of our Lord, and the discourses and writings of his apostles. The disposition to make new ecclesiastical laws, has ever been a copious source of corruption in the church. Besides what may be seen in books, which are published for the purpose, this disposition frequently forms one of the most striking features in private conversation. An unpleasant case of discipline cannot occur, without occasioning some such remarks as these; “Do not you see that we are all wrong? This will never do. There must be an alteration one way or another.” And presently, every one teems with some new proposal, as if, thus, they could banish the symptoms of human depravity, and improve upon the laws of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are aware of the answer, that discussions about external arrangement are become more necessary, than in primitive times, because churches have departed from the primitive model. But what we complain of, cannot be excused by this fact. The apostles taught, not only the institutions of church-fellowship, but the precepts in general of Christian morality. They knew, that both were connected, and that the one would be violated as well as the other. Now, on which did they most insist? If purity and corruption were so immediately connected with some recent inferences, about the duty of a church, why were these never explicitly stated by the apostles? why were they not as zealously urged then as they are now? why were not Christians admonished never to neglect them? The apostles were evidently jealous of the seals of their ministry. They ex-

horted them with purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord; not to forsake the assembling of themselves together; to let brotherly love continue; to consider one another to provoke to love and to good works; to do all things without murmurings and disputings; to be diligent in every personal and relative duty; to be content, patient, and faithful unto death. But where are their exhortations, to hold fast the ordinance of exhorting on the Lord's day; the ordinance of public discipline; the ordinance of a plurality of bishops; the ordinance of observing ordinances, whether they had bishops or not? Let it not be replied, these were unnecessary, because the ordinances were already delivered, and then in force. So were the other precepts already delivered, and then in force. But the Spirit of God led them "constantly to affirm" things of the one description; and to say comparatively little about things of the other. The custom, with many now, seems to be the very reverse. Surely we ought to form the plan of our exhortations on that which appears to have been left, as an example, by the apostles of Christ.—This remark is greatly strengthened, when we consider, that the apostles not only taught the primitive churches, but predicted the corruptions of the churches in after times. Here, if outward things were of such great importance, we might expect to see great notice taken of them. It is the immorality, however, not the ritual, of corruption, which is chiefly foretold. After reading some modern publications on church government, a man may well wonder, that he does not find in scripture, some such prophecy as this; "In the

“ last days perilous times shall come, for men shall
 “ sit, when they should stand, and stand when they
 “ should kneel; they shall eat the Lord’s supper in
 “ the afternoon, and not in the forenoon; they shall
 “ administer discipline on a Friday evening, and not
 “ on the Lord’s day; they shall not attempt to act
 “ as pastors, unless they really be pastors; they shall
 “ prefer one pastor who is learned, to fifty who are un-
 “ learned; and shall treat him with a degree of re-
 “ spect and liberality, which shall be declared to be
 “ truly disagreeable, by those who are of opposite
 “ sentiments.” It so happens, however, that the
 genuine reading of the text is somewhat different.

“ In the last days perilous times shall come. For
 “ men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous,
 “ boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents,
 “ unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-
 “ breakers, false-accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers
 “ of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-mind-
 “ ed, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, hav-
 “ ing a form of godliness, but denying the power
 “ thereof: from such turn away,” 2 Tim. iii. 1—5.

We request the reader to observe, that we do not ob-
 ject to paying such an attention to external things,
 as we find paid in scripture. Whatever is there re-
 quired, let us observe and do. Let us do it accord-
 ing to the pattern, if one be given; if one is not given,
 let no man presume to impose upon us one of his own,
 but let the churches act, as they please, in the inof-
 fensive exercise of Christian liberty, according to the
 sense of decency and order, which they have received
 from God.

Fourthly, When love waxes cold, preaching ceases to interest the people, or to gather them so much as formerly, divine countenance becomes less evident, and yet men continue as sanguine as ever. With what a mixture of feelings do we bear testimony to a first love; a zeal to encourage multitudes to hear the gospel; an unceasing occupation of talents peculiarly fitted for the work of itinerant preaching; and an eminent and extensive blessing from God on the means which were used. Far be it from us to say, that things are absolutely changed. But we do fear, that they are verging towards a change. When public teaching is sometimes found to turn upon subjects of internal arrangement, which might easily be settled in a private meeting, and in which a stranger cannot be supposed to take any concern; when churches, once harmonious, become divided, from no dereliction of first principles, but from new questions, forced upon them by individuals, questions which they never dreamed of before, and which the scriptures neither propose nor decide; when church-connection is lightly formed, and as lightly abandoned; when steadiness is regarded with jealousy, and men glory in their mutability, as if it were their very righteousness; all is not well. The admonition of the Saviour has here a most important application. "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent," Rev. ii. 5.

We are sure it will grieve our brethren, when they shall come to see, how much some of their measures

have contributed to establish the supposed necessity of retaining every abuse among churches, in order to preserve their order and existence. For many a year to come, Babylon shall hush to silence and to terror, such of her children as may prove restless and inquisitive, by pointing to the dismal condition of subdivided churches.—“ If you will not lie still, and slumber in my bosom, yonder is your fate.”

THE END.

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ERRATA.

- Page 88, line 6 from bottom, dele comma, after *Prideaux*.
— 113, — 6 from top, "Let the passage be read,"
— 126, — 3, ——— for "churches," read "a church."
— 190, last line, "not with old leaven."
— 203, line 2 from bottom, "form."

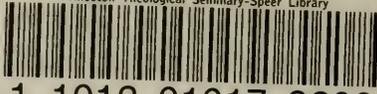
Handwritten text, possibly a signature or a list of names, enclosed in a faint circular outline. The text is illegible due to fading and blurring.

Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely a letter or document, written on aged, yellowed paper. The text is extremely faint and difficult to decipher, appearing to be a mix of letters and numbers, possibly representing a code or a very light ink impression. The writing is dense and fills most of the page.

Handwritten text at the top of the page, including the word "Guller" and other illegible characters.

Main body of handwritten text, appearing as a list or series of entries, with some lines crossed out. Includes the number "60" at the bottom left.

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