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The ecclesiastical polity of
the New Testament unfolded

New and Uniform Edition.

THE CONGREGATIONAL LECTURE,

THIRTEENTH SERIES.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL POLITY OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT UNFOLDED.

BY THE REV. DR. DAVIDSON.

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THE
ECCLESIASTICAL
POLITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT
UNFOLDED,

AND

ITS POINTS OF COINCIDENCE OR DISAGREEMENT
WITH PREVAILING SYSTEMS INDICATED.

BY SAMUEL DAVIDSON, D.D.
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HALLE, AND LL.D.

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MDCCCLIV.

“CEDAT CONSUETUDO VERITATI.”—*Augustine.*

“CONSUETUDO SINE VERITATE VETUSTAS ERRORIS EST.”—*Cyprian.*

P R E F A C E.

THERE are some phenomena in the religious world which appear to discourage a timid writer, at the present day, from attempting to discuss the subject of the following Lectures. And when these symptoms dissuading from its examination are of a cheering aspect to the pious mind, it becomes a matter for serious reflection whether the topic should be publicly agitated. But yet the Author cannot believe that the religious sects now existing are better prepared, *in reality*, to amalgamate with one another, than they were half a century ago; or that an examination of the topic is likely to impede their future incorporation, should that incorporation be deemed desirable or near. It is possible, indeed, that the narrow-minded adherent of a party may magnify the importance of belonging to his own denomination so highly as to look on all others with an evil eye, or with profound pity, as if they were deeply involved in serious error; but the man who endeavours to rise above the views of interested partisans, will treat the subject in a more liberal spirit. While indicating his own preferences, he will be careful

not to provoke the bitter recrimination of those who differ from him.

A few years ago, the Author was led to investigate the New Testament in regard to its teachings on the disputed question of Church Government. Ever since that period, which forms an important epoch in his life, the subject has been seldom absent from his thoughts. He has revolved it in his mind with an earnest desire to know it fundamentally and fully. Had he been disposed to proceed perfunctorily, he should have been satisfied with a shorter period of gestation, and consequently a shorter book; but a determination to search out every important part of the subject, prompted a slower and more cautious progress in arriving at results. If he knows himself aright he can honestly affirm, that he has sincerely endeavoured to ascertain the truth and to adduce it, irrespectively of its agreement or discordance, either with the denomination to which he belongs, or with any other. By the production now submitted to the public, he has no selfish interests to promote—no self-exalting purpose to serve. On the contrary, he expects to be blamed for it by almost every section of the universal church, because, in some minute particulars, he happens to dissent from prevalent notions.

It is necessary that the reader should distinctly remember the nature of the work undertaken, which is not to explain or defend the opinions and practices of any one denomination on the subject of ecclesiastical polity, nor to identify the polity of the New Testament with

modern Congregationalism; but to investigate the volume of inspiration with the view of unfolding its teachings, and to point out their agreement or discordance with the principles and usages of modern sects. For this purpose the Author has endeavoured to keep his leanings in perfect subservience to the divine word; and he is not aware that they have misled him in his explanations. If they have done so in any instance, it has been unconsciously. The reader is therefore entreated to recollect, that the Lecturer stands before him, not as the advocate of Congregationalism in particular, but as an humble, and he trusts an honest, inquirer into the revealed will of God. If he expects to find the thorough defender of any other system than what is sanctioned by infallible authority, he will be grievously disappointed. Hence the Writer alone is accountable for the sentiments advanced. The opinions advocated are not to be charged on the denomination to which he has the honour of belonging. They possess no *official* authority. The Lecturer is not an expositor of the prevailing sentiments held by the Congregational body. Many of his brethren would probably disagree with some of the statements. At all events, they must not be held responsible for them. Whether true or false, the burden of them rests on the shoulders of him who makes them.

It will not be out of place to remark, that the Lectures were written, in the first instance, without reference to any other book than the New Testament. The conclusions were educed from it, irrespectively of interpretations assigned by the expositors of systems. *After certain*

results had been obtained, the works of others were consulted, for the purpose of learning the modes of interpretation to which they are attached. These varying expositions were then incorporated in their proper places, with a refutation of them appended, wherever they appeared to require it.

A few notes are annexed, consisting chiefly of passages which were found to coincide with the opinions of the Writer, *after* he had himself arrived at a full conviction of the correctness of the latter. If they serve no other purpose, they may at least be useful in teaching the admirers of learned men and weighty names, that the sentiments set forth are neither novel nor frivolous. Such as look for authorities in favour of the views propounded will see that they are not wholly wanting. Had the Writer been desirous to give his book the appearance of learning, many more annotations of a similar character might have been added. But his wish was to free it as much as possible from the encumbrance of erudition, in order that every part might be perfectly clear to the apprehension of the unlearned reader. It is not meant exclusively for ministers of the Gospel, but for the intelligent and thoughtful of the people also, on whom he places large reliance in the promotion of healthful reforms.

The Author can hardly cherish the hope of being exempted from considerable animadversion. He has counted the cost of manifold censure. Truth must not be sacrificed to usage or party. It is better to comply with the

suggestions of conscience than to please men. The favour of others, gained at the expense of conceding what conscience disallows, is too dearly purchased. But he is averse to polemics. He will not hastily allow himself to be dragged into controversy. So much of misrepresentation and asperity is mixed up with it, as to render it a most unprofitable and injurious employment. Neither is it worth while to reply to persons who nibble at minute particulars or things immaterial, while they are unable or indisposed to grapple fairly and fully with the main principles inculcated. As for those who condemn without reading, or affect to be witty at the expense of another, without so much as the semblance of calm and close reasoning, or the power to prove any radical unsoundness in his production, they cannot expect to be noticed, especially when they write anonymously. Fair and manly criticism is as obvious, as it is generally acceptable to the candid interpreter of God's holy word; while the sciolist is readily detected by the magnitude of his assertions in connexion with the littleness of his performances.

The Author is glad to find, that the long-expected treatise of Dr. Wardlaw, on the subject of the church government, has just made its appearance, and he only regrets that it did not come to hand till this day, after the present work had been printed. Doubtless the topic has received luminous treatment from that able and elegant writer.

For the Index and Analysis he is indebted to two of his young friends and pupils, Mr. J. Hodgson, and Mr.

N. Hurry, who kindly relieved him of this labour, in the midst of his other pressing engagements, and whom he thus publicly thanks for their seasonable aid.

LANCASHIRE INDEPENDENT COLLEGE,
January 8th, 1848.



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THE
ECCLESIASTICAL POLITY OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT UNFOLDED.

LECTURE I.

VIEWS OF ECCLESIASTICAL POLITY ENTERTAINED BY CHRISTIANS.

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
Rev. ii. 7.

IN commencing a course of lectures on Ecclesiastical Polity, it is necessary to declare the principle or principles by which we purpose to conduct our examination of the subject. The standard of appeal must be unequivocally stated. We do not mean to inquire what is the voice of early ecclesiastical tradition. Immediately after the apostles' death, changes in the ecclesiastical practices of the early Christians were introduced, which continued to develop themselves until *the hierarchical system* was consolidated. Early tradition is vague and indefinite. Even if its testimony respecting church-government could be clearly ascertained, it could claim no authority. The obligation of Christians living in the present day to follow it, is a thing that may be freely questioned. Our standard, therefore, is not early ecclesiastical tradition, however venerable or hoary. Neither do we purpose to examine primitive practices *in conjunction with* Scripture, whether

they be taken to elucidate the New Testament, or the New Testament be regarded as shedding light on them. The inventions and usages of uninspired men should not be combined with the word of God in this form, or placed on an equality with it; because that were to assign equal authority to a Divine revelation and the opinions of fallible creatures. We will not allow the Bible either to be subordinated to early human writings, or to be placed in the same lofty position with them. Scripture alone is the authority we acknowledge. As far as tradition accords with it, our interpretations of the latter are strengthened; but early ecclesiastical sentiments or practices must not dictate what we shall follow, or regulate the mode in which the New Testament shall be understood. The Bible is, to a great extent, a self-interpreting volume. The Christian takes it by itself, and uses his best judgment in discovering its meaning.

It will thus be apparent that the field we intend to occupy does not consist of the writings of the Fathers. We leave their ponderous folios in undisturbed dignity. It is the ecclesiastical polity of *the New Testament* which we seek to develop; not the ecclesiastical polity of *the post-apostolic period*. The Fathers of the early church throw little light on the form of church-government exhibited in the apostolic age. Indeed, it may be questioned whether they do not tend to obscure and perplex it. It is certain that they cannot, in any view, be regarded as its legitimate expositors. As such, their aid must be repudiated by the impartial historian. We are now concerned with the New Testament alone. What says *that Book* on the subject of ecclesiastical polity? Is it silent respecting it? Or does it speak so vaguely that nothing plain can be collected from its utterances? Or again, does it contain sufficient directions for the regulation of social worship in all ages? In answering these questions a wide field opens up to view, which it is our intention to prosecute in the spirit of calm

inquiry, undeterred by the difficulties of the path, if haply it may be cleared from the obstructions of men who love their own systems better than truth.

In introducing a subject to the notice of the reader, it is usual to dwell on its importance, or to magnify the difficulties attending it. In the one case, writers virtually plead for an attentive hearing, on the ground that their theme demands and deserves it; in the other, they indirectly convey the impression, whether consciously or otherwise, that they are competent to discuss what they propose. In both instances, we fear that the leading desire often is, to exalt self in the estimation of others, although that idea never enters into the mind of some holy men. At the commencement of the present series of lectures, we do not purpose to enlarge on the importance, or to enhance the perplexity, of the topic. Probably all will admit that it is neither frivolous nor uninteresting; but that it demands a place in the thoughts of the intelligent Christian, however entangled it may appear in some of its parts. The views entertained by professing Christians of ecclesiastical polity may be classed under three heads.

First. Some suppose that no system of church-government is laid down in the New Testament, and that it is vain to expect a divine model to regulate the condition of all churches. They believe that the arrangements of Christian societies should be adjusted by expediency; the particular order which is suited to one country being ill adapted to another. They look at the fact, that what flourishes in one district does not succeed in another. Where the civil government is monarchical, Episcopacy or Presbytery should be established; where it is popular or republican, Independency. Not that the advocates of this sentiment would associate these forms of polity with the specified modes of human government in every instance. They have been selected simply as an illustration of the

varying polities which might be established in different circumstances. According to the hypothesis in question, no divine pattern is obligatory on Christians generally; but they are perfectly free to follow their own judgment in the matter, and to modify the government of churches, under the present dispensation, as the genius of the age or country may seem to suggest. Expediency is the only rule by which everything should be settled. The discretion or wisdom of men must mould and shape the arrangements of social worship.

Secondly. Others think that nothing is left to human discretion, but that a precise model is laid down, which we are bound to copy in every particular. They assume that the New Testament is a full and complete guide in *all* matters pertaining to the constitution and order of churches;—that Christ has left nothing indeterminate, having supplied all information that could be required on the subject;—in short, that nothing should be added to, or subtracted from, the precedents and precepts of apostolic times. They believe that the practices of the first churches are recorded in Scripture for our imitation—that they constitute an entire system adapted to all ages and circumstances, to which the churches of Christ should rigidly adhere, amid the endless vicissitudes of human society.

Thirdly. Others advocate the opinion that the New Testament was designed to exhibit a pattern of ecclesiastical organization and discipline in *outline*, not in *detail*. They maintain that certain features, forming the essential parts of a system, are traced; while minor lines are dimly shadowed, or left entirely to the judgment of Christians. The principles of church-order are clearly propounded; while the application of them is left to ordinary discretion. In filling up the outlines with traits and tints most appropriate, a wise expediency should be consulted. The platform may therefore be completed in various ways, without impairing its scripturality. It may be adapted to

the exigencies of all times, without losing its essential character ; though some inferior points of primitive arrangement be altered to render *the principles* coincident with the utilities of particular states of society.

The ideas entertained on this subject by professing Christians, at the present day, will be found to harmonize with one or other of the hypotheses now mentioned. More opinions might possibly be enumerated, were it expedient to distinguish minor shades of sentiment ; but it is sufficient for our purpose to reduce them to three classes.

Let us consider each separately.

The first opinion has many able advocates, of whom we need only mention Stillingfleet and Campbell. Those who belong to established churches often adopt it. It is an Erastian notion. That it commended itself to the Bishop of Worcester, at least in his younger days, there can be no doubt in the minds of those who read the "Irenicum," in which he says : "I conclude, then, according to this sense of *jus*, that the *Ratio regiminis Ecclesiastici* is *juris divini naturalis*, that is, that the reason of church-government is immutable, and holds in all times and places, which is the preservation of the peace and unity of the church ; but the *modus regiminis Ecclesiastici*, the particular form of that government, is *juris divini permissivi*, that both the laws of God and nature have left it to the prudence of particular churches to determine it."* The remarks of Campbell are to the same effect : he terminates a very able discussion of the primitive form of church-government, by saying : "It will be observed, by the judicious and the candid, that what has been advanced does not affect the lawfulness, or even, in certain circumstances, the expediency of the episcopal model ; it only exposes the arrogance of pretending to a *jus divinum*. I am satisfied that no form of polity can plead such an ex-

* See Note I.

clusive charter, as that phrase, in its present acceptation, is understood to imply. The claim is clearly the offspring of sectarian bigotry and ignorance. In regard to those polities which obtain at present in the different Christian sects, I own ingenuously, that I have not found one, of all that I have examined, which can be said perfectly to coincide with the model of the apostolic church. Some, indeed, are nearer, and some are more remote; but this we may say with freedom, that, if a particular form of polity had been essential to the church, it had been laid down in another manner in the sacred books. The very hypothesis is, in my opinion, repugnant to the spiritual nature of the evangelical economy. It savours grossly of the conceit, with which the Jews were intoxicated, of the Messiah's secular kingdom—a conceit with which many like-minded Christians are intoxicated still.”*

Those who look to *the diversities* of worship existing among professing Christians often fall in with the opinion in question. Had one form of church-order been set forth for general adoption, they infer that so many sincere and upright men could not have differed so widely respecting it. The Deity could not have intended to have established any one system, even in outline, from which none should be at liberty to depart, else the directions respecting it had been far clearer and less liable to be misunderstood. Surely the Author of revelation would have made it so explicit on this subject as to preclude much difference of sentiment. On that supposition, his precepts and examples must have been more luminous. Influenced by these and like considerations, many sincere individuals persuade themselves that Christ has instituted no particular form of polity for his people on earth. And, indeed, the hypothesis in question saves a world of inquiry. It precludes the necessity of laborious investigation. It is a very convenient weapon in defence of a favourite dogma. What

* Lectures on Ecclesiastical History. Lect. iv. p. 81. 8vo. London: 1834.

need is there to hunt after the principles and practices of the first Christians, when they are involved in so much obscurity, and cannot, after all, be of any moment to us? Thus many perfunctory men rest satisfied with the present view of the subject. It suits their superficiality, their dreams of union among Christians *before truth and principle have obtained due homage*, and that passive quietude of mind which is alike indisposed and unable to take a firm grasp of any theme, however important it may be to the true welfare of man. In an age of which *haste* is a prominent characteristic, *faith in the future* having become feeble, it is easy to foresee that it will obtain many votaries and bid fair to prevail. *Strong intellect*, deeply imbued with the study of the Bible in all its comprehensiveness, and keenly alive to evangelical purity, may not relish it; but an ordinary observer of sects, who is, at the same time, an ordinary reader of the Bible; a pious and peace-loving man, will always be inclined to embrace this supposed "weapon-salve for the church's wounds." It has peculiar charms for minds of a certain order. And yet it appears to us to be singularly unphilosophical, as well as fraught with injurious consequences.

We might expect, *à priori*, some regulations from the Head of the church relative to the organization and government of his people. As King, he reigns over a great multitude of obedient subjects on earth whom he has subdued unto himself by his grace; and it were anomalous in a spiritual governor to propound no laws for the guidance of his disciples in various relations connected with the advancement of his kingdom on earth. When therefore we consider the character and offices of Christ, we should expect certain rules for the proper direction of his people in their social capacity. He has shown no indifference regarding his subjects; nor has aught conducive to their welfare been neglected. Hence it is improbable that he could have manifested no concern or given no intimation

of his will respecting the nature of his kingdom on earth. The character of members belonging to his church, whether worldly or spiritual, could scarcely have been a matter of indifference to Him who shed his blood to redeem to himself a *peculiar* people, zealous of good works. If it were a trifling matter whether that kingdom should be pure or corrupt, it might be asserted that human discretion is the sole standard of polity; but the revealed character of the Redeemer and the entire genius of his religion forbid the supposition.

God gave precise and minute directions respecting his worship under the ancient dispensation. He did not leave it to be regulated by the caprice of the Jews, but jealously guarded it from their inventions. It was sacred in his eyes. He would not allow it to be profaned by additions, or to be altered by his own people. Hence a presumption arises that he would give some directions concerning it under the new dispensation. The change in his procedure would be too great—unwarranted even by the change of circumstances—if he prescribed every part of social worship in one case; but in the other gave no precept about the constitution and conduct of Christian societies.

The mode of this procedure can be satisfactorily explained by the fact that he gave *positive precepts* to the Jews, and *moral laws* to the Gentiles; but the latter do not coincide with the hypothesis which assumes that the order and discipline of churches have been left wholly undetermined.

Again, no society can exist without laws. And as every church is a society selected from the world, it could not subsist except there be fixed laws by which it is governed. Now that the wisdom of man is incompetent to frame the best regulations respecting the kingdom of Christ, is apparent from the character ascribed to him in the Scriptures, and the conduct he has pursued in times past. Prone to err, he could scarcely foresee the best forms

in which spiritual religion could be conserved and conveyed to future ages. His understanding is weak in spiritual things. He cannot perceive the full influence of rites and modes of religion on the essence of that religion. The Jewish people in ancient times, who were continually following their own devices in the service of Deity, and swerving from the rules given them by Moses, are a type of humanity under all circumstances. And then the consequences of man's deviation from the word of God in the early age of Christianity, sufficiently expose his folly when he thinks fit to pursue his own course. Antichristian errors arose. The pure worship of God degenerated. Rites and ceremonies were multiplied to such a degree as to obscure holy truth. The papacy was gradually consolidated. Disastrous results followed the abandonment of the disciplinary forms of apostolic Christianity. When these forms, admirably adapted as they were to the fresh and vigorous faith of the first Christians, gave way to others deduced from cold reason and experience, or from the written word itself by inferential processes, the practical spirit of Christianity rapidly declined. *The moral* was overpowered by *the speculative*. *The external* was enlarged and magnified; while the vital principles, to which a simple vehicle is best suited, were overburdened with human enactments. Thus a departure from primitive forms operated most injuriously in the province of religion by opening up a wide inlet for antichristian systems.

The preceding observations involve the idea that religious polity affects and influences the great doctrines of Christianity. The mode in which a church is governed will inevitably give a turn to the modes of thinking and general manners of the members. This is seen in the different existing forms of *civil* government, where a philosophic mind may frequently trace peculiarities of thought and action to the genius of the constitution under which the people exhibiting these peculiarities live. And there

is nothing to prevent an exemplification of the same fact in forms of *ecclesiastical* government. Let a Christian sect habituated to a polity of a secular nature be compared with another governed as a strictly spiritual society by spiritual laws, and the opinions of each will appear with a variety of tinge. And as *opinions* must find their corresponding expression in *conduct*, the life must necessarily be influenced by the particular form of government under which it is manifested. Is it likely then, that Christ would leave to human discretion entirely, the mode in which his churches should be governed?

But we will go farther and affirm, that erroneous sentiments frequently insinuate themselves into a church through the channel of an unscriptural constitution. The farther a particular society of professing Christians departs from an association of primitive believers in the arrangement and administration of their ecclesiastical concerns, the greater will be their temptation to recede by little and little from the apostolic standard, even in precepts pertaining to faith and conduct. It is easy to see that if perverse modes of interpretation be pursued in explaining away the incompatibility of modern regulations with those enjoined in the New Testament, there will be a tendency to transfer a similar method of exposition to the weightier statements of salvation. Errors in doctrine steal in through the medium of corrupt practices. Thus it is again improbable, that God should give no scriptural directions on the present subject. Christianity is a universal system. It was not intended for one country or age, but for all times and circumstances. Its doctrines and precepts are adapted to all people, however varied their mental habits may be. If therefore the doctrines and duties propounded in the New Testament have so general a bearing, why should all regulations regarding church order and discipline—*some* of which, at least, are

closely connected with the nature of Christianity—be considered inapplicable to all countries and ages?

If all forms are not equally fitted to promote edification, there is a presumption that the one which is best adapted to secure the great end of church-fellowship would be indicated, provided mankind could not arrive at it by the exercise of their own judgment. And that men are not competent to discover by their own unaided light, the best laws for a spiritual kingdom diverse from the kingdoms of the world, is proved by history. It is therefore consistent with the Redeemer's character as Head of the church, to indicate in what manner that church should be regulated, so as to fulfil its allotted functions on earth. It has been said, indeed, that different forms are alike calculated to advance the holiness of Messiah's subjects, one being best for one state of society and another for a different state. But the assertion is incapable of proof. We deny the truth of it. It has never been shown that the discordant forms of church government existing in various countries have been a wise arrangement of Providence; or that vital religion would not have progressed so well without them. On the contrary, a spiritual religion requires a vehicle of a spiritual character; and a diversity of spiritual vehicles, or, at least, of vehicles equally spiritual, has not been exemplified in the world. We know of none save a single one that has not secular elements in it *essentially*.

Still farther: the hypothesis is so vague as to have a virtual tendency to do away with the utility of many passages in the New Testament. Numerous instructions in that volume are superfluous to succeeding ages, except as matters of historical interest. Why should Luke or Paul have detailed the manner in which various churches were set in order, had not that order been intended for the imitation of believers to the end of the world? On that

ground we can perceive no *adequate* reason for the insertion of numerous directions to the early churches in the New Testament.

And then, those who advocate the view in question virtually abandon it in practice. It is surprising to see how anxious they are to have the apostles' countenance as far as it will agree with the particular system of polity which they adopt in practice. The conduct of the majority of Christians shows, that they conceive *some* things relative to the organization and character of churches to be determined by Divine authority, which they do not think themselves justified in deserting. They have some regard, for instance, to *the character* of the members belonging to their society, to the existence of suitable officers for the general benefit of the body, and to the observance of certain ordinances, after the example of the primitive Christians. "Because man is changeable," says Dr. Arnold, "the church is also changeable; changeable not in its object, which is for ever one and the same, but *in its means for effecting that object*; changeable in its details, because the same treatment cannot suit various diseases, various climates, various constitutional peculiarities, various external influences. The Scripture, then, which is the sole and direct authority for all the truths of the Christian religion, is not, in the same way, an authority for the constitution and rules of the Christian church; that is, it does not furnish direct authority, but *guides us only by analogy*."* Here an anxiety to limit the changeableness of the church's constitution is apparent, although the writer has adduced the fact of the church being entirely variable, with the exception of a human priesthood, on several occasions. But did Erastian writers carry out their theoretical notions, they would not trouble themselves with investigations concerning the polity followed in Scripture, or incur the

* Christian Life: its Course, &c. Introduction, p. 44. Fourth edition. 8vo. London: 1845.

hazard of misinterpreting passages, lest haply those passages should speak against them. They would disregard the New Testament entirely; justifying the system they uphold on the ground of its wise adaptation to the circumstances of society. Yet how seldom is this procedure adopted! Men who view the subject as one wholly left to human judgment, write elaborate treatises respecting the apostolic and primitive polity. Surely the fact of their so doing proves that they virtually attach *some* importance to what they find in the New Testament, as though it were desirable to have something analogous to old-fashioned usages in their own form of government.

We have said, that many who sigh for unity among Christians advocate this hypothesis. Could all be brought to look on the subject as one purely indifferent, and attend to the vitalities of religion, it is thought that divisions and schisms should be healed the more readily.

But the very opposite effect might result from the prevalence of the sentiment. Uniformity of belief and practice is ordinarily attained by a divine model, not by the absence of it. It is contrary to the constitution of the human mind to conceive that coalescence of sects, resulting from perfect harmony of belief in the latter days of Christianity, and comporting with the great increase of knowledge by which those days will be characterized, can be effected on this hypothesis. The diversity existing among evangelical Christians is too great to be done away in this method. "But if a model exists in the New Testament by which all churches ought to be regulated; if each is occupied in imitating this, they will gradually approach nearer to one another; and thus the numberless sects and parties which dishonour the religion of Jesus will be at an end."*

* A View of the Social Worship and Ordinances observed by the First Christians, &c. By J. A. Haldane. Second edition, p. 34. 12mo. Edinburgh: 1806.

These and other considerations are strong presumptions against the hypothesis that no particular form of church government is laid down in the New Testament for imitation. The injurious consequences of it may be seen in the proceedings of those who adopt it. In churches of their order, worldly and spiritual, civil and sacred elements are mixed together very frequently. They do not uniformly adhere to the exclusively spiritual character of a Christian church; but consistently deviate from the New Testament even in this particular, and corrupt the nature of true worship in consequence.

In the preceding observations it is implied, that apostles and evangelists observed one course in settling the government of the churches. The New Testament seems to sanction the idea, for it is written in 1 Cor. iv. 17, "Timotheus . . . who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach *every where in every church*;" and in 1 Cor. vii. 17, "And so ordain I *in all churches*." The position, however, is disputed by Stillingfleet, who thinks it probable that they did not observe any one fixed course in establishing churches. The grounds of this singular opinion are—First, the different state, condition, and quantity of the churches planted by the apostles. Secondly, the multitude of unfixed officers in the church at that time, who acted with authority over the church where they were resident; and, thirdly, the different customs observed in several churches as to their government, after the apostles' decease.

These grounds appear to us quite insufficient to support the superstructure built on them; and the illustration of them affords a feeble defence of that for which they are adduced.

Under the first, he adduces the fact, that a small number of believers did not require the same number of persons to teach and govern them which a large church did; and that the apostles settled church-officers with a view

to the increase of believers in some populous places. This, however, is quite consistent with the fact, that the same government belonged to all; for it is not asserted that precisely the same number of office-bearers belonged to all churches. Uniformity of organization does not involve *sameness of numbers* either in the members or officers. The latter is an *accessory* circumstance, which should not be taken into account.

It would have gone far to establish his opinion if the writer had proved another statement, viz., that in churches consisting of a small number of believers, where the probability of a large increase was not great, one single pastor, with deacons under him, was constituted by the apostles for the rule of those societies. But what proof of this position is given? Passages from Clement of Rome, Epiphanius, Clement of Alexandria, and the author commonly called Ambrosiaster, are quoted. It is superfluous to follow him into an examination of the places in question, else it might be satisfactorily shown, that the words of Clement of Rome, at least, do not support that for which they are cited. And in relation to them all, we do not allow that the Fathers succeeding the apostles are sufficient of themselves to prove the nature of apostolical practice. Their own practice varied from the apostolical; and they were, therefore, strongly inclined to transfer it to the original age of Christianity. In short, they are not generally competent witnesses of what was really apostolical. We have no assurance that they did not furnish an imperfect view, in their writings, of the apostolic form of government. We, ourselves, have the same means of discovering it which they had, viz., the New Testament. Their advantages were not superior to ours; for, though their nearness to the apostles' times is in favour of their testimony, yet other circumstances counterpoise the value of that proximity.

We are prepared to prove, from the New Testament,

that there is no example of a single pastor, with deacons under him, being constituted by the apostles for ruling a church. If there be any such instance, let it be exhibited. It is easy to reason, from the smallness of the work to be done in some places, the scarcity of suitable persons for settled rulers, and the necessity of unfixed officers for preaching abroad; but such circumstances are nugatory when brought against palpable evidence of the fact being otherwise. Besides, it is unfair to conjure up small churches in the apostolic period, for the purpose of setting one pastor over them. The established *churches* of that day were not ordinarily small; though separate *congregations*, forming *parts* of them, may have been so.

Neither does "the multitude of unfixed officers residing in some places, who managed the affairs of the church in chief during their residence," prove the position advocated by Stillingfleet. Apostles and evangelists provided that stated office-bearers should be appointed in the churches as soon as convenient; so that apostolical practice was uniformly to have fixed officers as soon as possible. It is unphilosophical to argue from the extraordinary circumstances attending the infancy of Christianity, or from the organization of churches still incomplete, against the sameness of that form of government which apostles and evangelists introduced as a permanent institution. In every point of view it is wholly improbable that the apostles themselves governed some churches, during life, without elders. They had, it is true, the care of all; but they were ever anxious to have them furnished with their own governors and teachers, not being ambitious of retaining supreme authority in their own persons.

It would be an insult to the understanding of the reflecting reader to refute the objection founded on the disagreement of Christians respecting the plan of church government laid down in the New Testament; since it applies with

equal force to all doctrines of the Bible, and would consistently lead to Deism.

But there are many who stumble at the fact, that a particular form of polity is not exhibited in a *logical, systematic method*. Such persons should recollect that the doctrines are stated in the same way. No *system* of theology is developed and arranged in due proportions. It has been left to the diligent research of Christians to collect the scattered statements, and to arrange them in their respective places, so as to form a harmonious body of doctrine. A *system* of ecclesiastical polity, logically propounded, would have been out of place. General principles and incidental allusions are all that could have been expected. The subject could not have been treated *formally*; since it would have been inappropriate to write a treatise to societies already formed, on the right mode of forming such societies. If we consider that Christians of all times are addressed in the persons of the believers to whom the epistles were originally sent, it will be apparent that incidental notices alone can be looked for, *formal treatises* being unsuitable. The wisdom of God is wiser than men. Let us beware of pronouncing the New Testament obscure or meagre in many points, lest in so doing we charge God with our own ignorance, because *we* do not see *the best* mode in which a topic should be discussed, nor the degree of systematic fulness rightly belonging to a proper description of it. Infinitely wise reasons must have dictated the method in which the Scriptures touch on church order.

After a comprehensive survey of the entire question, we cannot sympathize in the indifference with which many regard it; or assent to the vague notions they entertain about it. The character and honour of the Redeemer, the interests of His kingdom on earth, and the nature of true Christianity itself, unite to justify the expectations of those

who look for a particular polity in the New Testament; while various intimations in the word of inspiration, in connexion with the uniform consistency of apostolic precepts and proceedings in planting and training primitive societies, point to the same conclusion.

The subject it is true occupies an inferior position to Biblical *doctrine*. But it should not be undervalued or despised on that account, as if it were unworthy of serious inquiry. It is the bounden duty of every man who professes to receive the Bible as divine or authoritative, to consider all the communications it contains. If the Deity has spoken of the external arrangements of His house, it is no more than right that man should regard the intimations of His will. “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*”

Far be it from us to magnify the importance of the view we advocate, as though adherence to it were essential to salvation. We are no bigots or slaves to system. We can separate the life of religion and what is essential to it, from the external vehicle in which that vital religion is conserved and propagated. But yet there are relative degrees of importance; and it belongs to the philosophic student of the Bible to assign every topic its due place, neither over-estimating nor depreciating any. Each has its own position; and the highest wisdom is to ascertain the exact place which the Deity intended it to occupy in the intellect and affections of His obedient creatures.

In conclusion, we hesitate to agree with the latitudinarian notion that the entire matter of ecclesiastical polity has been left to the judgment or caprice of mankind, else there would be a strange deficiency in the new economy. Surely the Redeemer's care must extend farther than the advocates of this theory allow. Much of the edification and progress of God's people depends on *the mode* in which they express their united acts of adoration; as well as on

the means they employ for the promotion of purity, peace, and order among them.

II. The second hypothesis on the subject of ecclesiastical polity consists of the opposite extreme. It has been advocated by Carson, Haldane, and others. It leaves nothing to the discretion of individuals or societies, maintaining that every point has been arranged and settled by Divine wisdom: "Not only," says Carson, in his Answer to Ewing, "is there no warrant in Scripture for the interposition of human wisdom in the affairs of Christ's house—there is express proof to the contrary. Almost the whole eleventh chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians respects order. Even such things as are taught us by the light of nature itself are not left to discretion." And again: "It is highly unreasonable to suppose that God would leave the smallest regulation to the discretion of men, seeing that it has been owing to this sentiment that the Churches of Christ have been overwhelmed and lost under the heap of antichristian rubbish."*

Here the possibility of making new regulations, or changing apostolical practices, is wholly precluded. It is maintained that the precedents and precepts of apostolic men and times relating to the constitution, discipline, and management of churches, should be reckoned *a complete model* for all future times, and therefore *implicitly* copied. The light of nature is excluded by the alleged existence of a light superior to it, and superseding it in every case. But the hypothesis is untenable. While it appears to honour the word of God by exalting it to supreme authority, and holding it forth as an unchanging code in all circumstances, we cannot but regard it as derogatory to the wisdom of the Divine procedure.

Our first remark on it is its *impracticability*. It cannot

* An Answer to Mr. Ewing's Attempt towards a Statement of the Doctrine of Scripture on some Disputed Points, &c., &c. Pp. 33, 34. 12mo. Edinburgh: 1809.

be fairly carried out. It must be violated, and is *in effect* violated by every Christian society. The New Testament, for example, enjoins the duty of social public worship; but the hours of meeting, the particular localities in which religious assemblies should be held, and the sort of structures they should meet in, are not prescribed. The precise mode and order of public worship are not determined. Many other particulars might be mentioned, regarding which we shall search in vain for an inspired precept or precedent; and therefore the judgment of Christians must be allowed to determine them.

Again, it is contrary to the genius of the New Testament, which does not contain a book of Leviticus. *Formal, full, and minute* directions, are not given in it. The religion of Christ is occupied with general principles applicable to all the circumstances in which His people can be placed. Under the ancient dispensation they were treated as children in a state of pupilage; and therefore specific directions were given them on all points pertaining to faith and worship. But under the spiritual economy introduced by Christ, moral precepts are laid down, whose application to particular cases is left to the judgment of Christians. If then, nothing relating to the external order of churches be left to discretion, there is an anomaly in the mode of teaching adopted in the New Testament. There is a departure from the ordinary mode of instruction which it follows. Its characteristic peculiarity is abandoned.

Farther, the theory in question tends to deprive Christianity of that flexibility which eminently fits it for all times and circumstances. If such be *the precise form* provided for it—a form consisting of enduring, unalterable *circumstantials*, as well as *essentials*, it would not be capable of adaptation to the ever-changing manners of each successive age. On the contrary, it would appear imperfect, when viewed in connexion with the mutations and progress of society in every country. But, while minor matters are

not prescribed, there is a wise accommodation to the pressure and moulding of circumstances through which the system has been destined to pass; the substantial form continuing the same. The vehicle preserves its identity, though the pins and nails of it be different.

For these reasons, and others which will naturally suggest themselves to the reflecting mind, this hypothesis must be pronounced improbable.

III. The third opinion commends itself to our judgment as the only proper and correct view of the subject. Agreeably to it, apostolic precept and example are our ultimate appeal, but not after a mechanical fashion. We are not reduced by it to the condition of those who have nothing else left them than to follow expressly and precisely in the line of apostles and of apostolic men. We follow Scripture analogy, using our reason and discretion. We apply the general precepts to all cases that may arise; and are more attentive to the *spirit* of forms, than to their *letter*.

But objections have been urged against this hypothesis, which require to be noticed, inasmuch as they have perplexed many simple minds. Its *vague, indefinite* character—a character involving looseness of application—has been largely insisted on. It draws no clear line between broad features, and unimportant particulars. It is impossible for its advocates to say with exactness, how far apostolic precepts and practices should be followed, and *at what point* they should be deserted. “To receive whatever the Scripture contains is a clear and precise rule, capable of being reduced to practice, wherever men are favoured with revelation: but once depart from this, and we are all uncertainty; our practice cannot be in faith, and therefore cannot be acceptable to God. Rom. xiv. 23.”*

We hesitate not to express our belief that there are *the essentials* and *the circumstantial*s—the things that may not

* *Haldane*, in his *View of the Social Worship and Ordinances observed by the First Christians*, p. 13. 12mo. Edinburgh: 1806.

be accommodated to times, places, and circumstances—and those that may be so. No strict mathematical line is drawn between them, because that would be out of place in moral subjects. In distinguishing between the unchangeable and the mutable, Christian wisdom is fairly and properly exercised. Men endowed with sense, reason, and reflection, are to judge of the general features, as distinguished from the minor matters to which no importance attaches. If the objection were fairly carried out, it would militate against the important and saving doctrines of the gospel, viewed in connexion with those of minor moment; for no specific line is made between them, and Christians are left to general principles in judging of those with whom they should hold fellowship as *believers in the faith* of the gospel. Some things must be believed in order to salvation; while other doctrines have no *necessary* connexion with it, and may be either held or rejected, without detriment to individual safety before God. And yet no precise distinction between them is set forth in the Scriptures. How easy then for an objector to say, The hypothesis on which you profess to admit members to church-fellowship is vague and shadowy! You require a profession of faith in some doctrines of the Bible, but not in others. Why do you do not demand a belief in *all* the doctrines, whether they be of greater or less importance? How can you draw the line between those intimately connected with saving faith, and others of inferior moment? By what warrant do you speak of the essentials and non-essentials of vital religion?

It is farther objected that this view infringes on the sufficiency of the Scriptures. “If Christ,” says Carson, in his Reply to Brown, “has committed any such subordinate legislative authority to church rulers, then their laws, which are the result of it, become equally binding with any part of the word of God. Consequently we have duties that are not contained in Scripture; and notwithstanding all

the warnings Christ and his apostles have given us not to submit to the commandments of men, he has, in fact, established them, and made it equally duty to obey the laws of the clergy as his own. Here the Scriptures are no longer perfect; we have only an imperfect revelation of the will of our King. But everything not contained in Scripture is contrary to Scripture. For if the 'law of God is perfect,' every additional law supposes it imperfect."*

Here the reply of the great Hooker is pertinent: "I trust that to mention what the Scripture of God leaveth unto the church's discretion in some things, is not in anything to impair the honour which the church of God yieldeth to the Sacred Scripture's perfection. Wherein seeing that no more is by us maintained, than only that Scripture must needs teach the church whatsoever is in such sort necessary as hath been set down, and that it is no more disgrace for Scripture to have left a number of other things free to be ordered at the discretion of the church, than for nature to have left it to the wit of man to devise his own attire, and not to look for it as the beasts of the field have theirs."

The expression *legislation* is not fairly applicable to our view, and therefore we disclaim it. And that we impugn the sufficiency of Scripture is not true. It is a *sufficient* guide in all things pertaining to the nature and acts of God's worship; though silent as to many attendant circumstances belonging to that worship. General principles, comprehending particular cases, are enunciated. In the application of these, it is true that abuses may be introduced; but that is no valid argument against them. "Let all things be done to edifying." "Let all things be done decently and in order." The wisdom of the Christian will keep such directions in mind. He will look at the tendency of every measure that may be introduced in the

* Pp. 24, 25. 12mo. Edinburgh: 1807.

government and discipline of churches ; and should it contribute to the edifying of the society, or to its proper compactness, symmetry, and increase, he will not hesitate to adopt it as accordant with the mind of Christ. Thus in instituting and arranging all things relating to social worship, we go wherever the precepts and precedents of the New Testament point, satisfied with *hints* where no clearer insight is given, and making use of general principles virtually comprehending many particulars and furnishing free scope for the exercise of holy enlightenment and devout discretion.

Another objection to our theory is, that it prepares the way for the rejection of important doctrines. This objection resolves itself into the argument against the use of a thing from the abuse of it. Its innocuousness will appear if it be understood that we are not at liberty to deviate from the general principles ; or to fill up the outline according to our own caprice. The outline, indeed, *may be* differently completed by different Christians. In some cases alterations in the primitive model may be made to suit sentiments foreign to the spirit of true religion. Secular elements will probably be introduced. Unworthy motives will prompt the enactment of regulations impregnated with the spirit of the world. But this does not deter us from affirming that the outlines should be filled up *in a manner consistent with the general tenor of the Christian religion, the reason* of things being duly attended to, and *the essential* separated from *the accidental*. The divine platform *may be filled out* in a variety of methods all conducive to edification and promotive of order, without the addition of regulations obviously injurious to the platform itself, or without the abandonment of such as have an inherent tendency to advance spirituality.

And here the inquiry naturally arises, How is it possible to distinguish *characteristic* from *subordinate* features ; or in other words, the essential outlines of church polity

from the minor particulars not obligatory on Christians universally? On the former an enduring character is enstamped, while the latter are mutable. In the one case we are not at liberty to deviate from the Divine formula; in the other, a holy expediency judges that certain things may be laid aside; and different means employed for attaining the same end.

The following propositions are offered as a reply to the difficult question proposed.

1. Whatever is set forth with *clearness and directness*—especially in the later parts of the New Testament, when the nascent state of Christianity had passed—may be presumed to belong to *the essential* features of the Divine system. The reasonableness of this proposition will be apparent to him who reflects on the mode in which the Deity has suited his revelations to the imperfect apprehension of his creatures. The laws of his procedure and the known character of his revelation are in harmony with it. It is necessary, then, to mark the things that are plainly laid down in the New Testament, comparing them with such as are discoverable only by the aid of inferential reasoning. If there be regulations whose existence is deduced by a process of inference, and is consequently less certain than if it had been lucidly stated, it is natural to attach less importance to them, or to conclude that they do not belong to the things which were meant to be obligatory on all believers to the end of time.

The institution of bishops and deacons in every church may be taken as an example. The existence of these officers is so definitely brought before the reader's notice in various passages, that there can be little doubt of their belonging to the essential constitution and welfare of every society properly and fully constituted.

2. Another test is where the reason of the thing is not the same in two analogous cases. *There* Scripture precedent is not obligatory. "The first Christians," says Fuller,

“met in an upper room, for they had no proper places of worship. But it does not follow that we who have more convenient houses should do so. The first Christians were exhorted to ‘salute one another with a holy kiss.’ The reason was, it was the custom in the East for men in general in this manner to express their affection, and all that the apostle did was to direct that this common mode of affectionate salutation should be used in a religious way. In places where it is a common practice, it may still be used to express the strength of Christian affection; but, in a country where the practice is nearly confined to the expression of affection between the sexes, it is certainly much more liable to misconstruction and abuse. And as it was never a Divine institution, but merely a human custom applied to a religious use, where this custom has ceased, though the spirit of the precept remains, yet the form of it may lawfully be dispensed with, and Christian affection expressed in the ordinary modes of salutation.”*

3. Accidental circumstances—in other words, such as may or may not accompany an institution—may be dispensed with. Many things connected with the observance of the Lord’s supper are of this nature. It was originally celebrated with *unleavened* bread, but it is indifferent whether the bread be leavened or unleavened. So, also, the juice of the grape may be fermented or unfermented.

4. Precedents and regulations, having no inherent tendency in them to conserve and diffuse true religion, may be presumed to belong to the local and the temporary. Such was the institution of *deaconesses*, arising out of the state of society in the East. There is now no need for a similar institute; the wives of deacons, or certain female members of the church, being quite competent to transact any business that may call for female co-operation. The existence of such an order seems to have no necessary con-

* Works. Vol. iv. pp. 621, 622. 8vo. London: 1831.

nexion with the maintenance and diffusion of spiritual religion, or with the true prosperity of a church of Christ.

5. Allowance should be made for the cessation of miraculous gifts in the primitive churches. In all that relates to or is essentially connected with *them*, nothing can be viewed as a pattern for succeeding ages. Thus *gifted* brethren were allowed freely to address assemblies; but these spiritual gifts having been withdrawn, the brethren should not consider themselves warranted to speak at all times in the public assemblies, in presence of their official rulers and in opposition to their desire.

6. If it be ascertained that all the apostolic churches were not constituted or governed *exactly* alike, the points in which they differed from one another must be of no importance or interest to Christians in these days. The features in which they were similar should be retained, if no other circumstance indicate their mutability; but the particulars in which they vary may be freely discarded.

We are not prepared to say, that all the apostolic churches were constituted or ruled *precisely* in the same manner. Perhaps the church at Jerusalem differed in several smaller points from the church at Antioch. But there is no ground for supposing that they were not *essentially* alike. There was *substantial* though not perhaps *minute* resemblance.

These propositions may assist the inquirer in ascertaining the general platform of church-government, or those features which seem to be of universal obligation, amid details of a mutable nature. Ingenious or metaphysical men may easily perplex themselves and others about the separating line, and dwell on the alleged vagueness of the subject with abundance of illustration; but the humble, anxious inquirer, who seeks for truth alone, with singleness of heart, will find little difficulty in perceiving his path, and filling up the outline, furnished by Scripture,

with details best harmonizing with the right end of Christian churches. Guided by the wisdom that comes from above, he will avoid incongruities by keeping as near the divine model as a due allowance for difference of times, manners, and countries, will allow. He will not idly seek for an express and positive precept respecting every particular; but rather bear in mind the apostolic injunction, "Let all things be done decently and in order."

That the ordinances delivered by Paul to the churches were uniformly the same, and considered of importance by him, may be inferred, not only from his own words, expressive of their sameness, but by his praising such as adhered to them; while it is sufficiently plain that the mind of Christ is declared in the practice of the apostles and their assistants, in the organization of the early churches, and the directions given for their right government.

Let the considerations formerly adduced in favour of the existence and obligatory character of an ecclesiastical polity as *divine*, be taken in connexion with the particular hypothesis we have been advocating, and it will not perhaps be thought unreasonable to maintain, that a departure from principles and practices uniformly followed in the erection, worship, and discipline of the apostolic churches, is unwarranted. If these early precedents were not meant for the imitation of succeeding times, many details have *the appearance* if not *the reality* of being superfluous. The space occupied in the canon of the New Testament might, as far as we can see, have been better filled than with the copious instructions given to Timothy and Titus relative to officers and churches. It is hazardous to neglect the use that might be served by the narrative of certain facts in the Acts of the Apostles, and by various counsels addressed to ministers and churches, on the ground of their obsolescence.

Let it never be forgotten, that many things are brought

out *incidentally*, not *formally*; and that a *general* pattern is all that can be reasonably pleaded for. But while the outlines alone can be collected, agreeably to which all details should be fitly framed in subservience to the increase of righteousness, we cannot suppose that even *they* were intended to be temporary and mutable. On the contrary, they appear to be the guiding, essential features of churches to the end of the world. They indicate the Master's will concerning the order of His house; and we prefer to have a chart once employed with success, when Christianity sprang forward from its infancy to its strength with amazing celerity, to those ingenious expedients which have stunted its growth since the apostles' decease. "If we find any direction or act of Christ, or his apostles, respecting the government of the church, why are we not to regard it as expressing his mind or the mind of his inspired apostles, as to the proper manner of administering our ecclesiastical affairs? And why is it not an expression of the Divine will as obligatory on us relative to this subject, as to any other? How can we feel ourselves at liberty to disregard the precepts or the example of our infallible guides in this case, more than in any other? If, in regard to any of the particular forms of proceeding in church-government, we are left without any definite instruction from the word of God, we are so far at liberty, yea, we are under obligation, to make a proper use of our own judgment and discretion. In the case supposed, (and I think such cases really occur,) it is manifestly the will of God that we should proceed according to our conviction of what is proper and expedient. But if we find general principles of ecclesiastical government established in the word of God, those principles are to govern us. They constitute what we may call *the Constitution of Church Government.*"*

Some minds in the present day rest too much on forms

* Lectures on Church Government. By Dr. Leonard Woods, pp. 9, 10. 12mo. New York: 1844.

of ecclesiastical government, as if one were the exclusive channel through which grace is imparted. The episcopal polity has been so exalted by several of its advocates. But *the spirit* of religion is the chief thing demanded by Christ. Yet we cannot avoid thinking that there is an opposite danger, that of disregarding forms of government as things of little importance, to be constructed or taken down by the mind of Christians as may appear best fitted to promote their individual edification, and to harmonize with the state of society they live in. We are fully convinced that this is an erroneous idea. Even those who entertain it are reluctant to say that everything is changeable. Most of them adhere to *the spiritual nature of a Christian community*, maintaining that none except such as give evidence of their religious knowledge, and their obedience to Christ, should properly belong to it. But, then, they aver that the way in which it is governed may be freely altered—an assertion too latitudinarian to be correct, at least in the sense in which it is propounded. There may indeed be slight variations in the mode of ruling a Christian church which affect not the fundamental principles of its constitution; but alterations having an unavoidable and necessary influence on the very nature of the society, so as to change that nature sooner or later, are reprehensible. Here we contend for immutability. It is of little consequence, for example, whether the college of elders belonging to a church endeavour to preserve their parity by labouring in different departments of the ministerial work allotted to each, every one presiding in turn in matters of common concernment to the entire body; or whether one person be invested with perpetual presidency by a voluntary arrangement on the part of all. Either method may be adopted without infringing the spirituality and independence of the society. But it is *not* a matter of indifference whether the government of the church be vested in men not elected by the members themselves; because it is

possible that they may be unfit to edify and rule the church over which they are appointed. The choice of pastors should not rest with those whose best interests are not involved in that choice, but solely with the persons whose instruction calls for the election; else the growth of the members will be frequently retarded, and corruption introduced into their midst. Neither is it a matter of indifference whether the government of the church be monarchical or republican. The vesting of absolute authority in one man over a church, be it great or small, without accountability to all the constituents of it, is too great a modification of the primitive form to be allowed. While, therefore, we can go a little way with Neander in affirming, that "under the guidance of the Spirit of God, the apostles gave the church this particular organization, which, while it was best adapted to the circumstances and relations of the church at that time, was also best suited to the extension of the churches in their peculiar condition, and for the development of the inward principles of their communion. But forms may change with every change of circumstances. . . . Whenever at a later period, also, any form of church-government has arisen out of a series of events according to the direction of Divine Providence, and is organized and governed with regard to the Lord's will, he may be said himself to have established it, and to operate through it by his Spirit, without which nothing pertaining to the church can prosper;*—we cannot approve of the view to the extent advocated by the learned historian. Agreeably to his sentiments, the Episcopal, the Presbyterian, and the Congregationalist polities, may all be divine in important features. But there must be authority for the divinity of these discordant modes of ecclesiastical government, ere they can claim a heavenly sanction. One form, viz., that which apostles, acting under

* Introduction to Coleman's Church without a Prelate. London edition, pp. 5, 6.

the immediate guidance of Christ, gave to the early churches, has a just title to be considered divine; but systems involving material deviation from that primitive one cannot be placed on the same eminence, without *an express warrant* for their heavenly origin. Good men with pious purposes may frame them; but the piety of the constructors does not argue the divinity of their schemes. Simple, therefore, as the original constitution of the church was, and popular as the mode of its government is admitted to have been, in perfect adaptation to the civil government of the Romans and the peculiar state of society, it is arbitrary to aver that other forms, different in genius and spirit, may be advantageously or innocently substituted in its stead. Manners and customs are perpetually changing; civil governments present great diversities in different lands; modes of life are more or less artificial throughout Christendom; and yet, while Christ's kingdom is *not of the world*, it is wiser to follow the approved principles of the primitive age in the erection, government, and discipline of churches, than to accommodate our procedure in this respect to those shifting circumstances around us in which pure religion has little sympathy.

The church is not bound to a certain system of government solely by its expediency to fulfil the objects of her mission, or exclusively by the force of enactment. It is by representing the one or the other of these as the first principle of church government, that the entire subject has been perplexed. The two have been set in opposition to each other; some contending for the one, others maintaining the other. We cannot avoid thinking that the advocates of both are injudicious in contrasting them, or at least in the one-sided view they take of each separately. Both should be combined. They are not antagonistic. They are virtually identical. Christ intended that a certain constitution and government should belong to his churches, because that constitution and government are the best for

accomplishing their mission. Here expediency and the will of God coincide. He willed certain ordinances because he saw their eternal adaptation. The great stumbling block to some is the prominence of expediency in the original appointments. Ordinances they observe to have been made to meet emergencies. And they were continued not because *a statute* made them obligatory, but because they fulfilled the object for which they were called into existence. Now we are ready to admit that the sense and sagacity of spiritual men in the infancy of Christianity led them to adopt means for attaining the great ends contemplated by every church of Christ. Thus far it is in things spiritual as in things natural. The fitness of means to accomplish certain purposes was perceived in the exercise of a sound spiritual discretion. God sanctioned and blessed the means adopted in such circumstances, teaching us thereby that they were adequate to the time and season. But then it is argued that, unless there be a positive enactment rendering the same means imperative at all times, they may be laid aside in other circumstances by the exercise of a sound discretion also. Experience may prove their inapplicability to states and conditions of society wholly different from those existing when they were originally introduced. Even the express divine authority of a constitution at the season and in the place of its introduction, is said to constitute of itself *no* authority, divine or human, for that constitution abiding in the actual state of things.* Here we dissent. We fear that the writer to whom we allude, and others of like philosophical spirit, are misled by *the mode* in which primitive regulations are described as originating, and the absence of their being propounded as *law*. But there is surely no necessity for the form of *law*. Can we limit the Deity to *a certain mode* of expressing his will regarding the perpetuity of the

* See a Sermon entitled the "First Principle of Church Government." By A. J. Scott, M.A., p. 51. 8vo. London: 1845.

churches' organization? The Christian system is not characterized by the peculiarity which would require positive precepts in matters of church order; and it is therefore unreasonable to make the absence of the *statutory* characteristic, a ground for casting off the obligation of primitive precedents.

There is no incompatibility between a true expediency and an unalterable constitution. There are things *always* expedient. It is possible to conceive of a mode of government the best under every state of society. The constitution of the first churches was adopted because it seemed the best fitted in the eye of common sense to promote the great ends of such societies, and the Deity sanctioned the means so suggested; but how shall the wisdom of succeeding churches know when these means are no longer applicable? How shall it fall on other plans which Heaven may likewise bless as conducing to the same ends in other circumstances? In the former case the Divine will is clear, because inspired men were present, following certain rules; the experience of apostles and apostolic men proved their utility: but how shall the Divine will be ascertained in the latter case? The wisdom inherent in the majority of primitive appointments—indeed, in all which we regard as unalterable—is a wisdom proceeding from the Holy Spirit in a more direct and unmistakable way than the wisdom now resident in spiritual men; for apostles suggested what they should be precisely, in the circumstances that called for them. The early Christians, with all the extraordinary gifts they possessed, would not probably have been able of themselves to employ so good an organization. Thus other times are destitute of an unerring intuition which belonged to the primitive period. It is true that common sense, natural sagacity, and experience, are in the churches of Christ now—they have spiritual men for spiritual work—to mould spiritual organizations, to impart fresh forms to social religion; but the frail and

fallible element mingles with all in far greater proportion than formerly, when, in the youthful freshness of Christianity apostles gifted with unerring wisdom set societies in order.

With the full perception of this difference between the churches of apostolic and of succeeding times, let it be supposed that the latter agree to lay aside ancient forms, and to assume others deemed more befitting, the question still recurs, How shall it be known whether the Deity sanctions the change? The answer probably will be: By the fruits resulting from it. The fitness of the new organization can only be tested by the consequences with which it is attended. In this view experience has ever contradicted the theory. The history of Christianity in the world for eighteen hundred years, exhibits no exemplification of its justness. Facts hitherto have not realized it. That it is capable of realization is possible;—but as yet it is a mere theory which has failed as far as it has been brought into action. Radical changes in the original organization and government of churches have contributed more to their secularization than to the work of God, for doing which on earth they primarily and properly exist. Thus we bring the question out of the region of shadow, and reduce it to one of actual history. We ask the ingenious advocate of expediency alone to show the favourable aspect of history towards it. During the last eighteen hundred years, have the progress and consequences of events indicated the probability of its truth? Has human wisdom been so wise as to be able to metamorphose the entire form of churches, to the blessed increase of true righteousness?

Let then the usefulness of a system be recognized as its authority *in the manner* in which God recognized the institution of judges appointed to assist Moses; or as the schools of the prophets, which He amply blessed; or as the synagogue, owned and hallowed by Jesus, in the

character of a religious assembly; and we shall accept that system as an emanation from the power of the Spirit who still breathes into every true church the life that finds expression for itself in appropriate forms.* But where shall we find expediency so sanctioned in churches that have cast off the ordinances of apostolic times? Where are the pure churches that have largely departed from the simplicity of early forms of worship? Where are the societies that have most signally contributed to make man *one with God*? Are we to look for them in churches established by law? Certainly not. Where are those who, with all the appliances of evangelical doctrine, have failed to realize the great ends of their mission in deviating from the platform of discipline adopted in apostolic times? May we not suspect that the truth which is in them has been obscured and straitened by the altered forms assumed? May we not attribute their failure wholly, or in part, to their want of wisdom in not adhering to ancient, well-tryed regulations?

It ought to satisfy even the philosophic mind that the light of nature in man is not mechanically restrained by the declaration of certain principles pertaining to the order of religious societies, which are indicated in a mode so incidental and unstatutory-like, that common sense has full scope in educing them, in judging of their application to individual cases; in modifying, altering, or adding whatever may be needful, so as to construct a *system* out of the essential lines revealed in Scripture. *The nature* of the acts to which modes and ceremonies are applied, with the subservience of all forms to general edification, will afford exercise to human discretion in receiving or rejecting such additions as may be suggested for adoption. Here there is nothing stiff or mechanical. There are an unchangeable foundation and general directions for rearing the superstructure required by it. The vital energy

* See Scott's Sermon on the First Principle of Church Government.

and spiritual wisdom of the church in completing her own regulations are not unduly straitened. They have sufficient freedom of action. No *manacles* are put on them.

We need not stop to show that the office of the ministry in the church is of divine appointment. The fact is unquestionable. Let the reader who wishes to satisfy himself of it, only turn to the words of Paul in the Epistle to the Ephesians (iv. 11, 12): "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." These words properly understood afford an ample warrant for the perpetuity of gospel ministers. *Christ gave gifts to men for fitting the saints for the work of the ministry, in order to the edification of his body.* Gifts are distributed among the saints that those on whom they are bestowed may be qualified for the work of the ministry; each one for that peculiar service in the church to which he is best adapted. As long therefore as the church needs to be built up, so long are persons necessary for the ministry. Hence the perpetuity of the office is coincident with the perpetuity of the evangelical state.

The same apostle, in the Second Epistle to Timothy, writes—"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." The perpetuation of office implies the continuance of churches; and in the book of Revelation, where our Lord speaks from heaven to various societies in the state in which they had been organized by apostles, or their assistants, he addresses them as though they should strive to keep themselves as pure as they had been at first. No intimation is given of the desirableness of a change in their management and discipline as occasion might require; while the alterations that have receded farthest from early simplicity have proved detrimental to the advancement of genuine religion in the

world. The speedy defections from the primitive pattern did not operate beneficially. Hierarchism and formalism choked the inward vigour of the church's essential principles.

We now proceed to inquire, whether the constitution of the primitive churches was modelled after the Jewish synagogues. Since the time of Grotius, and especially of Vitringa, whose work is the most elaborate on the subject, the affirmative has been generally maintained. The great majority of learned names are ranged on that side of the question; because the Dutch theologian is supposed to have *demonstrated* the fact, as far as it is capable of demonstration. It may therefore be deemed a hazardous thing to object to an hypothesis supported by the weight of so many writers. Yet we are free to confess, that it does not commend itself to our judgment, either as probable or certain. Plausible and natural as it may appear to many, there is ground for hesitation. It is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain the condition and form of the Jewish synagogue in the time of Christ. Those who have tried to describe it, can go no higher for definite information, than to writers of the second century; Philo and Josephus furnishing very meagre notices; while authors belonging to the third, fourth, eighth, and ninth, even Moses Maimonides in the twelfth, are appealed to. All these are too recent to be of much weight, or entitled to implicit credit. Jewish writers of a comparatively late period, were scarcely competent to give an accurate account of the synagogue service and government in the time of Christ, especially as they were accustomed to transfer later customs to much earlier times. Doubtless the mode of worship in the synagogue was considerably changed after the Jewish polity became extinct. It is also generally admitted that the Jews borrowed, it may be unconsciously, several things from the practice of Christians, particularly of Christian apostates. That uncertainty attaches to the

sources whence our knowledge of the synagogue has been derived is apparent from the fact, that Vitranga and Light-foot differ in their opinions on several important points of its constitution; that the former is compelled to resort to conjecture in not a few cases, for the purpose of making out an analogy; and that occasional assertions are made, virtually amounting to a concession of the untractableness of the argument undertaken.

The entire hypothesis seems to us unsupported by proof. No hint or allusion in its favour, appears in the New Testament. All that Stillingfleet or Whately adduces as arguments on its behalf, simply amounts to this, that *the thing may have been*. But *whether it was so in point of fact*, has not been shown. Even the former, with all his ability, has been able to say nothing of weight on that side of the question. There is, in truth, an absolute lack of evidence; and it is therefore surprising how the point has been taken for granted with quiet unhesitatingness by modern authors. Doubtless there is a general similarity between the synagogue and the Christian church. But all assemblies who meet for the worship of God, and possess a copy of his revealed will, will unavoidably follow several usages that are alike. The light of nature leads them to do so. We need not say that this is a different thing from the one being an express copy of the other.

A few examples will serve to verify these general statements. And here it will not be necessary to go farther than the two learned Hebraists already named. Vitranga in particular has brought an amount of learning to the question truly wonderful, though it might perhaps have been better employed.

Si Pergama dextra defendi possent,
Etiam hac defensa fuissent.

This writer lays down three types of the government of the synagogue. One is *monarchical*; but this he rejects as

the pattern of the Christian church. The second is also discarded; but the third, which is *oligarchical*, is fixed on. Here it is easy to see that his previous ideas of the constitution of Christian societies led him to choose out of the varying forms of synagogue organization, the particular one that best accorded with his own sentiments. Lightfoot, however, seems to have had a different type in his eye; and hence arises mainly the collision of opinion between them.

Lightfoot compares the *chazan* of the synagogue with the *ἐπίσκοπος* or *overseer*; whereas Vitranga contends that he is analogous to the *διάκονος* or *deacon*. According to the latter, the term *chazan* is never used in the writings of the Hebrews as a title of honour, but uniformly as one of ministry, and for the most part, of ministry of the lowest order. But this is inconsistent with a passage in Elias Levita which says, that the *chazan* presided over the assembly in the public prayers, and was so called from the idea of *seeing*, because it was his duty to see how the lessons were read, and whom he should call forth to read. Thus it would appear from Elias Levita that the *chazan's* office was not an inferior one, but almost equivalent to that of *elder*.

Farther, *sheliach tsibbur*, "the angel of the church," is identified by Lightfoot with *the bishop* and *the angel of the church* in the Apocalypse; but Vitranga, not being an Episcopalian, dissents from the former position. Yet many ancient authorities seem to support Lightfoot in identifying the *chazan* and the *sheliach tsibbur*; so that Vitranga is obliged to admit, that the terms are used interchangeably in Jewish writers, though he tries to prove a wide distinction between them. Again, Lightfoot asserts that there were three deacons or almoners, on whom devolved the care of the poor, called *parnasin* or *pastors*; but Vitranga thinks that the appellation was *general*, meaning pastor or

ruler—a learned man—who governed and taught in the synagogue.

It is by no means clear that the people in the synagogues appointed their own officers to rule over them, notwithstanding the laboured attempt of Vitringa to prove it; or that the ruler of the synagogue was only *primus inter pares*, holding no official rank above the college of elders. Other specimens of the diversity of opinion between Lightfoot and Vitringa might be presented. Indeed the confusion pervading many parts of the latter's work,—a confusion produced in instances not a few by the attempt to carry out his system of analogy, may lead the reflecting reader to hesitate and pause, until the real constitution and form of the synagogue, in the apostles' time, with its leading and subordinate office-bearers, after which the Christian church is said to have been modelled, be definitely settled. Till then, we doubt whether a fixed form belonged to it. Great mutability seems to have characterized it.

We have said that *conjecture* has often been resorted to for the purpose of helping analogies. On this point Mosheim has appositely referred the readers of Vitringa to the chapter on the customs of the early Christians in their houses of worship praying towards the east, which the Dutch theologian assumes to have been taken from the Jews; though the fact is more probable that the latter turned towards the west. Nothing in the shape of argument is employed to prove the derivation. The learned writer merely exercises his ingenuity.

When anything becomes unmanageable in his hands, he reminds his readers that the usages of the ancient churches were not uniform; or, where the traces of analogy are feeble, he avers that there was a considerable modification of synagogue forms to suit the state of believers under the New Testament. The variation of syna-

gogue usages on the one hand, and those of the early Christians on the other, are very serviceable to his purpose.*

In short, the clear and indisputable resemblance of the two things compared, consists of a few features so general as to be suggested by the light of nature and the ordinary rules of Scripture, both to the Jews under the ancient, and to Christians under the modern economy. The peculiarities of Christian societies, while they are accordant with common sense, must yet be traced to the apostles acting under infallible superintendence. We do not say, with Owen, that it is dishonourable to the apostles and the Spirit of Christ in them, to think or say that in such things they took their pattern from the Jews; but this we are bold to affirm, that the case has not been made out. One thing, and one only, seems to have been borrowed from the Jews, viz., the title *elders*, *πρεσβύτεροι*, corresponding to the Hebrew *זְקֵנִים*. This title was employed in the Jewish-Christian churches; while *bishop*, *ἐπίσκοπος*, was adopted in the Gentile communities. It would be out of place to enter more fully into the details of the present question. The result of our investigation has been stated generally; a result by which we are constrained to abide, till better proof of the opposite be presented.

* See Note II.

LECTURE II.

THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF A SCRIPTURAL CHURCH.

“Paul unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.”—1 COR. i. 1, 2.

MAN is a social being. He has not been created for himself, or sent into the world as a child of solitude. His nature prompts him to hold intercourse with his fellows. There is a strong inclination within him to act with others. Hence masses of human beings congregate, bringing themselves under common obligations for the accomplishment of certain objects. The social propensity discovers itself so early and with so much uniformity in man, that he cannot have been designed for solitariness by the Author of his being, but for the active duties which bring him into contact with those who bear the same image with himself. Placed in a world peopled with beings like himself, one family, owning a common Parent, is formed of all.

But he is a *religious* as well as a *social* being. He has some apprehension of a superior Intelligence to whom he owes allegiance. The light within him teaches him that there is a God presiding over the world, whose favour it becomes him to secure. Endowed with certain capacities of perception and feeling, he is necessarily disposed to offer reverence to a higher Existence. This appears in the savage as well as the civilized state of humanity; for the idea of a God arises very early in the mind, and is never entirely dislodged from it.

Thus the foundation of social religious worship lies in

the nature of man. It is the dictate of his intellectual and moral constitution to render religious homage to the Supreme Being, not merely in the solitude of his own meditations, but in the company of his fellow-creatures. The susceptibilities bestowed on him impel him to manifest to others *and in union with them the religious sociability* of his nature; just as he exhibits his energies in *the civil* affairs of life, in the society of his fellow-men. There is no reason why he should act in concert with others in the one case, and not in the other. He finds it conducive to his interest to commune with those around him in *all* concerns about which his moral nature awakens solicitude. Numbers concentrate their energies and efforts in the pursuit of objects immediately connected with their temporal comfort. They meet together and consult how they may increase their advantages in the present life. And why should they not also unite and evince equal carefulness in the business of religion? Are they not prompted to do so by the religious and social tendencies of their nature? Reason suggests that they will reap advantages by combining their efforts. Accordingly they *do* assemble, and present homage together to the Great Creator.

But the duty of entering into church-relationship is not wholly left to the common sense of mankind. It proceeds from higher motives, and is based on surer principles.

Revelation commands and confirms it. It arises out of *the Christian* life. Hence Christ himself, during his stay on earth, collected a little band of learners, who may be regarded as the first exemplification of a church under the New Dispensation. He called disciples out of the world to follow Him. To them He imparted religious instruction. It was given them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God. In their presence He observed the Jewish passover, and instituted the last supper, the distinguishing mark of disciples till His second coming.

In accordance with the command and example of Christ,

exhortations addressed to Christians on the subject are scattered throughout the New Testament, implying that the duty is a dictate of their renewed nature, not to be neglected. Hence the apostles and their assistants gathered the new converts together, organized fixed societies with office-bearers, and regulated their social worship by word or epistle. In the conduct of the primitive disciples there is ample warrant for a similar course, in all who profess the like faith; since the commands given to them were not intended for themselves alone, but for *all* who profess obedience to the same Lord, and walk in the way of his commandments. And then the benefits arising from the church relation, render it a duty to enter into it. The advantages it confers are too apparent to be mistaken. Here the gifts and graces of Christians are improved by exercise. Here their faith is strengthened, their languor dispelled. From continual intercourse with the like-minded, they receive an impulse to renewed activity in the divine life. Their security and comfort are mightily promoted. They are better fitted for enduring opposition, and making advances into the territories of darkness.

Finally, it is their duty to enter into this relation because by it the Saviour is glorified. Christ is glorified in his saints individually; but he is *eminently* glorified in them, when they are met together to show forth his praise and declare his works.

Thus man is prompted to enter into the church relation by the dictates of his renewed nature, the commands of Christ, the exhortations of apostles and prophets, the example of the first Christians, and a consideration of the benefits resulting from union. And when he thinks of the glory accruing to the Saviour from the church with its hallowed operations, he will not fail to avail himself of the privilege. Happy is the man, who, in the communion of the faithful, finds himself borne onward by a holy stream of love descending on the members, while each is tenderly

watched and strengthened by his fellow-traveller to Zion. He thinks not of *the duty* of entering into the relation, but of *the privilege* he enjoys within the sacred enclosure of a Christian community.

The word *ἐκκλησία*, *church*, applied to an assembly convened for religious purposes, has two significations in the New Testament.

In the first place, it is used to denote the whole body of believers, the true people of Christ on earth and heaven. Thus in the Epistle to the Ephesians,—“And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to *the church*, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” So likewise in the same epistle: “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.” In this sense the term is applied to what is commonly called *the church universal*, including all the saints on earth and in glory. It is of importance to attend to the Scriptural notion of *the church universal*, because it has been frequently mystified by scholastic distinctions. It consists, as has been just stated, of two parts, one on earth, the other in heaven,—*together constituting* the one mystical body of Christ. Whenever a sinner believes in the Saviour he becomes a member of this spiritual household, and is invested with the immunities of heavenly citizenship. None but saints belong to it. Hypocrites may be found in the assemblies of professing Christians on earth; but no unbeliever can possibly belong to the church universal, since he cannot have a living connexion with the true Head. “That church of Christ which we properly term his body mystical, can be but one; neither can that one be sensibly discerned by any man, inasmuch as the parts thereof are some in heaven already with Christ, and the rest that are on earth (albeit their natural persons be visible) we do not discern under this property whereby they are truly and infallibly of that body. Only our minds, by intellectual conceit, are able to

apprehend that such a real body there is, a body collective, because it containeth a huge multitude; a body mystical, because the mystery of their conjunction is removed altogether from sense. Whatsoever we read in Scripture concerning the endless love and saving mercy which God showeth towards his church, the only proper subject thereof is this church. Concerning this flock it is, that our Lord and Saviour hath promised, 'I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hands.' They who are of this society have such marks and notes of distinction from all others, as are not objects unto our sense; only unto God, who seeth their hearts and understandeth all their secret cogitations, unto him they are clear and manifest."*

Secondly. The term *church* signifies a number of believers habitually assembling for the worship of God in one place. Thus in the second Epistle to the Thessalonians: "Paul, and Sylvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." So also in the Epistle to the Colossians: "Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans." The word uniformly bears this signification when applied to any of the separate assemblies of Christ's servants on earth.

The two meanings in question exhaust the entire range of acceptation belonging to the word. There is no passage in which one or other is unsuitable or inappropriate. We are, therefore, warranted to infer that it does not bear any other sense.† The connexion and nature of a passage generally indicate, with sufficient clearness, how the term should be understood. This view is confirmed by the fact, that when the spiritual worshippers of a country,

* Hooker: Ecclesiastical Polity. Book iii. 1.

† See Note III.

district, or province, are mentioned in their associated capacity, they are constantly styled *churches* (ἐκκλησία); whereas the believers belonging to a town or city are described as *a church* (ἐκκλησία). The New Testament accordingly, speaks of *the churches* of Judæa, Galatia, Achaia; but of *the church* at Corinth, Ephesus, Smyrna, &c. In the former case, distinct assemblies of saints are meant; but in the latter, one society met together to observe the ordinances of Christ.

The materials composing a church are definite and peculiar. The only members properly belonging to it are such as give evidence of their obedience to the Lord Christ. The edifice is intended to be an holy habitation, and holy are the living stones of which it is composed. The regenerate alone should be admitted into fellowship. This is a cardinal point that ought never to be overlooked. To show that it is amply supported by Scripture we need look no farther than the surface of the New Testament. Thus Paul writes: "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints." In like manner he writes to the church of Ephesus: "To the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus." So also to the Colossians: "To the saints and faithful brethren which are at Colosse."

Such are the genuine materials composing a church of God, according to his own word. They are saints by effectual calling; men and women who profess subjection to the laws of Christ, and whose practice accords with their profession. Here the strictest jealousy should be maintained. Nothing can compensate for the absence of piety in one desiring admission into a church. No intellectual endowment should be allowed as a substitute for it. No amount of religious knowledge, or familiarity with the doctrines of the Bible, or fluency of conversation on serious themes, should cover over the want of religion,

and serve for introduction into the community. Here all the officers and members of a church should concentrate their enlightened energies in bringing the condition of their fellowship as near the scriptural rule as the imperfection of humanity will allow. If pastors have a sincere desire to act according to the revealed will of Christ, to be faithful and conscientious in the oversight of a flock, and to preserve the minds of the disciples from contamination, they must be especially careful of purity of communion. And the members also, should take the same lively concern in the matter as the pastor himself. It is their province, no less than that of the elders, to guard against the intrusion of carnal men. Interest, as well as duty, should urge them to do so. Let them not suppose that it mainly or wholly concerns the bishops of the flock, or the bishops together with the deacons, to examine and judge of character, while they may quietly acquiesce in all the doings and decisions of their official brethren; but let them equally maintain a watchful care over their fellowship, lest they be corrupted by unworthy associates, or dishonour the Master whom they profess to obey.

We presume that few professing Christians of the present day, except the advocates of civil establishments of religion, would object to this account of the qualifications requisite in church members. Formerly Baillie and Rutherford appeared in opposition to it, reasoning to a large extent from premises which the early Congregationalists did not assume. Imperfectly acquainted as they seem to have been with the true ground taken by John Cotton and his brethren, they combated opinions which were neither held nor avowed by the advocates of purity. It will not be needful, therefore, to adduce the arguments of these Scottish authors out of the neglected volumes in which they have slumbered. The advocates of the Congregational polity do not deny that hypocrites will be occasionally found in churches; or that ungodly men

will appear there, after all the caution habitually exercised to exclude them. The members and office-bearers of a spiritual society do not pretend to infallibility, nor to judge of the Christianity of a candidate otherwise than by life and profession conjointly. They are wont to make due allowance for infirmities and imperfect attainments which are not absolutely incompatible with the reality of spiritual life in the soul. Hence such writers as Baillie and Rutherford wasted many of their arguments on the air.

Presbyterians of the present time, particularly such as are unconnected with the State, allow that the members admitted into churches should be such as profess their knowledge and faith in Christ, together with their subjection to him in ordinances; or in other words, those who are true Christians in the judgment of charity. We fear, however, that though they admit in theory the scriptural qualifications of church-members, they forget them in practice. Their system, however favourable it may seem to the scriptural standard on this vital point, has never secured holiness in the members to any considerable extent. As long as a palpable line of distinction is not drawn between the hearers composing a congregation; and while candidates for the ministry enter on their studies for the office without giving evidence of personal holiness; this Denomination cannot pretend to attain the character they admit to be so desirable. Congregationalists have hitherto had a clearer apprehension of the qualifications necessary for church-members, and have best acted in conformity with their creed. And yet they too should proceed more discreetly and faithfully. The spirit of the world is continually pressing into their churches. There are times when opposition to worldly maxims on the part of churches generally is faint and feeble. We fear that the practice of most churches among us has not been a true index of their acknowledged sentiments. The barrier between them

and the world has not been sufficiently definite. Their zeal for political privileges has crippled their piety. Oh that all our churches would habitually reflect on the Saviour's words to the angel of the church of Ephesus: "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. *Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*"

The relation borne by a true church to Christ the Head is plainly indicated by the following language: "Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."—"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."—"I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." Such was the character of the Corinthian church. Of the church of Ephesus the apostle writes: "Ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children," is an exhortation addressed to the same community. Thus the members of the primitive churches are called *the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Ghost, the spouse of Christ*—expressions denoting the closest connexion with the Redeemer. How then can any professing to follow the New Testament model admit members into fellowship who give no evidence of spiritual union to Christ, the Life of his people? Let those who respect the Master's authority, and the apostolic conduct in the regulation of the earliest churches, pause, ponder, stand in awe, as they read such descriptions of the early converts in their associated capacity.

From the scriptural qualifications of members the

following characteristics of an apostolic church are deducible.

1. Adoption of the doctrines contained in the word of God.

If every rightly constituted assembly of Christians on earth be part of the universal church which is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, they are bound to receive whatever has been revealed concerning Christ or his kingdom. The Redeemer has spoken to men, unfolding high and holy principles which they could not have otherwise known; and it becomes those who profess to be animated by his spirit to adopt his maxims as well as to act on them with simple faith.

2. Another characteristic is, maintenance of religious instruction and ordinances.

A primary object of the union of believers in a church capacity is mutual edification and encouragement. Hence a neglect of the appointed means of instruction must tend to destroy their character. "Wherefore, comfort yourselves together," says the apostle Paul, "and edify one another, even as also ye do." On another occasion he asks, "How is it then, 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 things be done unto edifying." No association of professing Christians can exist long without diligently attending to the ordinances of God's house. There must be among the members mutual exhortation, incitement to increasing holiness, exposition and hearing of the word, spiritual oversight of the body by persons specially intrusted with the charge, the exercise of prayer and praise, and observance of the symbolic institutions. These will be maintained in the society, else the souls of the disciples will become lean, and their spiritual life rapidly decay.

3. Intimately connected with the preceding characteristic is the maintenance of discipline.

“Ye are a chosen generation,” says the apostle Peter, “a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” A church of Christ, proceeding on the principle of selection as its basis, must maintain the purity which it was called out from the world to exhibit. It is necessarily distinct from the world, having no fellowship with ungodliness. Erring members are faithfully dealt with by the body. In the case of offenders, rebuke and censure are employed when necessary. Violation of God’s commandments is not allowed to pass unnoticed. Should a hypocrite be detected within the sacred enclosure, he will be excluded as unworthy of discipleship; or should any walk contrary to their profession, they must be treated as offenders.

These are the characteristics of a true church; and wherever one of them is absent, the others will also be deficient; for they are exhibited in *united operation* wherever an assembly of believers meets for worship. They are evidences that the body is built on Christ, the true foundation. They show the divine life animating the members. A fundamental point is the existence of faith in the persons admitted into a church, however small the measure of that faith may be. If *saving* knowledge be secured in the members, all will be well; and the characteristics of a Christian church will be manifest. But if this essential qualification be dispensed with, there will soon be a deficiency in the characteristics we have mentioned; barrenness will blight the communion; it will be seen that it has a name to live, but is dead in the cause of Christ.

If this description of a rightly constituted church be correct, it is apparent that no national church can possess

a scriptural character. Every church established by law must be more or less secular. It must proceed, to a great extent, on the principle of comprehension, rather than selection. It is controlled from without; and cannot exhibit that purity required by the New Testament. It either sets up no barrier between itself and the world, or a very feeble one. Professing to be coextensive with the population generally, all are considered as belonging to it; except perhaps those who have attached themselves to a dissenting denomination. "The first churches," says Kelly, "were *select* and *spiritual*. Our national church is, and ever will be, and from the nature of an establishment must be, *comprehensive* and *secular*. Whenever the first churches ceased to be *select* and *spiritual*, they ceased to be what their principles required. Whenever a national church ceases to be *comprehensive* and *secular*, it ceases to be itself. It becomes like the first Christian churches, a collection of spiritual companies living in the midst of the world, distinct from it, and showing forth the praises of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvellous light. That is, it ceases to be an establishment, it affords no temptation to avarice and ambition, and it supplies none of the means of selfish indulgence. At least this is the case, as much as it is possible for it to be."*

The truth of these observations is amply verified by the history of every establishment. A true church of Christ, therefore, need not be sought in any national church. These state-machines will always be pervaded, to a large extent, by worldly elements, whence they become unlike the primitive churches. In their composition they will ever present admixtures foreign to "a congregation of faithful men." The pure gold in them will bear a small proportion to the wood, and the hay, and the stubble, reserved for the fiery trial. Our grand objection, then, to an esta-

* A Plea for Primitive Christianity, &c., by Thomas Kelly. Pp. 13, 14. 12mo. Dublin: 1815.

blished church, is its diametrically opposite character to the churches of the New Testament. We deny not the existence of true Christians in these national institutions; but *that* is an accident belonging to them, not an essential requisite in their constitution. *They are not formed on the principle* of admitting within their pale none except those who give evidence of repentance and faith; but on the contrary recognize as Christians all who simply acknowledge the truth of Christianity. The true idea involved in being *a Christian*, lies far deeper than their superficial cognizance reaches.

Two meanings have been specified as alone belonging to the word *ἐκκλησία*, *church*, in the New Testament, viz., that spiritual assembly which comprises all true believers in all ages, usually denominated *the universal church*; and, a congregation of Christians assembling for worship in one place, or, *a particular church*.

Other senses have been frequently annexed to the term. Thus it is said to denote a number of congregations united under one government, *each, the meanwhile, having its own teaching ruler*. These separate assemblies may belong to a city, a district, a province, or a country. Their number and territorial occupancy are subordinate points; it is sufficient that they are all united into one *church*. Thus we read of the church at Jerusalem, at Corinth, at Ephesus, &c., each consisting of various churches or societies under the same rule, whether that rule were *prelatic* or *presbyterial*. Hence, also, has arisen the customary phrase, church of England, church of Scotland, Presbyterian church in America, &c.

We shall first examine the case of the church at Jerusalem, which consisted, according to Episcopalians and Presbyterians, of more separate churches or congregations than one, because the believers were more numerous than could possibly meet in any one building.

It will be necessary to trace this church from its origin,

as far as various notices of it in the Acts of the Apostles furnish the materials of its history.

In Acts i. 15 it is stated, that the number of the disciples was one hundred and twenty, whom Peter addressed regarding a successor to Judas.

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.” (ii. 1, 2.)

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized : and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul ; and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common ; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” (ii. 41—47.) Here a great increase was made to the few disciples. Three thousand were added to the one hundred and twenty. Yet they met as one body having fellowship in Christian ordinances. “*All that believed were together, and had all things common.*” Even the place in which they usually met is specified in the forty-sixth verse : “They continued daily with one accord *in the temple.*” They were still *the church* to which the Lord added *the saved*. When it is said that they broke bread *from house to house*, it is intimated that, besides meeting in the temple, they met in private houses, in little companies similar to family circles, where they partook together of the daily meal, and celebrated the supper of the Lord.

Again, it is written, "Many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand." (iv. 4.) From *three* thousand the believers now amounted to *five*.

"And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked." (iv. 31—34.) Here all the disciples are represented as assembled together, having one heart and one soul, having all things in common. They were a united body, assembling for worship and other purposes connected with their welfare.

"And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)" (v. 12—14.) Here again the temple is specified as the place where they all met. The common people magnified the apostles, but none of the higher classes durst join himself to them.

Still farther; when the multiplication of disciples gave rise to the election of deacons; "the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables, &c., &c. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose," &c. (vi. 2—5.) Here the multitude, *i.e.* the entire body of believers, is enjoined to select seven men for a particular purpose. Doubtless this implies that *all the believers* met in the same place, for the apostles "called them to them" and addressed them together.

In the eighth chapter of the Acts, a great persecution is recorded, which may be supposed to have lessened the number of believers at Jerusalem.

In the fifteenth chapter, Paul and Barnabas having come to Jerusalem, "were received of *the church*, and of the apostles, and elders." (verse 4.) When the apostles and elders came together, to consider the question of circumcision, we read, that "*all the multitude* kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul." (verse 12.) "Then it pleased the apostles and elders, *with the whole church*, to send chosen men," &c. (verse 22.) These three verses imply that all the believers met together for the transaction of ecclesiastical affairs.

Lastly, it is subsequently written of the Christians at Jerusalem, "the multitude must needs come together," intimating that it was both possible, expedient, and necessary, that they should assemble in one place.

These notices, scattered throughout the book of Acts, expressly state, or fairly imply, that the entire body of believers in Jerusalem met for the worship of God and the transaction of business in the same place. They lead us to infer that the number was never greater at one time than could come into the temple, or any other building, court, or area, to which they may have resorted. Sometimes the temple or Solomon's porch is mentioned as the place of assembling; and again, there is no intimation of the locality. It is not, however, our business to find a building capable of accommodating the multitude. Even supposing them to have met elsewhere than in the temple, it is sufficient for us that the voice of one man could reach the whole. The language uniformly applied to them proceeds on the assumption that they worshipped, partook of ordinances, and transacted ecclesiastical affairs together. "Is there a single passage in all the history in which they are said or supposed, either expressly or by implication, to have been divided into distinct congregations? If there

were really a difficulty as to their numbers, a difficulty can never destroy a fact, far less be the foundation of an opposite system."*

We shall now allude to the mode in which the force of the entire series of passages relating to the disciples at Jerusalem is dissipated by Episcopalians and Presbyterians. Our observations will have special reference to the arguments and criticisms of Brown, in his vindication of the Presbyterian form of church-government, because he has made a most industrious use of the reasonings advanced by the Westminster divines as well as of Lightfoot's interpretations, diligently collecting all that can be adduced in opposition to our view, and omitting nothing that the ingenuity or judgment of a strenuous partisan can possibly supply.

It is argued that on the day of Pentecost three thousand were added to the original number of disciples. These three thousand were not Jews who had come up to Jerusalem merely to attend the feast, purposing to return soon after to their native lands; but they were *stated residents* in the city, as is proved by the term *κατοικοῦντες*, *dwelling*, (Acts ii. 5,) which signifies a *fixed* and *durable* dwelling. After this first great conversion, the Lord added the saved *daily* to the church (ii. 47.) Subsequently, after a Sermon of Peter's, the number of the men was about five thousand. These were not merely *hearers*, but *believers*; and that, too, in consequence of the discourse which they had just heard. The five thousand were *additional* to the three thousand, because in every other passage of the Acts where Luke describes the number of the converted, he mentions the new believers alone, and not the entire number. Besides, the word *ἄνδρες*, *men*, (Acts iv. 4,) means no more than the *males* as distinguished from the *females*. Hence there was a multitude of *female* converts besides the men. Here, therefore, we have upwards of eight thousand believers,

* Carson, Reply to Brown, p. 261.

and a considerable proportion of females. Reference is also made to Acts v. 14, and vi. 7. If a great number of the priests became obedient to the faith, "we may well suppose that the additions which, at this period, were made to the church, must have been uncommonly great. There is thus a collection of at least *ten or twelve thousand* Christians in the city of Jerusalem, who were all not only hearers but members of the church, and probably they consisted of a much greater number."*

After the persecution recorded in the eighth chapter, which took few members (if any) from the church, we are informed that the word of God grew and multiplied. (chap. xii. 24.) According to Acts xxi. 20, there were many *myriads* or *ten thousands* that believed; for the word *μυριάδες* should be taken in its literal acceptation. Allowing that only three myriads belonged to Jerusalem, "it will make the number of Jews who were connected with that church, independently of converts who would be added to them from the Gentiles, no less than *thirty thousand*. And considering the number of ministers who, for so long a space, had laboured amongst them, it is probable that their proportion of these *many* ten thousands must have been considerably greater."†

Such is a summary of the circumstances adduced by Brown to prove the impossibility of all the members belonging to the church at Jerusalem meeting in one place. The course of reasoning adopted passes over those notices of *the place* in which the converts are said to have assembled, or touches them as lightly as possible; while all particulars relating to the number and increase of the brethren are collected and understood in as wide a sense as possible, that the entire number may be swelled to an extent rendering it impossible for them to meet in any

* Brown, Vindication of the Presbyterian Form of Church Government, p. 203, 2nd edition. 12mo. Edinburgh: 1812.

† Ibid. pp. 209, 210.

one building. No allowance is made for strangers who were in the city at the feast of Pentecost; nor are the circumstances which induce rapid and frequent changes materially affecting the number of inhabitants, taken into consideration. On the contrary, the number of the disciples has a stereotype character which is carried throughout the whole history. One number is added to another, the first continuing the same, although a considerable interval of time may have elapsed. If three thousand believers existed at one time, and two thousand were subsequently added, all the three thousand are counted as still belonging to the church; none having removed or died in the interval. Whatever period may have elapsed; whatever outward circumstances were brought to bear on the disciples; however shifting may have been the population of Jerusalem in consequence of its festivals; notwithstanding all circumstances adverse to the church's very existence; there was little or no diminution of the amount of believers. This will scarcely be considered the right mode of arriving at *the whole* truth. It is natural to understand all the passages which affirm that the whole company of brethren met in the temple, in their obvious meaning; and to carry the idea of the same locality into others where place is not mentioned, unless the contrary be suggested by the context. Nine times is *the church* and twice *the whole church* in Jerusalem spoken of; but we never read of *the churches* in that city. According to the analogy of other passages where the term is applied to the believers in a city or town, we should expect it to be used in the same manner when predicated of the Christians at Jerusalem. If there be some difficulty in discovering whether all the converts residing in the city at any one time, could meet together and be addressed by one individual, is it not reasonable to infer that the obvious undisputed sense in all other instances, belongs to it in the disputed case of the disciples at Jerusalem?

Is there not, at least, a strong presumption in favour of the opinion that it bears the same signification in a doubtful and difficult case which it unquestionably exhibits in all simple and clear instances? In opposition to this, Episcopalians and Presbyterians insist that the church at Jerusalem forms a remarkable exception, comprehending, as they believe, a number of separate communities or churches under one episcopal or presbyterial government. They are willing to build *an essential part* of their respective systems on the use of the word in regard to the believers at Jerusalem.

Having made these preliminary remarks, we shall examine the statements of opponents which have been presented in outline.

We deem it unnecessary to refute the untenable notion of Lighfoot and others, who regard the one hundred and twenty disciples assembled in an upper room as consisting of office-bearers alone, or more accurately, of the twelve apostles, the seventy disciples, and "thirty-eight more all of Christ's own country, converse, or kindred," appointed by him for the ministry. Nothing is more extravagant than to assume that the believers in Jerusalem at this time amounted to many hundreds if not thousands, meeting in several congregations; and to convert the upper room into "the meeting and sitting-place for the presbytery of these elders that took care of all those congregations."*

It borders on the puerile when the Westminster divines mention that the word *ὀνομάτων*, *names*, (not men,) may mean "men of chief note and eminence;" and that "possibly these were such, every one whereof was capable of election to an *apostleship*, which was the *τὸ ἔργον* of this meeting." There can be little doubt that the believers generally were present. All the *disciples* were assembled.

* Lightfoot's Commentary on Acts. See his Works, edited by Pitman. Vol. viii. p. 32. 8vo. London: 1823.

The phraseology employed at the commencement of the second chapter refers back to the company now met, and justifies this interpretation: "when the day of Pentecost was fully come, *they were all* with one accord together." Besides, as Neander has well remarked, "the great importance of the fact which Peter brings forward in his discourse, that the gifts of the Spirit, which, under the old covenant, were imparted only to a select class of persons, such as the prophets, under the new covenant which removes every wall of separation in reference to the higher life, are communicated without distinction to *all believers*—this great fact would be altogether lost sight of, if we confined every thing here mentioned to the apostles."*

The three thousand converted on the day of Pentecost are said to have been residents in the city, the verb κατοικούντες applied to them being appealed to in proof of the fact (Acts ii. 5). It is freely conceded that the Jews from neighbouring countries were not commanded to attend the feasts at Jerusalem. The law did not require their presence in the metropolis at the Pentecostal season. It is probable, however, that many of them *did* repair to the sacred city on those occasions, esteeming it a privilege to worship with their brethren. We may reasonably suppose many to have been present at the feast of Pentecost from religious motives. The word κατοικέω, to *dwell*, does not denote of itself a *longer*, as contrasted with a *shorter*, residence. That idea lies in concomitant circumstances, not in the verb alone.† In the present case, *the ninth verse* shows, that many of the inhabitants of other countries now at Jerusalem were still inhabitants of those countries; and, consequently, they must have sojourned in the city only for a short period, probably during the continuance of the feast. It is not said *they that dwelt in*

* Planting and Training, &c., &c. p. 13, vol. i. of the original German, fourth edition, 1847.

† See Note IV.

Mesopotamia, but, *the dwellers in Mesopotamia* (οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν Μεσοποταμίαν). Hence they must have been sojourners in the city for a short period during the continuance of the feast; or longer, if they were attracted to the capital by the general expectation of the Messiah, then so prevalent. This point is one of importance; and might be readily overlooked by a superficial reader.*

In the fourth verse of the fourth chapter it is implied, not that five thousand first believed at that time; but that the previous number was increased to five thousand. The language of the verse, so far from leading us to infer that the five thousand were *additional* to the three thousand, indicates the reverse. It is stated first, that *many* of them who heard believed the word; and secondly, that the entire number of disciples now *amounted to* five thousand. The original literally translated is, "the number of the men *became* about five thousand." Had the five thousand been additional to the three thousand, we should have expected the language of the historian to be "the number of the men *was* about five thousand."† It is no valid objection to our opinion, that Luke does not state in other places the entire number of believers, but of the new converts added to the church. *Unless he employ on other occasions the same phraseology as here*, there is no reason for supposing that he intended to follow an unvarying method in noticing the additions made to the early church. The language employed in each particular instance must alone determine whether Luke's descriptions have the immutable peculiarity of furnishing no more than the number of new converts.

The word translated *men* (ἄνδρες) is frequently employed in a general sense, including both male and female. When there is something specific, or when the writer intends to make it emphatic, it embraces *males alone*. In every case these is a reason for the restriction which must be gathered

* See Note V.

† See Note VI.

from the context.* But here no cause exists why the writer should employ it in a limited sense. Why should he omit all account of the females in an enumeration of the converts? Is the sex so insignificant as to deserve no notice? Or was the number of female converts so small as to justify Luke in passing it over in silence? Judging by analogy, the females were more numerous than the males. And even if the interpretations of our opponents were correct; they could not at all invalidate the fact that all the disciples met in one place. The temple was capable of accommodating them.

The language in Acts v. 14, and vi. 7, proves nothing more than that the number of the disciples rapidly increased in consequence of the apostolic preaching. It is neither affirmed nor denied that the multitude was too great to meet in the temple. In other places it is expressly stated that they were accustomed to meet in this building; and where is the warrant for affirming that they were continually dispersed throughout the city in distinct companies, in consequence of their unwieldy numbers?

The eighth chapter plainly proves that the members of the church were scattered by persecution, except the apostles: "And they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles." Some, however, are not satisfied with this plain exposition. They endeavour, accordingly, to represent the persecution as of very short duration and limited extent. It is even affirmed that the persecution was not protracted beyond the day of Stephen's martyrdom, because Luke says, *ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ*, *on that day*, rendered by our translators *at that time*. In opposition to this we remark, that the persecution is called a *great* persecution. The precise point which the writer wishes to express is not the *duration* of the persecution. His object is merely to show the time at which it arose. The duration of it is left indefinite;

* See Note VII.

while the point of its commencement is specified. It *began* on the day of Stephen's death; which certainly implies that it continued beyond the day. It is farther alleged, that *the ministers*, not *the members*, of the church were dispersed, not by persecution, but of their own accord. They saw, it is thought, the storm gathering, and wisely took it as a signal to leave the city. This mode of exposition is not natural. The word *ἐκκλησία* is *never appropriated to the office-bearers alone*; and therefore the pronoun *they* must refer to the church generally. And not only is it stated that *some* members of the church were dispersed, but *all* except the apostles were scattered. That the dispersion in question was voluntary is an assumption contrary to the laws of grammar and the obvious import of the passage. Surely the words, "there was a great persecution against the church, and they were all scattered abroad," contain *a reason* why they were so scattered. The force of persecution compelled them to leave the city. This meaning is still more unequivocally expressed in Acts xi. 19: "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen," &c., or as it might be more literally translated, "*by reason* of the persecution;" the preposition denoting *the cause* of it. The persecution was not merely *a signal* for the church to disperse, but *the cause* of the dispersion. In the fourth verse of the eighth chapter no ground is furnished for the assumption that the dispersion was confined to ministers of the gospel. It is the right and privilege of every Christian to make known the truth—to communicate the doctrines of revelation to all who will hear. The primitive Christians knew nothing of the episcopal or presbyterial license dispensed by *men* who claim the power of opening and shutting the mouths of believers competent or disposed to instruct those around them.

We leave it now to the judgment of the impartial to decide on the correctness of the statement; "it is plain

that the members whom it (the persecution) took from the church (if it removed from it any) could not be considerable." *

With regard to Acts xxi. 20, the word *μυριάδες*, translated *thousands*, is certainly used *indefinitely* of a large number in other parts of the New Testament. It is so employed, for example, in Luke's Gospel: "in the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people," &c. (*τῶν μυριάδων τοῦ ὄχλου*). It has the same indefinite sense in the Epistle to the Hebrews (xii. 22). Why should the word be restricted to *myriads* precisely, in the present passage? Had the apostles at this time any reason to speak *definitely* of the number of believing Jews? If the adjective be indefinite, should not the substantive be the same? †

But indeed it is not stated, neither is it probable, that these thousands of believers belonged to the church of Jerusalem. They rather belonged to Judæa generally. All Judæa would soon hear of the apostle's teaching; and the course prescribed for him would be equally necessary for those throughout Judæa as for the residents in Jerusalem. The contrast between "the Jews which are among the Gentiles," in the twenty-first verse, and "the thousands of Jews," in the twentieth verse, shows that the latter mean *the Palestinian Jews* generally. It must never be forgotten that it was the feast of Pentecost, when many repaired to Jerusalem from different parts of Palestine and from adjacent regions. Paul, we are informed, hastened to be at Jerusalem at the feast; and it is probable that his fellow-travellers, noticed in Acts xxi. 16, were also going up thither to attend the festival. There is no evidence that the apostle's design was frustrated; although such an idea is apparently favoured by the Westminster divines. † But whether these believing Jews, whose num-

* Brown's "Vindication," pp. 206, 207.

† See Note VIII.

‡ See Note IX.

ber was so great, belonged to Jerusalem alone, or to Judæa, or to other countries besides, the context places it beyond a doubt, to the impartial reader, that it was possible for them to come together: "the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come." (xxi. 22.) If they did not actually meet together, the language just quoted implies thus much, that they were not so unwieldy in numbers as to render it *impossible* for them to assemble in one place. Had they been so very numerous as to make their assembling impossible, such expressions as, "the multitude must needs come together," could not have been employed. It rests with our opponents to show that they did not meet in the temple even after the death of Stephen; for it is nowhere said they were deprived of its use subsequently to his martyrdom. And even though they did not assemble in the temple, it is uniformly mentioned that they were collected in one place. There is no necessity to insist on this one place being an ordinary house, or an upper room. Any space or area is sufficient for the purpose.

It is further argued that there must have been a plurality of congregations in Jerusalem, from the number of ministers who laboured for a considerable time in the city. Here the reasoning of Episcopalians and Presbyterians proceeds on the ground of our supposing that each of the preachers ministered in turn to one congregation. We do not, however, represent the case in that light. Hence their argumentation is based on a position not taken by those whom they combat. Mistaking the view of their opponents, they regard it as unaccountable; and therefore erect numerous congregations throughout the city, in order to find employment for so many preachers, one minister presiding over one congregation. But we are willing to take our representations from the sacred record itself. *The apostles preached daily in the temple and in every house.* (Acts v. 42; ii. 46.) In like manner Paul at Ephesus taught the con-

verts *publicly and from house to house*. (xx. 20.) As to the *prophets and teachers*, (Acts xi. 27, 28, 30,) for whom Presbyterians find it necessary to erect congregations as well as for the apostles, they were seldom *official* persons. They possessed extraordinary gifts, qualifying them to instruct and edify the churches; but properly speaking, they were not *church-officers*. Hence it is unwarrantable to multiply congregations in proportion to the number of such teachers or gifted men. On any view of the subject, the apostles and their companions had sufficient employment at Jerusalem, because they were occupied not merely in the public assembly, but privately, in the house. The entire argument founded on the number of ministers is of no force even in favour of the Presbyterian hypothesis. A large number of disciples would require many pastors, whether they met *together* statedly, or in separate congregations. It is the duty of pastors, not simply to preach in public at stated times, but also to visit from house to house. The latter is as necessary as the former. Hence their work, supposing the disciples at Jerusalem to have been very numerous, would be equally onerous, although perhaps not entirely of the same kind, in either case. Every one not blinded by attachment to a system will see that a counterpart of the dull and regular routine observable in modern congregations where several pastors labour, or in separate assemblies over each of which one bishop presides, should not be looked for in the church of Jerusalem at this time. The apostles and prophets of primitive times were very different from ordinary ministers. In many essential points their rights and functions were unlike those of modern preachers. It is absurd to think of the apostles as preaching every sabbath alternately, to one assembly; or as presiding, each one of them, over a distinct congregation. Let us think of the unsettled state of affairs at Jerusalem, the infancy of Christianity, the imperfect organization of the Chris-

tian society; and we shall soon be convinced that the city presented abundant scope for the activities of apostles and the ardour of gifted teachers.

The diversities of languages among the believers has also been adduced to prove that the church of Jerusalem consisted of several distinct congregations. It would appear, however, from the second chapter of the Acts, that all the dwellers at Jerusalem understood one language. Peter addressed them in the same language, not at different times, but *at once*. Hence it seems that they *understood* the current tongue, though all or even the majority may have been themselves unable to speak it with ease or fluency. "But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words." It is not necessary however to our argument, that all understood the apostles preaching to them in Aramæan, or in Greek. The apostles may have spoken to the strangers belonging to various countries, first in one tongue and then in another, until they had *successively* expounded the gospel message to all present. The point on which we insist is, that all were together.* It is an inferior consideration, whether the collected multitude understood the same language at once, or whether all were made to hear the same truths by successive addresses in the same place. It is unquestionably implied in the words of the fourteenth verse of the second chapter, that they were all together.

It is scarcely worth while to notice other evasions of Brown for the sake of supporting his cause. Thus in Acts v. 12, he restricts the adjective, *all*, to *the apostles alone*, because of the context: "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people

* See Note X.

magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)” “The same fear,” says Brown, “which fell upon the multitude in general, and which, for a time, kept them at a distance from the apostles, is asserted, in the eleventh verse, to have fallen upon equally *the whole church*, and we may naturally suppose would produce upon them a similar effect. But *if the rest of the church*, as well as the multitude, durst not, for a time, join themselves to the apostles, is it not obvious that it must have been the apostles alone who are said to have been *all* in Solomon’s porch?”* This is worse than trifling. There are two kinds of fear. There is a tormenting terror. There is also a holy and sacred awe. While the former might prevent the wicked from joining the fellowship of the apostles because under its influence they looked only at the formidable power with which these messengers of heaven were armed; the latter, on the contrary, would lead individuals *to* the apostles, or, at least, not deter them from such society. It is true, that the apostles are spoken of in the clause immediately preceding: “and by the hands of *the apostles* . . . and they were *all* with one accord in Solomon’s porch,” &c.; but it does not hence follow that *the all* consisted of the apostles alone. Why should the apostles alone be in Solomon’s porch? In their case ought the word *all* to have been inserted? Does not this adjective lead the mind beyond them to the whole church? We admit that Peter and John are represented in another chapter as going up to the temple *alone*; but it is added, they went to pray, or to join in the worship; whereas the apostles could not have joined in the worship in Solomon’s porch, since *that* was a different part from the court where the worship was conducted. If then they were alone in Solomon’s porch, what business had they to transact; and how can the phrase, *with one accord*, be appropriate to *them*? Were they occupied with business,

* Vindication, &c., p. 220.

which may be supposed to have created a division of opinion among *inspired* men ; or how were they employed ? The naturalness of the language, on the supposition that they and the brethren were together in one assembly, is apparent ; while the strangeness of the diction, if they were alone, strikes the most superficial reader.*

In relation to the words of Acts vi. 2, " Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said," &c., Brown affirms that the *heads* of the multitude, and not *the entire community*, were summoned together and directed to choose deacons. This opinion is borrowed from Lightfoot, who dogmatically asserts, " not the whole multitude of believers, which, at this time, were grown to very many thousands ; but the whole number of the presbytery." The hypothesis is unworthy of refutation. It is not stated that *some* of the disciples, or *a few* of them, or *their leaders*, were called ; but *the multitude at large* (τὸ πλῆθος). That they were in one place, is obvious from the circumstance of their being addressed in the same language (verse 3) ; and, as if to show that not a part only, but the whole body, was assembled, it is added in the fifth verse, " and the saying pleased *the whole multitude*." †

To the proof derived from the fifteenth chapter, that the whole church was assembled at the apostolic conference, objection is made, because the term, *brethren*, ἀδελφοί, is employed. We are reminded of the fact, that the word is frequently given to *ministers as such*, and to them alone. Happily, however, we are not confined to *the one term*, as though our proof that all the believers were present, rested solely or chiefly on it. In the twelfth verse it is affirmed, that " *the whole multitude*, πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος, kept silence ;" and in the twenty-second it is written, " then it pleased the apostles and elders *with the whole church* to send," &c. Here the phrase, *the whole church*, in the one verse, explains who are meant by *the brethren*, in the next.

* See Note XI.

† See Note XII.

In the one, are enumerated the apostles and elders, and the whole church ; in the other, the apostles, and elders, and brethren. Hence we infer that *the whole church*, and *the brethren*, are synonymous expressions applied to *the same individuals*. Ingenuity may try to evade this conclusion ; but it can only be of a *perverse* character.

Still, however, the opinion that brethren, ἀδελφοί, is an appellation belonging to ministers of the gospel, is generally held by Episcopalian and Presbyterian writers. We are bold to affirm that it has no foundation in the New Testament. It is applied to *all* who believe in Christ, of whatever country, condition, or character they be ; indicating the love they should cherish towards one another as children of the same Father in heaven. 'It is not appropriated to *one part* or *section* of believers to distinguish it from another part or section. On the contrary, it is equally and indiscriminately used in relation to all believers ; whether to such as belong to a particular locality, or those constituting the true church of Christ throughout the earth. Brown quotes a few passages where bishops or overseers of the flock, preachers of the word, and evangelists, are addressed by the title, illogically deducing from them that it is given to ministers *as such*. By a similar argument he might easily show that the apostles were *deacons*, διάκονοι ; because the word is not unfrequently applied to them. Though *used of* ministers, it does not follow that it is *appropriated to* them. In opposition to the few passages he has quoted, we might adduce a great number where it is incontrovertibly applied to Christians in general, synonymously with *saints*. Belonging as it does to all believers, it may be predicated of apostles, prophets, evangelists, bishops ; or of Christians bearing no office ; just as the writer, in a particular context, speaks of the one or the other.

It is marvellous to find how those who style themselves *the clergy*, *par excellence*, are disposed to claim for themselves all the titles which can be supposed to elevate them

in their own opinion, or in the esteem of others. And yet, considering what human nature is, it is not surprising to see this phase of vanity. To say nothing now of other appellations, they will not allow the common people even the name *brethren*. *They are the brethren*; but unofficial Christians, however holy or intellectual, are *the laity*. The New Testament does not sanction this arrogance. The spirit of that book rebukes it. *All Christians are brethren*; the humblest, poorest disciple, that ever listened to the voice of Christ, equally with the most exalted preacher of the word. God, who is no respecter of persons, is the one Father of both. He hears the imperfect, incoherent prayer of the one as willingly as the fluent, connected address of the other. Yea it may perhaps be found at the great day, that many who pompously proclaimed the word of the Lord, magnifying *themselves*, instead of their *office*, shall be excluded from the society of the Redeemer who was meek and lowly on earth; while poor *laymen* who heard the gospel and believed, though kept at a respectful distance from *the assuming brethren*, shall be welcomed into the immediate presence of Him who is not ashamed to call *all* the sanctified, *brethren*.

The preceding attempt to remove the objections adduced from the circumstances of the Christians in Jerusalem to the meaning we have assigned to the term *church*, will perhaps be regarded as successful. It has been shown that the Acts of the Apostles afford no ground for believing that the church in that city consisted of several distinct congregations with their respective elders. It resembled the other churches of the New Testament, whose members were wont to assemble in one place. The disciples were accustomed to meet for worship and the other ordinances, not in sections scattered here and there throughout the city, called *congregations*; but *together, in the same place*. Nor have "common sense and reason" been violated by placing such numbers in a single congregation. No "ex-

traordinary sort of commenting" on the writings of the inspired penmen has been adopted. We are willing to abide by "the matter of fact."*

In looking back at the history of this church, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, it is scarcely possible not to be struck with the idea of its indefinite and temporary organization. Exposed to many extraordinary influences, and taught by many inspired men, it necessarily presents various features unlike those of fully organized societies in a land of evangelical light. It seems probable, on the whole, that the Christians in the city, accustomed as they were to meet as a church in one place, received mutual edification in a variety of ways; even in private houses, where little companies assembled like families. On these occasions they doubtless engaged in the usual exercises of worship without any *formal distinction* between teachers and taught; except in the case of extraordinary officers, to whom the believers naturally looked with veneration. Their state was in a great degree unsettled and informal. It should be carefully noticed, however, that these small assemblies were not distinct churches. They were still parts of the one church, from which they did not separate. They belonged to the general body. "The epistles of the Apostle Paul," says Neander, "give the clearest evidence that all the Christians of *one* city, from the beginning and ever after, formed one whole church."†

Our great objection to the views of the church at Jerusalem, taken by Episcopalians and Presbyterians, is founded on the fixed character they assign to it. In parochial style, they parcel it out into separate congregations, *each with its own ruler or rulers*; while the college of elders sit in council to deliberate respecting the interests of these distinct societies. It is thus made to assume a stereotype form too

* See Note XIII.

† "Planting and Training," &c. vol. i. p. 176 (note), and p. 262 of the original.

inflexible to admit of the free scope of all the influences that must have affected it.

Let us now consider the case of the church at Ephesus.

“*First.* That there were more congregations than one in the church at Ephesus appears by Acts xx. 31, where is mention of Paul’s continuance at Ephesus in preaching for the space of three years; and Acts xix. 18, 19, 20, where the special effect of the word is mentioned; and v. 10 and 17 of the same chapter, where is a distinction of Jews and Greeks; and 1 Cor. xvī. 8, 9, where is a reason of Paul’s stay at Ephesus until Pentecost; and v. 19, where is mention of a particular church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, then at Ephesus, as appears Acts xviii. 19, 24, 26. All which laid together doth prove, that the multitudes of believers did make more congregations than one in the church of Ephesus.

“*Secondly.* That there were many elders over these many congregations as one flock, appeareth, Acts xx. 17—37.

“*Thirdly.* That these many congregations were one church, and that they were under one presbyterial government, appeareth, Rev. ii. 1—6.”

These are the arguments employed by the assembly of divines who sat at Westminster, in their “form of presbyterial church government.” In modern times nothing has been added to the weight or number of the proofs so adduced in connexion with the Ephesian church. Their validity, however, is mainly suspended on the ground of the title *church* being given to the assembly in Aquila’s house, and to the other congregations supposed to meet in the city, *conjointly, and at the same period.* It is not sufficient to show that the converts in Aquila’s house did not consist of the entire number of believers in Ephesus at a given time; or that there were different assemblies in various parts of the city. It is necessary to demonstrate that there were more converts in Ephesus than such as

met in *his house*; that they formed distinct congregations of worshippers; that they continued in their separate capacity; and that as *distinct congregations, each with its own pastor and ruling elders, under one government*, they are denominated *the church of Ephesus*.

The argument is wholly vitiated should it appear that the circumstances of the converts varied; so that although they may have met as separate assemblies for a time, they subsequently coalesced; that the title *church* is never given to the separate congregations as associated; but is applied only to the believers statedly meeting in Aquila's house, notwithstanding other believers may have met for worship in other parts of the city at the time it is so employed.

What is meant by the expression *church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla* at Ephesus? The Westminster divines suppose that it denotes a congregation distinct from other assemblies in the same city; and consequently that the Ephesian church consisted of several congregations; while others think that it is applied merely to their children and servants, and such inmates as lodged with them. In the latter sense it is equivalent to *a Christian family*; in the former, to *an assemblage of believers worshipping in a church capacity*.

The New Testament mentions three persons who had "a church in the house," viz., Nymphas, Philemon, and Aquila. There must have been something peculiar in the circumstances of these individuals; else they would not have been singled out in such a manner. The interpretation which restricts the phraseology to a Christian family is not probable or appropriate, because the New Testament employs other diction in relation to pious families, such as "household," or "they of the household." Besides, many individuals are saluted by name in the epistles, who must be presumed to have had pious families. Had godly households therefore been all that was intended by the phrase before us, they would not probably have been

saluted as *churches in houses*. These considerations, with others that might be mentioned, incline us to believe that the phrase denotes a company of believers meeting, in a church capacity, in the houses of Aquila, Nymphas, and Philemon. In large cities, where the disciples were numerous, the distances considerable, or the enemies of Christianity watchful and persecuting, it is quite probable that some met occasionally, or for a time, in the house of a particular individual; or in an apartment otherwise convenient. Certain circumstances and peculiarities of situation may have prompted the brethren to separate for a time. The person at whose habitation a part of them assembled may have been an eminent teacher of righteousness; or his dwelling may have presented peculiar advantages in the midst of persecution; or his premises may have contained an apartment large enough to accommodate a considerable number. Thus Neander thinks that the nature of Aquila's employment required extensive premises; and that, therefore, he could set apart a room for the use of disciples wherever he fixed his abode. When we also take into account his religious qualifications, it is natural to suppose that he frequently led the devotions of these small assemblies. He and his consort are styled Paul's fellow-workers. They were well acquainted with the gospel. They took Apollos, and expounded to him the way of God more perfectly. Aquila, in short, was a preacher of righteousness.

Philemon, who is also said to have had a church in his house, was a wealthy member of the church at Colosse, distinguished for his hospitality towards Christian brethren, especially evangelists. Some think that he was a deacon; others a bishop; but it is now impossible to discover what office he filled, or in what rank he moved. He is styled by Paul a *fellow-worker*; so that we are inclined to draw the conclusion that he was a Christian teacher; one qualified and accustomed to impart instruction. This is favoured

by the usage of the word *συνεργός* in most, if not all the passages where it occurs. In consequence of the apostle directing him to prepare a lodging in a house hired in the city, it may be judged that his premises were not extensive; and therefore that *all* the believers at Colosse did not ordinarily assemble at his habitation. A few of the disciples met in his premises, to whom he probably imparted instruction in religious things.

It may be inferred that the circumstances connected with Nymphas and his house were similar; although the New Testament furnishes no information respecting him except the incidental mention of a church in his house near Laodicea.

In short, every view that can be taken of the matter shows that the expression "church in the house," denotes not merely the pious members of a single house, but a number of believers meeting in a private dwelling or in the premises connected with it, for conducting religious exercises in the name of the holy Redeemer. In the case of Aquila, who was a tent-maker, his occupation may have rendered it necessary for him to have several workmen resident in his domestic establishment, most of them, perhaps, adherents of Christianity; but we should not limit the phrase even to these; since no analogous consideration can be urged in the case of Philemon. Neander quotes a passage from Justin Martyr that may throw some light on the difficult point before us. When this celebrated father was examined before the prefect Rusticus he was asked, "Where do you assemble?" Justin replied, "Wherever it suits each one's preference and ability. You take it for granted that we all meet in the same place; but it is not so, for the God of the Christians is not circumscribed by place, but being invisible fills heaven and earth, and is everywhere worshipped and glorified by the faithful." Rusticus then said, "Tell me where you meet together, or in what place you collect your disciples."

Justin said, "I am staying at the house of one Martinus, and I know of no other place of meeting besides this; and if any one wished to come to me, I communicated to him the words of truth." The persons who thus repaired to Justin's house for instruction constituted, according to Neander, "the church in Justin's house."

Having thus endeavoured to explain the expression, "church in the house," in conformity with the opinion of the Westminster divines, we proceed to consider their statements respecting the church of Ephesus.

Christianity was early planted in Ephesus by the apostle Paul, who, on leaving Corinth, came thither with Aquila and Priscilla. His visit was a brief one. Some success, however, attended his preaching; and the comparatively few converts whom he collected seem to have met in Aquila's house. On Paul's leaving Ephesus, Aquila remained, either to attend to the new converts, or for the purposes of his trade, or for both. Whatever may have been the true cause of his continuance in the city, it is probable that he acted as one instructor of the company of believers. During the interval between the apostle's first and second visit, the church was consolidated and built up on the faith.

When the apostle visited the place a second time, we read of his finding twelve disciples there, (Acts xix. 7,) though the passage does not exclude, but rather imply the existence of others. Yet it is apparent that the whole number of the converts was comparatively few. On this occasion, extraordinary success attended his preaching. Numbers were converted to the faith of the gospel. Aquila's house was no longer able to afford them accommodation. Hence the materials of a new and second assembly were collected elsewhere, under the immediate superintendence of Paul and his companions. There was a large number of believers in Ephesus, when the apostle, writing thence to the Corinthians, during this second visit

of three years' continuance, sends the salutations of Aquila and Priscilla, with those of the church in their house. (1 Cor. xvi. 19.) Hence we infer that about A.D. 56, all the converts at Ephesus did not meet for worship in one building or place.

But when Aquila subsequently removed to Rome, those who had met in his house appear to have joined the assembly in Ephesus, formed by Paul during his second stay.

Now it should be particularly remarked, that the term *ἐκκλησία*, church, is not applied to the entire company of Ephesian believers when Paul speaks in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, of the church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, A.D. 56. It is applied to *some* of the converts—to such as met in Aquila's house. We infer, therefore, that there were two congregations assembling in different parts of Ephesus, at this time.

The next mention of the church at Ephesus is in Acts xx. 17—37. This passage relates to its condition in 57; and would lead us to believe that *all the disciples met together*, for they are styled “the church,” (not churches,) and “the flock.” At this time, too, Aquila had removed to Rome; as we learn from the Epistle to the Romans, which most scholars assign to 57. Thus when *the church* in Ephesus is mentioned, (Acts xx. 17,) Aquila had left the city, a fact in harmony with the statement already made, that the church in his house had incorporated itself with the other believers after his removal, and that the two congregations subsisting for a short space, formed thereafter *one church* meeting for worship in the same place.

Several years afterwards we read again of *the church* of Ephesus, Rev. ii. 1. This was about A.D. 96 or 97, or as others with less probability believe, A.D. 67.

We have seen then, that there are three passages referring to the Ephesian converts at different times. From the first, we conclude that there were two assem-

blies; from the second and third, we learn that both had become incorporated. When Aquila resided at Ephesus, and had a church in his house after Paul's second visit; the organization of the Christians in the city was not complete or final. It was afterwards completed, chiefly by Timothy, a little before the account of Paul's interview with the elders recorded in the twentieth chapter of the Acts. In A.D. 56; the term church is not applied to the whole company of the believers, but simply to those in Aquila's house. In A.D. 57, the term is used to comprehend all the converts. So also in 97. Thus the word is attributed to the entire body of the converts *at a different period from that* to which the single passage, apparently proving that it includes a number of distinct assemblies, specifically relates. It is scarcely fair to carry back the meaning of the word from one passage and time to another passage and time, except the same elements enter into both. It is hardly candid to argue from the perfect to the imperfect organization of a certain church. Let it be shown that the church in Aquila's house continued to exist at Ephesus when the elders were addressed by Paul, as recorded in the twentieth chapter of the Acts, and then the argument of the Westminster divines will have force; but all the facts of the case are satisfactorily explained by the reasonable view that when Aquila removed to Rome, the church in his house united itself with the more numerous body which had been gathered and immediately superintended by Paul during his second visit to the city.

In connexion with this point it should be specially noticed, that the term *church* is never applied to the whole body of converts in a town where any of the persons having *churches in their houses* then resided. Accordingly when Aquila and Priscilla lived at Rome, before they were banished by Claudius, the entire company of believers in the imperial city is not styled *the church of Rome* or *at*

Rome contemporaneously with the existence of a church in Aquila and Priscilla's house. (Compare the Epistle to the Romans xvi. 5, and the entire letter.) So also in the case of Philemon. At the time a church is said to be in his house, there is no mention of *the church* at Colosse. The example of Nymphas at Laodicea, is *apparently* an exception, but not *really* so, unless it can be proved that he lived *in* the city rather than *its vicinity*.

We object to the view of the Ephesian church taken by the Westminster divines and their followers on the following grounds.

In the first place, it can never be proved, that each of the two sections, or rather two churches, which were soon after united, had one pastor or bishop specially appointed for itself. Aquila acted as the overseer of the few believers that met in his house; but who shall say that he was their regular minister; or that there was any official distinction between him and the converts, resembling that marked line drawn between the clergy and laity in the Episcopal and Presbyterian denominations? When and where was Aquila ordained, for many lay great stress on this rite? It will be difficult to refer to any passage which proves, even by implication, that he received ordination from a presbytery. If therefore he was not thus constituted or set apart over a single congregation, the resemblance between him and the member of a modern classical presbytery essentially fails. It is easy to transfer notions derived from modern usages to primitive times, and nothing is more common; but it is not so easy to persuade an impartial inquirer that such later ceremonies are like those of the apostolic churches.

In the second place, it can never be shown that a presbytery, in the modern sense of the term, met periodically in Ephesus to enact laws for governing the separate congregations in the city. Some preachers of the gospel in the

present day are so smitten with the love of power, or inflated with ideas of their own dignity, that the notion of government continually haunts them.

Thirdly, the body of the Ephesian disciples is termed "the flock," by the apostle Paul. The elders of the church whom Paul sent for from Miletus must have equally ministered to the same Christians, because they were neither apostles nor evangelists. Elders are pastors only to one congregation or church; and accordingly they are commanded to feed *the one flock* in Ephesus. It will not suffice to say that *flock* in the singular number is put for *flocks* in the plural; although the Westminster divines suggest this when they allege, that flock in the singular number "is taken *collective* for such a flock as contained in it divers particular flocks, as we read expressly Gen. xxxiii. 13, Jacob saith of his, 'The flocks are with me, and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock would die.' Here is a full parallel to Luke's 'the whole flock;' all the flock in the singular is said to have several particular flocks as parts of it. And so Christ's 'little flock' and 'one fold,' Luke xii. 32 and John x. 16, though both in the singular number, and so expressing one flock and fold in general, viz., the church catholic, yet comprehendeth many particular flocks and churches contained in it and under it, as we have in our former answers shown there were many particular congregations in Jerusalem, and yet it's but one church and governed by one common presbytery."*

To this we reply, that the passage in Genesis is not parallel, because both modes of expression—"the flocks" and "all the flock"—are employed in the same verse, the one explanatory of the other, a circumstance which does not occur in Acts xx. 28. The phrase "little flock" employed in Luke's Gospel, xii. 32, means the disciples alone

* Answer of the Assembly of Divines to the Reasons of the Dissenting Brethren, p. 105. 4to. London: 1648.

to whom the Saviour then spoke, and not "the catholic church," as is supposed. In John x. 16, the word used is a different one from that in Acts xx. 28, and, therefore, furnishes no support to the cause for which it is adduced. Thus none of the passages quoted by these divines proves that *flock* may here denote "*divers particular flocks.*"

The elders are exhorted by Paul to *feed* the church at Ephesus. The right meaning of the verb *ποιμαίνειν*, translated to *feed*, is disputed. The dissenting brethren in the Westminster assembly appear to have restricted it to doctrine, or to the communication of spiritual instruction;* while the Presbyterians in the same assembly understood it in the sense of ruling as well as teaching.† It is more natural to include in it all the duties which the word denotes in other places. It is better not to divide the various duties of the office, unless there be some warrant to justify a separation of them. If then the verb *ποιμαίνειν* mean *to govern* as well as *to teach*, it is natural not to separate the governing and the teaching in the same passage. Let the word be taken in all its latitude, as the Westminster divines properly understand it. What then is the sense of the clause with which *ποιμαίνειν* is connected? The elders are instructed to govern and instruct the flock over which the Holy Ghost had appointed them overseers. In the Presbyterian sense this is equivalent to saying that the elders were to feed the flock as far as *teaching* was concerned, "*partitive*, that is, some one congregation, some another, and so amongst them the flock was fed;" but that they were to *govern* the same flock, not in their *partitive* but *collective* capacity. "Ye elders whom I now address, take care that each one of you teach aright the particular congregation over which you have been appointed; and see to it at the same time, that all of you in your presbyterial assembly govern the particular congregations in their united form." This is the unnatural interpretation vir-

* See Note XIV.

† See Note XV.

tually given to the passage by the Westminster divines. If the verb ποιμαίνειν include, as they correctly suppose, the exercise of all ministerial duties, it is impossible in that case to parcel it out into different departments, and to say that such duties are to be exercised in different ways. If *teaching* the flock should be understood *partitively*, *governing* the flock should, at the same time, be understood *partitively*; or if *teaching* the flock be taken *collectively*, so also should *governing* the flock. The elders are exhorted to govern the members of the church *in the way* they are exhorted to instruct them, provided we allow the same word to include *teaching* and *governing* in the same place.

If this reasoning be correct, *a modern presbyterial* government of the church at Ephesus must be abandoned. The words παντὶ τῷ ποιμνίῳ, translated *all the flock*, denote close intimacy. They are averse to the idea of distributiveness. The elders addressed stood in a peculiar relation to the entire flock; and the language cannot be taken distributively without violence; as the Westminster divines would have known had they been better acquainted with the Greek language. The original words cannot mean *to every flock*. There is no room for *the partitive* sense.* What support then is derived from the state of religion at Ephesus when the apostle wrote his First Epistle to the Corinthians, in favour of the notion that the term *church* is applied to a number of congregations with their officers under one presbyterial government? It affords no countenance to it whatever. As far as the circumstances of this city are known to us, the term ἐκκλησία still signifies a multitude of believers habitually meeting in one place. In certain cases it may be allowed that the primitive Christians could not immediately procure a building in a large city, capable of containing them all when they increased to an unusual number. They met in such places as they could obtain, and in such circumstances as were consistent with a due

* See Note XVI.

regard to their personal safety. We have seen that at one period in Ephesus, Aquila had a church in his house ; while there was a very large assembly in another part of the city. But these were soon after incorporated. They formed one church belonging to the city. As soon as it was judged expedient, they met together for worship ; and then the title *church* belonged to them all. It is quite improbable, that these sections which existed for a time in Ephesus had their own bishops permanently appointed over them. Their organization was neither complete nor regular. The different fellow-labourers of the apostles ; for example, Timothy, Luke, Sosthenes, Gaius, and Aristarchus, in Ephesus, were employed in superintending all the believers in the city in such ways as were most convenient. Each one had not a particular congregation assigned him, over which he alone was pastor. All were the pastors of the Ephesian converts ; nor was there unholy rivalry or jealousy among them. Aquila had as much liberty to instruct any portion of the entire body of believers, as Presbyterians suppose him to have had over *the church in his house*. It is admitted that when we read of the church in his house, *all* the brethren in Ephesus were not joined together in one suitable building. But they coalesced soon after ; for when Paul sent for the elders we read of *the church*. It is probable that there were a thousand believers, perhaps two thousand, but they were all together. They had several pastors or bishops, who would naturally take upon themselves such duties as they were best fitted to discharge. In this manner was maintained a large and healthy church ; not one of those sickly, feeble things, which is spiritually fed, or rather starved, in modern times by one overseer, and propped up by a county union.

It is puerile to suppose, that because there was a distinction of Jews and Greeks among the Ephesian converts they were therefore necessitated or accustomed to assemble in separate localities, the Jewish Christians apart from

the Gentile Christians. The church consisted chiefly of Gentiles, though like most other primitive churches it embraced Jews also. At that time both understood the Greek language, the Jews having learned it by intercourse with the Greek-speaking population.

The circumstances connected with the church of Corinth have also been adduced to prove that the term church is applied to several congregations united in one "presbyterial government." The following arguments are stated by the London ministers.*

"1. The multitude of believers. 2. The plenty of ministers. 3. The diversity of tongues and languages. 4. And the plurality of churches at Corinth."

1. In reasoning from the multitude of believers in the city, modern notions regarding the extent of a congregation have been transferred to apostolic times. Great uncertainty, however, attaches to such argumentation. No consideration, possessing the least claim to probability, has yet been advanced in connexion with the multitude of believers in Corinth at any one time, to show that there were distinct congregations. Attention is directed to the circumstance that "Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." Acts xviii. 8. The words, "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city," are quoted for the same purpose. We are also reminded that Paul continued at Corinth a year and six months. Finally, the two statements—"they that believed at Corinth were baptized," (Acts xviii. 8,) and "I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had

* The Divine Right of Church Government asserted and evidenced by the Holy Scriptures. By sundry Ministers of Christ within the city of London. p. 226, second edition. 4to. London: 1647.

baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other," (1 Cor. i. 14—16,) are brought into juxtaposition, from which "divers congregations" at Corinth are conjured into being "for the word and sacraments to be dispensed in." But who does not see that conjecture has supplied the place of argument in the present instance? No *proof* is adduced here to show that there were various congregations in consequence of the multitude of believers. Hence we pass by one-sided argumentation of this nature.

2. From the fact that Corinth had many preachers, the inference is drawn, that it had various congregations forming one presbyterial church. This argument is invalid, even though it could be shown that the church of Corinth had different pastors *at the same time*. It should be recollected that the gifted men or prophets which it had, were not the fixed pastors and ministers of it. Indeed they were not office-bearers at all. At first they supplied the place of officers; but properly speaking they were gifted brethren—men not invested with official authority, but furnished with extraordinary gifts for special purposes and places. It is true that Rutherford has adduced eight arguments to prove them ordinary pastors; but the so-called arguments are weak and futile, undeserving examination. We hold that there was a plurality of elders in each separate assembly of Christians, correctly designated *a church*; so that if it could even be demonstrated that "there was plenty of ministers and preachers in the church of Corinth" at the same time, (which has not been proved,) the fact would fail to attest the existence of separate congregations under one presbyterial government.

3. Here it is *assumed* that those who spoke with tongues did so for the edification of "divers congregations." Why they could not employ the gift for the edification of one assembly of believers, we are not informed.

4. The plurality of churches mentioned in reference to the church of Corinth, is advanced for the purpose of proving "a plurality of single congregations in this one presbyterial church," for it is written, "Let your women keep silence in the churches." In this argument there is some plausibility; although in consistency with their own view, Presbyterians should render the words, "Let your women keep silence *in the congregations.*" It is awkward to say regarding the one city, that the same word is employed to denote *all its congregations associated together under one government forming a presbyterial church, and each one of these congregations apart.* In this view, it denotes both *the presbyterial church of Corinth and a separate element of the same associated body.* We have hence a very loose application of language on the part of an inspired apostle, equally contrary to his usual method and to the philosophy of language. The word cannot be appropriated in two different significations on the same subject in one place. The use of language forbids it.

The expression, "Let your women keep silence in the churches," is explained by Glas* of the different meetings or assemblies of the one body of men and women that came together from time to time to eat the Lord's supper, and to teach and hear. But the word *ἐκκλησία, church,* signifies *the body assembling, not the assembly of the body,* as he understands it. Hence it cannot be referred to the various private meetings which may have taken place among different members of the church in various places of the city. The term is sufficiently interpreted by the preceding context. The apostle gives a rule which he intends should be followed "in all the churches of the saints." He uses the plural number because he has in view all other churches as well as that of Corinth.

In opposition to the reasoning of the London ministers we venture to affirm, that the word *church* is applied to

* Glas's Works, vol. i. pp. 193-4. Svo. Perth: 1782.

the entire company of believers at Corinth *as meeting habitually in one place*, not in distinct congregations. Hence the apostle describes *the whole church as coming together* for the purpose of edification: "If, therefore, the whole church be come together, and all speak with tongues," &c. But if *all* could not hear, they could not possibly receive instruction. Again, the Christians at Corinth are spoken of as *coming together* habitually to eat the Lord's supper. They are also exhorted to tarry one for another when *they came together to eat*; a statement which plainly proves the church to be no larger than that all could partake together of the ordinance in one place.*

On reviewing our examination of the churches of Jerusalem, Ephesus, and Corinth, we have no hesitation in stating our decided conviction that none of them consisted of several distinct congregations *with their own pastors*, united under the jurisdiction of one prelate, or of a college of presbyters. They were neither prelatic nor presbyterial churches. They were congregational churches, or societies of Christians, giving credible evidence of their obedience to Christ, and usually meeting for worship in one place. The word *ἐκκλησία*, *church*, descriptive of them individually, means an association of Christians *accustomed to assemble in one body*.

And yet the state of the believers in Jerusalem, particularly soon after their conversion, makes it probable that they occasionally assembled in small companies, here and there throughout the city. They were afraid of the enemies by whom they were surrounded. The distinction, too, between *the church* and *the family*, was not marked then as it was afterwards. This fact is accordant with a passage in the Acts of the Apostles (ii. 42—46), where it is said, that they brake bread from house to house, partaking of their food with gladness and singleness of heart. But even here, where the idea of their assembling in pri-

* See Note XVII.

vate houses is clearly implied, it is also stated that *they met daily in the temple*. The entire narrative in the book of the Acts shows that it was their habitual practice, when they were properly organized as a Christian community, to meet as one body, except compelled to disperse by the pressure of untoward circumstances. The members of the church *commonly* met together; all their feelings tending to prevent them from separating into smaller groups. When, therefore, they *did* assemble in larger or less quantities, as they were able, such meetings must be regarded as *the exception, not the rule*.

Again, Aquila had a church in his house at Ephesus for a time; but on his removal, it coalesced with the general body, so that all became truly *one church* assembling in the same place. Whatever temporary inconvenience may have caused the division of them into two companies, it is apparent that it was not in harmony with their desires that they should remain always apart. No alleged convenience could have compensated for lengthened or perpetual separation.

With respect to Corinth, it is tolerably clear that the believers there never met except in one place. They were not compelled by the force of circumstances, or of a pressing convenience, to divide themselves into sections on any occasion.

And then it should be recollected, that the term *ἐκκλησία, church*, is always applied to the entire body of believers in Jerusalem. The plural, *ἐκκλησῖαι, churches*, is never used. So also in regard to Ephesus. The narrative does not exhibit *αἱ ἐκκλησῖαι*, even when it is stated that Aquila had an *ἐκκλησία, church*, in his house; because it was not the divine will that the Christians *should continue* apart, being two or more *ἐκκλησῖαι* permanently. The same remark applies to the case of Nymphas, although it might be supposed, at first sight, that part of the Christians in Laodicea are termed an *ἐκκλησία, church*, in the very pas-

sage where *the church* of the Laodiceans ἡ Λαοδικέων ἐκκλησία, is also mentioned. (Coloss. iv. 15, 16.) Bähr's supposition is not probable, that *the whole church* of Laodicea met in Nymphas' house, although the words of the record will bear that interpretation. But we have no evidence that Nymphas lived in the city of Laodicea. According to Grotius and Steiger, he lived in the vicinity of it; and had a number of Christians meeting in his house for worship and ordinances—a daughter church, distinct from the mother church in the city of Laodicea.

The church at Colosse, in like manner, is not termed ἐκκλησία contemporaneously with the existence of an ἐκκλησία in the house of Philemon.

Thus the position, that two ἐκκλησίαι are never specified as being in the one city or town at the same time, even though there were separate congregations of worshippers in it, appears impregnable; as if on purpose to show that two *independent* societies of believers, two proper ἐκκλησίαι, should not be in the one place, except under very peculiar circumstances. Ἐκκλησία is applied to part of the Christians in a place; but the remaining part is not termed, contemporaneously, an ἐκκλησία.

We feel ourselves, therefore, on secure ground when asserting that all the members of the churches in Jerusalem and Ephesus *ordinarily* met together. In peculiar circumstances they assembled in little bands here and there; but it is certain that all *were accustomed* to worship together when practicable—to come together on all occasions of common interest and concernment. Their natural state, as the Christians of one place, was to be together in the various ordinances of God's house. Divided in sacred exercises, they were placed in unnatural isolation.

It is not, *in fact*, a point of great importance whether the believers in a city or town meet together for worship and the observance of ordinances on every occasion, *provided they have the same teachers and governors in common.*

But it has been converted into one of importance by the anxiety of modern disputants to represent the state of the prominent apostolical churches as precisely analogous to that of their own. As long as Christians belonging to the same place feel that they are called to assemble on every occasion of common interest—that their Christian privileges are not abridged by their meeting in distinct companies—that they stand in a relation of brotherly equality to all the other believers belonging to the other sections worshipping in their locality, little disadvantage would arise from sometimes worshipping apart.

Why then, it may be asked, has an elaborate attempt been made to show, that the Christians of Jerusalem, Ephesus, and Corinth, met habitually in the same place, if the matter be of little consequence? And why have so much pains been taken to present the ordinary rule of assembling, if it be vitiated by exceptions? To this we reply, that *the habitual meeting together* becomes a matter of importance, when, by departing from it, congregations or churches are constituted, distinct from, and independent of one another. It is not of importance, as long as the college of elders are considered equally the teachers and rulers of all, their services being distributed among the whole body; but when they become *appropriated* to particular portions, though bearing, perhaps, a loose relation to all conjointly, then does the departure from stated meetings of all together, prove injurious. It is possible to have various assemblings of the Christians in different places, without a virtual violation of their relationship to one another as *one church*; and in that case only, the deviation from meeting in one place is of little moment; but when it is perceived that the custom of assembling in different localities has a tendency to change the character of the one church, by splitting it up into a number of companies, which are, to all intents and purposes, self-regulated *churches*; then does the meeting of all in one

place appear a wise and important measure. The habitual assembling of these early Christians together, shows the value attached to unity, compactness, and mutual acquaintance—a value so great as to make it the rule at all times ; but *the kind of separation* of the one church, made by our opponents dividing it into distinct congregations or churches, each with a single instructor and governor, aided in the Presbyterian system by various other rulers, and owning subjection to a peculiar government constructed out of all the separated congregations, with their respective pastors and rulers—*this kind of separation*, we say, is unlike the occasional division of the church at Jerusalem into little companies worshipping as they could. Supposed convenience is studied too much ;—oneness, too little. The disjoining in question is complicated and artificial, appearing everywhere, and under all circumstances ; so that a mighty influence is lost. *Churches* are made out of one *church*.

In the case of these apostolic churches, the exceptions to the assembling in one place do not vitiate the rule, because the little bands were never regarded as wholly self-governed, independent churches, with teachers and governors for themselves alone.

But it were incongruous with the spirit of the New Testament churches to introduce such an arrangement into a city as that of modern Presbyterians, who have converted *the exception* into *the rule*, and altered it besides. Because the people of God in Jerusalem and Ephesus were compelled by circumstances, or urged by the pressure of a convenience almost amounting to necessity, to meet *sometimes* in small companies ; Presbyterians have made it a part of their system to erect such separate congregations, and to furnish each with a single pastor. They are right in maintaining that all the believers together constitute no more than *one church* ; but they are wrong in keeping them so distinct as to make them separate *churches* at the

same time. They are right in affirming that all the congregations are under the government of a college of elders; but they are wrong in assigning to each society its own elder to *teach* it alone; since all the elders should as much teach as govern the Christians in common. They are right in holding them to be united as one body; but they err in introducing such artificial distinctions as virtually destroy that unity; because all do not together partake of the Lord's supper, nor, indeed, ever meet together, except by the unscriptural mode of a few representatives. Their arrangements are too formal. They mar freshness, freedom, and energy.

Thus Presbyterians are far from proving the foundation of their system, even though they should be able to show that the churches in cities were larger than could conveniently meet in one place. Unless they can demonstrate that they were cantoned into various worshipping societies, each with its own teaching elder and other office-bearers, and subject to another government besides, they fail in laying a proper basis for their ecclesiastical practice. *The distinct and fixed congregations* into which they convert the little bands of believers, who sometimes met in various places, and assembled at such times as they could in consequence of the adverse influences by which they were surrounded, were undoubtedly a later, or post-apostolic arrangement. Originally they looked on themselves as one body; separated though they might be for a season. They regarded all the elders as their teachers and governors in common. They had no particular pastors, each group one for itself; nor did each congregation consider itself independent of the others. They were like the limbs of one body, rent asunder for a time, but longing to resume their natural position of compact union.

The usage of Congregational Independents is also exceptionable in regard to this point; but our business is to elucidate *principles*, not to defend prevailing practices.

They are right in maintaining that all the believers in Jerusalem, the *ἐκκλησία*, met together habitually under the government and instruction of various elders, but are wrong in splitting up what ought to be one church, the company of believers in modern towns, into several churches each with its own pastor, which in their independent individuality are patches and shreds, often incapable of a right self-government, because they have lost sight of the unity and kind of government existing in the earliest churches. By so doing, they have thrown away much of their strength; and what is more, their views have been narrowed. Every man, thinking, moving, and acting in the midst of his little society, becomes contracted in his ideas of men and things. It is very difficult for him to avoid being sectarian, selfish, unsocial in spirit; because his sphere is so narrow. Comprehensive and liberal views of Christianity are not readily nurtured in the small canton which the preacher looks on as peculiarly his own.

All Christians in a town or city should be one church, having several teachers and rulers in common, as was the case in Jerusalem. There are no peculiar circumstances sufficient to justify their separate, *self-governing* association in the present day, except the absolute impossibility of obtaining a place sufficiently large to accommodate all, and capable of being filled with the human voice. The entire church should always meet in one place for worship and ordinances; while congregations for the purpose of bringing sinners under the power of the gospel, and adding them to *the church*, might, at the same time, be regularly gathered. The preaching of the word might be conducted in many places; but the peculiar privileges of Christian assemblies composed of believers, should be enjoyed together.

It is unnecessary to show that the word *church* is improperly applied to the united congregations of a province or country, because the Scripture always speaks of *the churches*

of a district. Hence we read of *the churches* of Judæa, Galatia, Asia, not of *the church* in each of these territories. A church, composed of the united congregations of a province or country, is a thing unknown to the New Testament.

Provincial and national churches arose *after* the apostolic period. The only instance of a national church under the gospel which we have met with, is given by Stillingfleet, who finds in Egypt converted to the faith of Christ, a true church of God. As this example of representing an entire nation professing Christianity to be a proper Christian society, is a curious one, not apparent to an unlettered reader of the Bible, it will be desirable to cite the author's own statement: "*Isaiah* xix. 19, 21, 24, 25. *We have Egypt's professing the true faith, and enjoying gospel ordinances, vers. 19, 21, which, according to the prophetic style, are set down under the representation of such things as were then in use among the Jews: by an altar in the midst of the land, v. 19. The altar noting the true worship of God; and being in the midst of the land, the universal owning of this worship by all the people of the land. God owns them for a church, v. 25. Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt, my people, the very name whereby Israel was called while it was a church.* יָצַד, *Hosea* ii. 1; and when God unchurched them, it was under this name יְהוּדִים, *ye are not my people.* As much, then, as *Israel* was a church when God owned it for his people, so should *Egypt* be upon their conversion to the faith of Christ, which was done upon *Mark's* preaching at *Alexandria* not long after the death of Christ." *

In reply to this singular explanation it is sufficient to remark, that the best commentators on *Isaiah* do not refer the passage to the gospel dispensation. It should have been proved, not assumed, that the prophecy was fulfilled

* *Irenicum*, p. 157.

in Egypt's conversion to the Christian faith. Nor is Egypt denominated *a church*, in the words, *Blessed be Egypt my people*, either directly, or by implication. It is true that the terms, *my people*, are applied by Jehovah to Israel, which was a *national church*; but the simple fact of their being applied to another nation, does not show that it is also a true church of God. Eusebius says [that Mark first established churches at Alexandria itself; not that he preached throughout the country generally, or that he collected believers into churches in any other place.

The church universal has often been called *the invisible church*. It was probably owing to this appellation that some discovered distinct intimations in the New Testament of a counterpart to it in the world, which they denominated "the visible church universal," "the catholic church," or, "the visible company of the baptized." Where, it may be asked, is a church described as consisting of "the visible company of the baptized?" Where is the warrant for asserting that it contains not only true members chosen of God to eternal life, but ungodly men who have neither part nor lot in the spiritual blessings of salvation? In answer, we are referred to various passages. Thus in the parable of the marriage-feast, where the king's servants went and gathered both *bad* and *good*, so that the wedding was furnished with guests, there is a delineation of the church. "To this wedding," says M'Neile, "the church is expressly likened by her Lord, and the conduct of the servants, in gathering a mixed multitude, is not a device of their own, disapproved of by the Master; but a dutiful compliance with the Master's orders."* It is sufficient to characterize this assertion as incorrect. *The church* or an *ἐκκλησία* is *not* likened to the wedding. On the contrary, the inspired writer says: "*The kingdom of heaven* is like unto a certain king which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants," &c. The expounder has

* Lectures on the Church of England, p. 18. 8vo. London: 1840.

made two assumptions that ought to have been proved, viz., that *the kingdom of heaven* is identical with *a church* on earth: and also that *the church* is compared to the company consisting of *good* and *bad*. Till this, however, be done, the argument is nugatory. The figure of the wedding-garment represents a thing that cannot be known by man; an internal, invisible quality, which the Searcher of hearts alone can infallibly discover. We deny not that hypocritical professors may be received into Christian societies, because the true state of the heart cannot be always known correctly. But God will detect and punish them. The servants of the king gathered all they could. They summoned bad and good to the wedding; all were alike invited; but this furnishes no warrant for us to constitute churches consisting of bad and good men together; or to admit professors indiscriminately. We judge by appearances, and are therefore deceived occasionally. But that is no reason why we should not use as much caution as possible. All are invited to partake of the gospel blessings, whatever be their character; but all should not be knowingly admitted into churches, because the individual in the parable happened to be received among the guests. We should endeavour to receive none, except those who have the wedding-garment of true righteousness.

Another parable adduced for the purpose of proving the existence of a "visible church universal," or of "a baptized society" as a scriptural church, is taken from the parable of the tares and wheat, Matt. xiii. 24—40. Here again it is "the kingdom of heaven which is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field," &c. Impurity of communion has no support in the passage. The field is interpreted by our Lord himself to mean "the world," or habitable globe, not *the church*. The tares and the wheat, the righteous and the wicked, are together in the world; and not till they bear their peculiar fruit are they truly known as such. In infancy they are not distinguishable;

but when they grow up, unfolding their character, the difference is at once perceptible. And yet both are allowed to live together in the world. Christians must not persecute those living in sin around them. It is not *their* prerogative, but that of the great Judge, to remove the ungodly. At the great day they will be separated for ever; but, till then, they must be permitted to live along with Christians. Thus the parable forbids persecution.

Again, in another parable, evidence is found of a society or church called "the church visible," where *the kingdom of heaven* is compared to a net cast into the sea, "which, when it was full, they drew to the shore, and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away, Matt. xiii. 47, 48."* The gospel of the kingdom being preached, will induce many to make a profession of Christianity, who shall be cast away at the day of judgment. *The fact* that the net enclosed good and bad, was not intended to be a *rule of duty* to Christians in constituting churches, else the plain exhortations of other scriptures would be invalidated. It was meant simply to show that many professors will be hereafter rejected—many even in the churches of Christ—whose hypocrisy was not detected. But such persons never truly belonged to *the kingdom of heaven*. The point of comparison is *the effect* of both; of the proclamation of the kingdom in the world, and the putting forth of the net into the sea. The two things are not compared in regard to their *character* or *nature*, but their *visible results*.

Much misconception has arisen from ignorance of the right principles of interpretation. The points of resemblance in a parable have been multiplied beyond its proper scope. "The figure holds good only to a certain extent. It should neither be carried through every part, nor urged

* Garratt's Inquiry into the Scriptural View of the Constitution of a Christian Church, p. 18. 12mo. London: 1846.

too far. A minute and systematic parallel seems not to have been designed by the sacred writers. Each feature of the picture should not be insisted on, as though it had a corresponding and literal counterpart. It will be generally found, that some one point or principle is illustrated by a lengthened comparison, and that several traits are added to fill up the picture.* Hence in explaining such parables as those referred to, we must be careful not to imagine a *universal likeness* between the things compared, as if they resembled one another in all their properties and circumstances. One leading feature in them is sufficient to justify and interpret the parabolic representation,

On the whole, there is no evidence in the New Testament of the term *ἐκκλησία* ever being applied to a visible baptized society consisting of a mixed multitude, godly and ungodly. Even the phrase, "kingdom of heaven," does not denote such a society. Hence it may be fairly concluded, that "the visible church universal," or "the baptized society," is a phrase equally improper and unscriptural. Particular *churches* may be called *visible churches*; but a *visible universal church* is an inadmissible phrase. There is one *invisible church*: there are *visible churches* wherever worshipping assemblies composed of "faithful men" exist. The use of the epithets *visible* and *invisible*, in relation to churches, cannot be recommended. Mistakes have arisen in consequence of them. They have tended to introduce confusion into a subject, where clear ideas are of the first importance. It were desirable, therefore, that they should be laid aside. The mode in which the hypothesis of a *visible universal church* probably arose, is not calculated to recommend it; while the pernicious use made of it has produced lamentable perversions of truth. How often have passages applicable to *the invisible*

* Sacred Hermeneutics, pp. 309, 310. 8vo. Edinburgh: 1843.

church alone been applied to *the visible*, and a door thus opened to the admission of error!*

The only scriptural representation is, *the church universal* consisting of all saints on earth and in heaven; and a *particular church* composed of Christians usually assembling in the same place. The theory of Scripture is, that the latter taken together constitute that division of the *church universal* which is found on earth at any one time. That it is not fully realized is owing to the disobedience of man, not to the will of God. *The church universal* is visible just so far as *the churches on earth* consist of real Christians. That society belies its title which admits false as well as true professors of Christianity. The more worldly it becomes, the farther does its practice contradict its name.

Agreeably to this representation, do we find the terms uniformly applied to the members of apostolic churches. They are styled *saints, holy, &c.* Some unconverted individuals may occasionally belong to them; but this is a manifestation of departure from the standard to which the language descriptive of the church is not accommodated. The complete and proper idea of the society is preserved by the Holy Spirit; and so far as it is lowered or corrupted by the admixture of nominal Christians, the church is untrue to its character.

With respect to the number of believers constituting a church, there is no express information in Scripture. It varies according to circumstances, or the judgment of Christians.

It was held by the Jews, that less than ten men of leisure could not make a congregation; and some have thought that the Saviour's words, Matt. xviii. 20, were directed against this notion. It is doubtful, however, whether they were intended to be antagonistic to the Jewish tradition. John Cotton, Cotton Mather, and other

* See Note XVIII.

early Congregationalists, imagined that seven is the least number capable of entering into a church relation for the enjoyment of all ordinances. This number was fixed on, because they considered it impossible to carry out the rule respecting discipline in Matt. xviii. 15, 16, by fewer persons; and also, because the body of a church should consist of more individuals than the officers.

Others have endeavoured to find so much information in the New Testament regarding a church, as to hold that it may consist of *two or three believers*. According to them it is not stated *how many* members should constitute a church; while at the same time the lowest possible plurality is assigned in the declaration, "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Agreeably to this interpretation, a church may consist of any number of believers above one; *of two or three Christians*. The statement of Christ is taken in its most comprehensive sense. It is supposed to imply that in meetings of believers, public or private, in a church capacity or otherwise, the Saviour is present to answer the disciples' joint request. The terms of the promise are taken to include every kind of meeting. No limitation is introduced by these expositors, because they find none in the passage itself, or in the context. Hence they lay it down as a principle that two or three are sufficient. More than these, they say, are not absolutely necessary.

This reasoning is plausible, and in a great degree correct, although the conclusion in which it results is suspicious. Indeed the inference scarcely follows legitimately from the interpretation of the passage presented.

The twentieth verse contains a general declaration made to confirm the particular promise adduced in the nineteenth verse. "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything 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." The general declaration in the last sentence does not determine what a church is, or of how few it may consist; it merely asserts Christ's presence with two or three believers met in His name. Although the promise is applicable to the meetings of churches, yet it does not fix the lowest number of which a church may be composed. The two or three individuals are supposed to be members of a church; but the passage neither proves nor implies that they are *the all* necessary to constitute a scriptural church. At the meeting of a church where none but two or three are present, the declaration may be fairly used as an encouragement and warrant to expect the Saviour's presence; but the proposition is far different that, according to the declaration, none except two or three are absolutely necessary to constitute that fixed, spiritual society, rightly denominated a church of Christ.

The interpretation given by Cotton, that the two or three are considered as a sufficient number of witnesses to join with an offended brother in convincing and admonishing the brother that gave the offence, appears inadmissible.

It is vain to fix what has been left indefinite by the Holy Spirit. The matter must be regulated by Christian discretion. Experience proves that a large church is ordinarily desirable. Few of the churches mentioned in the New Testament—indeed, none of them that preserved its individuality for a length of time—were small or feeble.

Our investigations regarding the primitive churches have led to the full conviction, that they were voluntary societies;* that they were of a spiritual character, existing for purposes of edification, worship, and discipline; that they were not in connexion with civil governments, or under their control; that in the time of the apostles there were no provincial or national churches; that there was no external visible unity among them, farther than a sisterly

* See Note XIX.

relation; that they were not subordinate the one to the other; and that they were complete in themselves.

That they were *voluntary societies* is admitted even by those who think they ought not to be such in the present day. "The churches of Christ in those days were of necessity voluntary societies: but it does not thence follow, that they were always so to continue."*

The language in which they are uniformly described attests the truth of the proposition, that they were of a *spiritual character*. "Know ye not," says the apostle of the Gentiles, to the members of the Corinthian church, "that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

That they were *unconnected with civil governments* is universally conceded. All the governments of the world were opposed to them. So far from being assisted by civil power, they were persecuted by it.

We never read of *provincial churches*. On the contrary, the churches of Asia are mentioned; the churches of Judæa; the churches of Macedonia. Hence there is no record of *the church of Achaia*, although several churches existed in that province, as those of Corinth and Cenchrea. The advocates of *national churches* do not plead for their existence in the time of the apostles.

There is nothing to show an *external visible unity* among the churches of the apostolic period. All indeed were under the superintendence of the apostles generally; but whatever unity they had consisted in holding the same faith, and in serving the same Master with one spirit. Their unity was in having one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

Neither were they *subordinate to one another*. No example of this subordination has yet been adduced from the New Testament. Even those called mother-churches, such as were at Jerusalem and Antioch, did not claim or exercise power over others. All were distinct, independent societies.

* Garratt's Inquiry, p. 277.

The preceding propositions imply that the churches were *complete in themselves*. For example, the church of Ephesus possessed within itself the power of self-government; as is implied in Paul's address to the elders of it, and in the exhortations given to it at a later period, through John the apostle. So also with the church at Corinth; as may be fairly inferred from the two epistles addressed to it, especially the language of Paul relative to the treatment of the incestuous person. Any exception that may be taken to this statement by those who understand the word *church* to mean something else than a congregational church, will be dissipated in the following Lectures.

LECTURE III.

OFFICES APPOINTED IN THE EARLIEST CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.

“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 sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.”—ROM. xii. 6—8.

BEFORE proceeding to consider the office-bearers of a church, it will be expedient to allude to a point connected with them, by way of introduction. Some disputants commonly put ministers of the gospel into the place of apostles, by assuming that *they* may do what apostles did. Because apostles transacted certain matters, they infer that it belongs to church-rulers in modern times to perform the same duties. But many things were done by apostles which ordinary pastors ought not to do. The latter should not arrogate to themselves the same authority which belonged to the twelve. They should not place themselves in the same position. They have their own appropriate sphere. On the other hand, many things were performed by apostles that elders *should* perform in the present day. The duties devolving on apostles were partly peculiar, and partly common to them with others that should come after, especially with elders of churches.

The question therefore arises, by what means can the line of separation be determined? What duties, rights, or privileges, belong to the apostles *exclusively*; and what to other ecclesiastical officers in common with them? How

is it possible to know the boundary beyond which the claims of modern presbyters cannot go without intruding into the sacred enclosure peculiar to the few whom our Lord immediately selected as his followers? The elucidation of this point is of some moment. Important results hang on a clear apprehension of it. By arriving at a fixed principle respecting it, much fallacious and inconsequential reasoning will be refuted. The common error of quietly assuming that such and such things belong to the province of church-officers *because* they belonged to that of the apostles, will be effectually exposed. The arrogant pretensions of the clergy will be seen in their proper light. Men will begin to sift the affirmations of such as are of like passions, and therefore like ambition with themselves, rather than acquiesce in them unthinkingly.

The apostolic office may be said to have included in itself all inferior offices. An apostle had a right to do all things which an evangelist, a presbyter, a bishop, a pastor and teacher, and a deacon, were called to perform in virtue of their respective offices. He was furnished with an extraordinary commission, universal in its range. He was empowered to preach the gospel infallibly, to work miracles in attestation of the divinity of his doctrine, to found churches, and to give them such constitution as should best subserve the great purpose for which they were established. In organizing Christian societies he was divinely guided, so that he could not err. He acted under the express direction and approval of the great Head of the church; and therefore his arrangements were of necessity right. But since apostles were extraordinarily called and furnished, some may think that *their* ecclesiastical transactions are no guide to *us*. *We* may not imitate them because they have no proper *successors*. This idea is unscriptural and latitudinarian. They ought to be imitated by those who come after them. Both ecclesiastical officers and private Christians should do much after their example.

Apostles were not placed so far beyond the reach of humanity as to render it presumptuous in us to consider and imitate their conduct. Yet it were false reasoning in a church-member to say—"Here is a thing done by an apostle, and as he was a church-member of every Christian society, therefore I may do the same." It were equally censurable in an elder to affirm with regard to a certain apostolic transaction, "An apostle acted in this manner, and as he was an *elder*, I may assuredly do what he did." It is marvellous to observe how quietly elders are often put into the place of apostles. They are made to assume imperceptibly the same privileges and like power. As soon as it appears expedient to find authority for doing a certain act, some passage is adduced where *apostles* are represented as performing a similar one. But the right mode of proceeding is to ascertain from the plain description given of elders' duties, and from their approved proceedings in the New Testament, how far their office extends—the point up to which it reaches. So with regard to the duties of deacons, and of church-members. It must be discovered from the injunctions addressed to them, or from approved examples of their lives, how far their range of duty extends. In this manner we may be able to tell the line of demarcation between the apostolic office and all inferior situations. The separate scriptures relating to elders, deacons, and church-members must be carefully examined for the purpose of educing the appropriate province of each class. And when the aggregate duties involved in the inferior offices of elders and deacons are subtracted, what remains is peculiar to the apostolic office.

An example will render these observations more palpable to the reader. In the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles we read of the apostles ordaining deacons: hence it is concluded that modern prelates alone may ordain. But ordination was not *peculiar* to the apostles, for on examining what is said about elders we find that they too

ordained. In the same manner the presbyter's office may be said to include the duties belonging to a private church-member. An elder has a right to do not only what belongs to the office he sustains, but also what is required of a believer who sustains no office in the church to which he belongs. How far a private member may come up towards the peculiar duties of the elder's office can only be known by examining the duties common to both, and subtracting from them those of the elder.

These remarks may serve to put the reader on his guard against a mode of acting tacitly embodying a mode of reasoning not uncommon. Persons do certain acts, and authoritatively undertake certain duties, which do not rightfully belong to the situation they occupy as professing Christians. Pastors enact laws because the apostles did so, without inquiring whether the pastor's privileges reach so high as that point; or whether the enactment of authoritative rules be not peculiar to the apostolic office. Again, private members of a church claim the right to perform certain duties done by elders; although these particular duties may be peculiar to the office of elder, and therefore beyond the sphere of the unofficial Christian. Human nature is prone to exalt itself. The man occupying a lower and less privileged position, often usurps the rights of a higher. This procedure has a tendency to disturb and disarrange the proper relations subsisting between the different parties composing a Christian church. Jealousies and unhappiness are generated by it.

But we must advert to the opposite extreme, although it is less frequently exemplified, viz., an over-sensitiveness about apostolic succession. The apostles do not appear to have commonly stretched their authority as extraordinary officers to its highest point. They did not often insist on their peculiar prerogatives. They rarely exercised all the official power which they undoubtedly possessed. They did not prominently put forward their claims as apostles. It

is quite possible, therefore, to refrain from doing things which we may legitimately perform, from the fear of virtually occupying the position of a successor to them. Ordinary pastors may do very many things which apostles are described as doing. Laymen may assist in planting and organizing churches without exposing their deeds to the charge of invalidity. The affairs of churches may be set in order by elders without these elders incurring the imputation of intruding into the province of an evangelist. It is of little consequence by whom Christian societies are formed, organized, and regulated, provided the work be properly and scripturally done. If "the ordinances be kept," the spirit of primitive regulations maintained; the chief actors need not be fearful of stepping beyond their legitimate sphere into that of extraordinary officers, and thereby invalidating their ecclesiastical proceedings.

When a church has been formed it will naturally be the duty of the members composing it to look out for persons possessing the requisite scriptural qualifications, whom they may invest with an official character. No corporation can exist long without office-bearers or without persons who *virtually* become such. A worshipping society may indeed recognize no officer. It may repudiate the very name of ruler or overseer. But there will soon be persons who, in reality, and for all practical purposes, will obtain the authority possessed by ordinary office-bearers; else the society will fall into disorder. The light of nature no less than the word of God prompts the appointment of a class of men to bear rule in a church.

At the same time undue importance should not be attached to officers as though an assembly of Christians could have *no pretension* to the scriptural character of a *church* without them. We see from the fourteenth chapter of the Acts, that churches existed without elders for a considerable time, till Paul, returning from preaching the gospel in other places, appointed this class among them

(23rd verse). It is also apparent from the directions given to Titus (i. 5), that there were *churches* in Crete without elders.

Elders, therefore, are not essential to *the being*, but to *the well-being* of churches. They are chosen, not because a spiritual community is incompetent to do all *before*, which it does *after* obtaining them; but because the ordinances and commandments it is enjoined to observe can be done *better* with than *without* them. That they should be created in a spiritual corporation is a matter of order and wise arrangement, for the purpose of securing the best possible management of its interest; and therefore the light of nature, irrespectively of the word of God, would lead to their appointment.*

In peculiar circumstances a church may exist for a time without them. In that case the members should observe all the ordinances even in the absence of spiritual officers, because they are both competent and bound by duty to attend to them *always*. But in *ordinary* circumstances, overseers are needed for the right administration and stability of a church, which cannot be considered as completely or permanently organized without them. They are a divine ordinance as much as any other arrangement of God's house; and accordingly men are furnished with suitable qualifications by the great Head for discharging the functions to which they may be duly called by their brethren in the faith.

In the New Testament two kinds of office-bearers are set forth, *extraordinary* and *ordinary*. The one class, being no longer necessary to the progress of Christianity in the world, has ceased; the other, being required for the edification and prosperity of the churches, continues as long as these societies exist. The former were *temporary*, the latter are *permanent* officers, under the Christian dispensation.

* See Note XX.

The extraordinary office-bearers were apostles and evangelists ; to whom some add prophets and teachers.

The *apostles* were those who had seen Christ, and could therefore be witnesses of his resurrection ; they were called immediately by himself ; their commission was universal, authorizing them to preach the gospel and organize churches throughout the world ; and they were peculiarly fitted for their work by an inspiration which rendered them infallible in expounding the will of God, and by the power of working miracles in attestation of their divine mission, as well as of conferring miraculous gifts on others. It is sufficiently obvious from these qualifications, that the apostolical office was not intended to be perpetual. Vacancies were not filled up as they occurred.

Evangelists were companions of the apostles, assisting them in their various labours. Their chief employment consisted in preaching the gospel and gathering new churches among the Gentiles. They seem to have been usually chosen by the apostles, who intrusted them with special commissions as occasion required. They had the gift of tongues, enabling them to preach the gospel to every nation in its own language ; and also the gift of miracles, for confirmation of their doctrine. Timothy and Titus were evangelists. So also Philip the deacon, who is recorded to have wrought miracles. Judging from the example of Timothy and Titus, evangelists received specific directions from apostles ; though in the case of Philip there is no notice of instructions.

Although the office of evangelist corresponded with that of a modern *missionary*, it may be fairly inferred that it was *temporary*, being so connected with the apostolic functions, that when the latter ceased, it necessarily ceased at the same time. There are no apostles in the present day to send forth evangelists on special errands ; neither do men possess the extraordinary gifts which belonged to the primitive evangelists. Paul makes no mention of them

along with bishops and deacons, in his directions to Timothy.

The office in question, like that of an apostle, was not confined to one church; whereas no office-bearers intended to be permanent in the Christian dispensation belong to *more than one church*. Modern missionaries, improperly said to be *ordained* before their departure to heathen lands, sustain no *office*. They do not become office-bearers till a Christian church invite them to take oversight of them in the Lord, and they accept the call.

Prophets (προφῆται) were persons who spoke by an immediate impulse of the Holy Spirit, their minds being subject to an instantaneous afflatus whence the hearers were impressed with the same sudden power. In regard to the matter of their communications, they *unveiled mysteries*, or, in other words, revealed things future, as well as the secret counsels of the Divine will. They also uttered things adapted to instruct, quicken, animate, and confirm believers; or to produce faith in such as were previously unbelieving. Their exhortations and addresses were various, as the Spirit prompted: but, in all instances, there seems to have been an unwonted energy characterizing their appearances in Christian assemblies. The essence of the *prophetic* condition consisted mainly in the ἀποκάλυψις τῶν μυστηρίων (1 Cor. xiii. 2, compared with xiv. 30 ff.) though there was much variety in their addresses.*

Teachers (διδασκάλοι) were Christians in whom the gift of inspiration acted more uniformly and calmly. Having disciplined their minds by previous study of the Old Testament, they were able, after receiving divine illumination, to develop the truth infallibly in lengthened and continuous expositions. They were the subjects, not so much of extraordinary impulses, as of the Spirit's steadily acting power elevating the understanding to an unusual degree of appre-

* See Note XXI.

hension. Hence they occupied a most important position as public instructors.

The distinction between *prophets* and *teachers* was not always definitely preserved, for the *διδασκάλου* were sometimes excited to utter things which rather characterized the *προφῆται*.

It can scarcely be affirmed with propriety, that *the prophets* were office-bearers. They are more correctly denominated *gifted brethren* enjoying a peculiar charism of the Spirit, by means of which the ordinary disciples were struck with irresistible force. It has been sometimes supposed that they confined themselves to one church; but it is more probable that they went about instructing the brethren.

Neither can office be justly assigned to *the teachers*, at *their original appearance*. They presented themselves in particular churches and gave instruction to the members; but the charism does not seem to have been associated, in the first instance, with a distinct office.

It is obvious that *the prophets* were a temporary class. They belonged solely to the apostolic period of Christianity. The charism they had does not appear in modern churches. The same observation may be applied to *the teachers*,—*in a certain sense*. Looking at them *as they appeared originally* with powers elevated by the Holy Spirit to an uncommon degree of adaptedness for the communication of knowledge, it may be affirmed that they belonged to the earliest development of Christianity. When the charism became an ordinary gift, such as might be attained by many Christians in the exercise of their abilities, it is probable that these *teachers* were often taken into the college of elders, and thus formally constituted *officers*.

The charisms in question supplied to a large extent the place of definite church-offices. Societies in which the gifts of tongues prophesying and teaching existed, would feel less need of stated officers because the possessors of

them had an influence over the converts corresponding to their extraordinary illumination : an influence which may be regarded as the prototype of subsequent offices. The apostles were universal superintendents ; and any excesses arising from the liberty of speech allowed to the members generally could be checked by their presence or counsel. But amid their multiplied engagements they soon found it necessary to provide the newly-formed churches with stated ministers. Deacons were appointed in Jerusalem ; and, soon after, the circumstances of that mother-church required another class of men, to superintend the spiritual concerns.

The first mention of *elders* (*πρεσβύτεροι*) occurs in the Acts of the Apostles (xi. 30) in connexion with the Christian community in Jerusalem. The title was probably transferred from the *זָבֵן* of the synagogue to the assembly of Jewish Christians. Of the mode in which they were elected, and the precise time when they first appeared, no record is left. It is even difficult to discover the chief purpose for which they were originally instituted. All the circumstances, however, that have relation to the point conspire to show, that they were chosen in the first instance mainly for government. The gifted brethren instructed the church according to the talents conferred on them by the Holy Spirit ; but they do not appear to have had for the most part the gift of government (*κυβερνησις*). The members gave free scope to their awakened energies in exhortations and addresses in the assemblies ; but something was wanting, in the absence of apostle or evangelist, to concentrate and control the religious activities of all. Even those Christians who had the gift of government, were not left for a long period to exercise their abilities of management among the societies to which they belonged, without being expressly and formally appointed to the duties of superintendence and rule. It was expedient to create definite church-offices correspond-

ing to the charisms; and thus from among the persons who had already given evidence of ability to rule, a class styled *elders* were appointed, doubtless by the brethren themselves, or at least with their full concurrence, to maintain a general superintendence over the church, to check excesses, control the exercise of extraordinary gifts, which was not always managed with discretion, and to regulate the general proceedings of the society. No definite routine of duties was assigned them beyond which they should not go. The guidance of the spiritual machinery was intrusted to them as experience and wisdom, subject to apostolic direction, might judge most expedient. They possessed the gift of government in a peculiar degree, a gift which cannot be called extraordinary or miraculous like those of speaking with tongues and prophesying, but which ought to be regarded as the development of their own mental constitution aided by the Spirit's illumination.

The name *bishop* (ἐπίσκοπος) was of later origin than *elder*. It was first applied in Gentile churches. The same reasons which led to the erection of a definite church-office in the mother-church at Jerusalem, gave rise to bishops in Gentile communities. But the Jewish-Christian title would have sounded strange in the ears of the latter. Hence the term *bishop* (ἐπίσκοπος), with which they were familiar, inasmuch as it denoted an office in the Athenian state, presented itself as a suitable substitute.* That the one was current among the Jewish-Christians, the other among the Gentiles, is clear from the fact, that Peter and James who laboured among the former, invariably use *elders* not *bishops* (πρεσβύτεροι not ἐπίσκοποι).† The office of both was exactly the same. The names are used synonymously; the only distinction con-

* See Note XXII.

† See Rothe, Die Anfänge der christlichen Kirche. § 28. Svo. Wittenberg: 1837.

sisting in this, that the one refers to *the dignity*, the other to *the duties* of the office.

A few passages in the New Testament will show that presbyters or elders (*πρεσβύτεροι*) and bishops or overseers (*ἐπίσκοποι*) are designations of the same office: "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves; and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you *overseers*, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." These persons are called *the elders* of the church of Ephesus in a preceding verse. In the Epistle to Titus it is written: "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain *elders* in every city as I had appointed thee, for a *bishop* must be blameless." So also writes Peter: "*The elders* which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder—feed the flock of God which is among you, *taking the oversight thereof*;" or, as the original signifies, *acting as bishops*. The same conclusion unquestionably follows from the third chapter of the first Epistle to Timothy, in which Paul, after speaking of the qualifications required of a bishop, proceeds to notice those of deacons, without any mention of elders. But in the subsequent chapters he mentions *elders*, as though they were identical with *bishops*. The identity of elders and bishops is commonly admitted by impartial theologians of the Protestant Episcopal and Roman Catholic denominations. We need only mention Whitby belonging to the former; and in the latter Mack, author of a commentary on the pastoral epistles.*

As long as there were prophesying and teaching, besides other spiritual gifts in the primitive churches, the elders would probably devote themselves to the work of general superintendence and rule much more than to that of instruction. They acted as presidents, baptized, presided at the Lord's supper, assisted the poor and sick, main-

* Commentar über die Pastoralbriefe. 8vo. 1836.

tained purity of doctrine and conduct in the members, and settled disputes.

In the preceding remarks it has been assumed, on the ground of numerous passages, that definite church-offices were not established in all the churches at their commencement. Thus the church at Corinth seems to have had no elders when the apostle addressed his first epistle to it. But the fittest persons to be intrusted with the distinct duties of office would soon appear by the exercise of their peculiar gifts; and when it was found necessary to institute definite offices in particular communities, the gifted brethren might frequently be chosen. They had already supplied the place of such offices; and it was meet that their talents should be thereafter exercised in a more marked circle of duties. In this manner elders or bishops occupied a position corresponding to that in which those members who had the charisms of government and of *teaching* (*διδασχῆ*) previously stood; some of them in the presbytery of a church assuming the department of instruction, while others ruled and presided. The various duties of the one comprehensive office were distributed among them; each bishop following out the direction of his own talents so as to subserve the church's prosperity.

When we look at the settled state of the churches, after charisms had generally ceased—when the minds of Christians were no longer elevated and enlightened by extraordinary influences of the Spirit—when all that remained of the gifted brethren appeared in the elders—men favoured with less remarkable manifestations; we shall find no other office-bearers besides them than those attending to the secular affairs. Bishops and deacons were intended to continue in the churches of Christ; other offices were temporary. This opinion rests mainly on the following grounds.

First. Bishops and deacons alone are mentioned in the

Epistle to the Philippians, as belonging to the church in their city. Had there been other office-bearers in it when Paul wrote, it is most probable that he would have mentioned them; since no adequate reason can be assigned for specifying a part, not all. It cannot well be supposed that the Philippian church was not fully organized at that time. To account for the mention of some office-bearers only, after this fashion, would be exceedingly arbitrary.

Secondly. In the pastoral epistles, which contain the most copious directions respecting the regulation of churches, no officers are noticed except bishops and deacons. However unsettled the state of the Christian societies may have previously been, they had then assumed a fixed and permanent form; for those epistles were written at a comparatively late date. The events recorded in the Acts of the Apostles indicate the nascent, extraordinary state of Christianity; whereas the letters in question apply to it after it had been established in a great part of the then civilized world. Even on the assumption that the extraordinary gifts possessed by many Christians presupposed an imperfect and temporary constitution of the religious communities, *the pastoral epistles* cannot be reasonably thought to depict that condition. The lateness of their composition, as well as internal evidence, contradicts the idea. They apply to a condition of Christianity which would be likely to exist at all times; and were doubtless intended to regulate the affairs of churches throughout the present dispensation.

In the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, mention is made of *pastors* and *teachers*; and it has been disputed whether they were ordinary church-officers or *spiritual* and *gifted* men. The point, however, is of little importance, since both views are essentially coincident. Those who possessed the charism of *teaching*, had a gift corresponding to the later church-office designated as *the eldership*, or at least to part of the duties included in the

elder's office; and when offices were instituted in the churches, *teachers* were frequently invested with the elder-ship. Hence we have no hesitation in taking *pastors* and *teachers* as titles descriptive of ordinary office-bearers, especially as it is added that God appointed apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;" language peculiarly applicable to permanent office-bearers in the church of Christ.

It has been also debated whether these terms refer to the same office, or to two distinct orders of spiritual officers. Pelagius, Ambrose, Calvin, Beza, Whitby, the Cambridge Platform, and the Savoy Confession, adopt the latter view; while Jerome, Augustine, Rückert, Harless, Olshausen and others, embrace the former. Those who regard them as distinct, suppose that the *teacher's* peculiar duty is to attend to doctrine, while the *pastor's* is to attend to exhortation. In the language of the Cambridge Platform, "the pastor's special work is to attend to exhortation, and therein to administer a word of wisdom. The teacher is to attend to doctrine, and therein to administer a word of knowledge." The form of the words favours the idea that both names are indiscriminately applied to the same persons, in relation to the different capabilities they possessed, or the different duties which they usually performed. Had the contrary been intended, we should have expected the passage to have stood thus, "and some pastors, and *some* teachers," just as it is said, "he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists." Two classes of duties belonging to the same office are denoted by the terms in question. In the apostolic age these duties may have been performed by different individuals oftener than by one; because there was a greater division of pas-

toral labour at that time; but it is natural to suppose that the teaching and pastoral duties were also exercised by the same person.

Thus *pastors* and *teachers* are the same office-bearers with *elders* or *bishops*. In the Acts of the Apostles the *elders* of the church of Ephesus are exhorted to *feed* the flock, (to act as *pastors* or shepherds of it, ποιμαίνειν—ποιμένες εἶναι) over which the Holy Ghost had made them *bishops*, (overseers, English version;) and in *feeding* the church, or acting as *pastors*, they not only *ruled* but *taught*. In being *pastors*, they were *teachers* of the flock.

We have seen that four nouns were used interchangeably, viz., *elder* (πρεσβύτερος), *bishop* (ἐπίσκοπος), *pastor* (ποιμήν), and *teacher* (διδάσκαλος), all being applied alike to persons who presided over a congregational church. They were employed as general terms of designation; without being strictly defined, as technical names generally are. In the primitive period they had not acquired that *exact* appropriation to office which they subsequently received; although they were so appropriated to a *great extent*. The fact that the names were used interchangeably indicates, with sufficient clearness, that the duties they symbolized belonged to one and the same office. They implied equal rank and authority. There were no gradations of office among *elder*, *bishop*, *pastor*, and *teacher*, in the apostolic age. Character and talents were the only ground of distinction. There was then a simplicity in the arrangements of God's house, unlike the cumbrousness introduced in later times of degeneracy.

From the identity of presbyters and bishops, it follows that *scriptural* bishops were not such as *modern* or *diocesan* bishops.* They presided over one church or community, not over many. Some, however, *endeavour* to find *diocesan* bishops in the New Testament. The angels of the seven

* See Note XXIII.

churches in Asia Minor are represented as bishops of those churches.

This is the stronghold of those who find diocesan episcopacy in the Scriptures. It is not necessary, however, to spend many words on the argument. Archbishop Potter, who reasons from the title as adroitly as any of his followers, endeavours to show that the seven angels were so many single persons, and that they were men of chief authority in their churches. He argues that they were not the whole church in their several cities, because the churches are represented by seven candlesticks, whereas the angels are seven stars: they were not a select body of men, because they are mentioned as single persons: the angel of Thyatira was a married man, as is inferred from the words *thy wife Jezebel*, τὴν γυναῖκα σου Ἰεζάβελ; all the rest are constantly addressed in the singular number; and the titles of angels and stars are always applied in the Apocalypse to single men, while there is no example of their being given to any society or number of men. Such are the particulars of Potter's argumentation.

If diocesan episcopacy have no clearer or more sure foundation than this, it cannot have been designed for a perpetual arrangement suited to all places and circumstances. The expression, *angel of the church*, is universally allowed to be obscure; and it were strange if a system, or at least an essential part of a system of ecclesiastical polity, should have been based on a single phrase of dark and dubious import. It is contrary to analogy that God should have intended to establish diocesan episcopacy, and given no other revelation of his mind concerning it than the sole phrase, *angel of the church*, at the commencement of the seven epistles. Mr. Garratt admits that there is no other instance of diocesan episcopacy in Scripture.

It is needless to collect a multitude of opinions respecting the correct sense of the term *angel* in this connexion, since they are little more than conjectures. Obscurity

will always envelop it. We shall simply state what appears to us the most probable meaning.

Other parts of the New Testament show that these churches had several elders over them. For this purpose it is only necessary to refer to Acts xiv. 23, and xx. 17. Hence some suppose the college of elders to be personified by the title, *angel of the church*. But since all were equal in authority, none being permanent president or moderator, it is not likely that the singular number should be used. Besides, the instructions and warnings contained in the epistles were apparently intended for the members in general. Thus it is written in the second chapter, tenth verse: "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Here the singular and plural number are intermingled, as though it were a matter of no importance which was used. It is vain to say with Potter, that *the people* are addressed when the plural is employed, and *the bishop* alone when the singular occurs; and that the writer changes his style from the bishop to the people, and from the people to the bishop. The truth of the assertion is by no means obvious. On the contrary, *the same person or persons* are addressed in both numbers, as far as the nature of the language will warrant a conclusion. Thus, it is first said in the singular number, "Fear none of those things which *thou* shalt suffer;" to which is immediately subjoined, "Behold, the devil shall cast of *you* into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days:" language which is surely explanatory of the things which were to be suffered. Hence the conclusion is most natural that the object addressed in the singular is identical with the persons spoken to in the plural, especially as the singular is immediately resumed,—"*Be thou* faithful unto death." Had one part of the verse been

intended for the bishop, and the other part for the people, surely the distinction would have been more definite. In that case we should have expected a style of address *appropriate* to two portions of the church so far separated in power and dignity.

Again, the language in the ninth verse of the third chapter is not so suitable to a prelate of the time of John the apostle as to the church itself. "Behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet," &c. These words are appropriate, if the church itself be meant, to which the persons should come with humble reverence and attach themselves; but they are scarcely in harmony with the spirit of the apostolic age, though we should suppose a diocesan bishop to be intended as the receiver of the homage.

The general style of the book accords with a symbolical interpretation of the title; and since several parts of the epistles indicate that they were addressed neither to one president nor to several, it is probable that the title, *angel of the church*, is simply a personification of the predominant and pervading spirit of each church. This will account for the formal address in the singular number, without the least necessity for resorting to the supposition of a single officer. It is also confirmed by the fact, that the New Testament epistles are generally addressed to the members of the churches rather than the presiding officers, even in cases where it must be reasonably inferred that office-bearers had been appointed.

When Potter argues that the angel of Thyatira was a married man, because the expression *thy wife Jezebel* is used, the interpretation is almost ludicrous. Surely the very name Jezebel, might have suggested the idea that the language is *metaphorical*; the meaning being none other than that the spirit of Jezebel described in the first book of the Kings had been allowed to prevail. The *doctrine of Balaam*, mentioned in another epistle, is analogous. If

the word *thy* really belong to the text, it must denote the spirit *which you have* and *cherish among you*.*

But the churches are represented by seven candlesticks, whereas the angels are seven stars, consequently the angels are not identical with the churches themselves. This objection is not formidable. It is quite consistent with our view to say, that the seven candlesticks are the seven churches, while the seven stars are the respective angels of those churches, or the characteristic spirit of each. Thus it is by no means obvious, as Mr. Boyd affirms, "that if each several candlestick represented a separate church, each several star should represent a separate minister of a church."†

The exposition now given appears to us more natural than any other, being perfectly accordant with every part of the addresses to the churches, with the genius of those societies as described in the New Testament, and also with the practice of the sacred writers. If diocesan episcopacy be *proved* by this description of the seven churches, its advocates may be congratulated on the ingenuity and strength of their reasoning powers, which can deduce a truth so important from the slender materials presented.

The New Testament personages who have been identified with modern bishops are Epaphras, Archippus, Epaphroditus, Sosthenes, Crescens, Apollos, Diotrephes, Timothy, Titus, and James.

The first of these individuals is noticed in the Epistle to the Colossians, i. 7, and iv. 12, 13: "As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ." "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and

* See Note XXIV.

† Episcopacy and Presbytery, p. 109. 8vo. London: 1841.

them in Hierapolis." Those who can infer from these words that Epaphras was diocesan bishop of Colosse, must be very perspicacious. The weaker advocates of episcopacy alone adduce them as proof of a position incapable of legitimate demonstration. And why are they not consistent? Why do they not deduce the conclusion from the same passages that Epaphras enjoyed the bishoprics of Laodicea and Hierapolis, as well as that of Colosse?

That Archippus was bishop of Colosse or Laodicea has been inferred by Dodwell, from the Epistle to the Colossians, iv. 17, and from the second verse of the Epistle to Philemon; "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it." "And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellow-soldier," &c. The Apostolic Constitutions assign him the bishopric of Laodicea. He appears to have filled some office in the church of Colosse; although the nature of it cannot be discovered at the present day. Many think that he was a *deacon*; perhaps because the word translated *ministry* is τὴν διακονίαν. It is more probable, we think, that he was a *bishop*; not however a *prelate* or *diocesan* bishop.

In relation to Epaphroditus, who seems to have been a different person from Epaphras, he is elevated by Theodoret to the rank of a prelate, because he is called an *apostle*, and on the ground of a passage in the Epistle to the Philippians, ii. 25: "Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and companion in labour and fellow-soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants." But he was not an *apostle* in the proper sense of the word. He was *the messenger* of the Philippians. Besides, the commencement of the epistle shows, that the church at Philippi had a *plurality* of bishops: hence they could not have been diocesan.

A comparatively late tradition makes Sosthenes bishop of Colophon. The Sosthenes mentioned in 1 Cor. i. 1, was

probably a different person from the ruler of the synagogue, Acts xviii. 17. All that can be gathered from the New Testament respecting him is, that he was a Christian well known to the Corinthians, and associated in the gospel with the apostle Paul.

Crescens was also an assistant of Paul in preaching the gospel; but this is all the information concerning him furnished by the New Testament. The traditions respecting him in the Apostolic Constitutions, and the writings of the fathers, rest on no foundation. Apollos was a preacher, chiefly at Corinth, but there is not a shadow of proof that he was a diocesan bishop.

We know nothing of Diotrophes, except what is stated in the Third Epistle of John. He seems to have been one of the members of the church, and ambitious to have the pre-eminence. When Brokesby states that to him "a pre-eminence was due, but he was too great an affecter of it, and an ill manager of it, in which he exceeded his bounds," he draws on his own imagination.*

Timothy was probably *an evangelist*. He was requested at least to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. iv. 5). He attended Paul for a considerable time, assisting him in his labours, and sharing his dangers. Whitby admits that he did not hold an office identical with that of a modern prelate.

Titus is not called *an evangelist*, but it is probable he was so, because the directions given to him by Paul closely resemble those given to Timothy. He was left in Crete to ordain elders in every city, and to set in order the things that were wanting. Having finished the work for which he had been left in the island, he was sent for the next year to Nicopolis (Titus iii. 12).

Thus Timothy and Titus were employed by the apostle

* Government of the Primitive Church for the Three First Centuries to the beginning of the Fourth. By Francis Brokesby, B.D., Fellow of Trinity College in Cambridge. p. 63. 8vo. London: 1712.

Paul to perform certain ecclesiastical duties, for which, doubtless, they were well qualified by the Holy Spirit; but it cannot be proved that they were located at Ephesus and Crete as *stated office-bearers* presiding over dioceses, and having the kind of episcopal jurisdiction which a prelate legally exercises. They were required to set in order the things that were wanting, and to ordain elders in every city; (Titus i. 5;) but, in doing so, they acted under the express direction of an inspired apostle, for Paul says, "as I had appointed thee." "Evangelists," says Stillingfleet, "were sent sometimes into this country, to put the churches in order there, sometimes into another; but wherever they were, they acted as evangelists, and not as fixed officers. And such were Timothy and Titus, notwithstanding all the opposition made against it, as will appear to any that will take an impartial survey of the arguments on both sides.*

Whenever *an apostle* shall appoint *an evangelist* or *any other* to do a work similar to that intrusted to Timothy and Titus, we shall render all due honour to men *so* called and prepared for their *ecclesiastical* employment. Perhaps we might even concede to them the title and jurisdiction of *a diocesan bishop*. But we cannot metamorphose modern prelates into Timothys and Tituses, without a scriptural warrant. There is an essential difference between them in the mode of their appointment, the authority by which they are sent, the affairs committed to their care, and the power which they rightfully possess, or ambitiously usurp.†

James is said to have been bishop of Jerusalem. He who has been so styled was probably James the less, one of the apostles; and there is nothing in the New Testament to show that he was superior to the other apostles, or to justify Baur's extravagant assertions respecting him, as if he were *the bishop of all bishops, more than an apostle, the*

* See his *Irenicum*, p. 340. 4to. London: 1662.

† See Note XXV.

representative of JESUS HIMSELF. Like all the apostles, he had the care of the churches; although he seems to have chiefly resided in Jerusalem, and watched over the disciples in that city.* In the apostolic council he does not occupy such pre-eminence as the archbishop of the metropolis would naturally possess in virtue of his office. On the contrary, some of the other apostles are as prominent as he. Paul and Barnabas were sent as a deputation from the Antiochian church, a second time, to *the apostles and elders.* The whole narrative, in short, contained in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, plainly shows that the body of the disciples were present at the consultation of the apostles and elders. Hence the letter containing the decision was sent forth in the name of the *apostles, elders, and brethren.* Neither James, nor any other of the apostles, *assumed* ecclesiastical authority over the church. They cherished no ambitious designs; although they might have successfully executed many, had they been so disposed. Theirs was a nobler, because an humbler, spirit. Their tempers and characters were too deeply imbued with holiness to allow self to usurp that place in their desires which belonged to the *Great Master* whom they faithfully served.

Deacons are mentioned in the Epistle to the Philipians, i. 1; and in the First Epistle to Timothy, iii. 8, 10, 12, 13.

The office-bearers, whose election is described in the sixth chapter of the Acts, have been usually regarded as *deacons.* Some, however, have viewed them in a different light. The proper answers to two questions will embrace all the particulars needful to be discussed in the present place. First: were the persons whose election is there noticed, *the first* deacons? Secondly: were they identical with the officers mentioned in the First Epistle to Timothy, and expressly called *deacons* (διάκονοι)?

* See Note XXVI.

First. Many writers have supposed that they were *not* the *first* deacons. Mosheim, Kuinoel, Mack, Olshausen, Meyer, a writer in the Encyclopædia Metropolitana, and Whately, are of this opinion. In support of it, it is alleged, that traces of earlier deacons are discoverable in the *fifth* chapter of the Acts. *The young men* who carried out the corpses of Ananias and Sapphira were *the deacons* of the church at Jerusalem. In proof of this meaning assigned to the word rendered *young men* (*νεώτερος*), reference is made to Luke's gospel, xxii. 26, and to 1 Peter v. 5, where the same term signifies a public servant. In the former passage *νεώτερος* appears to be used synonymously with *διακονῶν*. But the identity is *apparent*, not *real*. In both cases there is a reference to *age*, not to *office*. Accordingly, Wycliffe translates the words of Luke, "he that is grettist among you be maad as yonger." Inferior services, such as that specified, seem to have been performed by persons undertaking them *spontaneously*. And who so ready to proffer their assistance in those matters as the young and active? It is not probable that *the same persons* performed these duties on every occasion. There were individuals always willing to render assistance; but it can scarcely be proved that they held a *distinct office*. We believe that the passages adduced by Mosheim and others do not establish the position for which they are quoted.

Another argument advanced in favour of the same opinion is derived from the language of the apostles, "it is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables." There must have been *some dispensers*, either the apostles themselves, or special deacons. If, therefore, the apostles' words exclude themselves from having discharged the duty, there must have been *special dispensers*, or deacons. Such is the reasoning of a writer in the Encyclopædia Metropolitana. To us it seems inconclusive. The assertion, "it is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables," does not prove

that the apostles had not officiated. It is quite consistent with their language to suppose that they took on them a *general superintendence* of the funds appropriated to the poor and sick, leaving the details to others; and it is highly probable that they did so. But when the number of believers increased, and conflicting interests began to appear; when jealousies sprang up among the new converts, arising, in part, from the different modes of thinking characteristic of Jews and Gentiles—from the prejudices of the former; and the free spirit of the latter, often bordering on excess—the apostles saw the necessity of appointing persons who should relieve them of a burden partly inconsistent with their proper calling; and at the same time allay the murmurings which had already broken forth, and from which they themselves could not hope to be exempted, should they continue to dispense alms. Hence arose a pressing necessity for special office-bearers.

Attention is farther directed to the fact, that the complaint is called a murmuring of *the Grecians* or foreign Jews against *the Hebrews* or native Jews, because the widows of the former were neglected; and that the names of the seven are all Hellenist or Grecian; whence the conclusion has been drawn, that they were only the first *Grecian* deacons, *Hebrew* deacons having existed before. It is thought that the latter had acted with partiality in the distribution of alms among the widows. They had neglected the Grecians and attended to their own party. But from the fact of the names being Grecian, it does not follow that the seven all belonged to the Greeks; for the Jews had often double names, the one Hebrew, the other Hellenistic. The very circumstance, too, of the murmuring proceeding from the Hellenistic part of the church, might have led the church to choose Hellenists alone, that there might be no ground for alleging partiality in future, but that complete confidence might be established in the minds of the Hellenists.

On the whole, we see no sufficient ground for doubting that the deacons now elected were the *first* of that order. It is not probable that there were already Hebrew deacons. The distribution of alms had been superintended by the apostles; but as they could not attend to details consistently with their spiritual duties, some of the disciples had been intrusted with the specialities of management, not always the same persons; and it was almost unavoidable that they should have been Palestinian Jews, for of them was the church at Jerusalem chiefly composed. It cannot be ascertained whether the complaint was founded in truth, or merely in distrust of the Hebrews on the part of the Hellenists. One thing only is certain, that the discontent of the Grecians, whether well or ill-grounded, found expression, and led to the creation of an office, to which seven persons, well qualified, and possessing the church's confidence, were solemnly chosen.

Secondly. Were these seven individuals identical with the office-bearers mentioned in the First Epistle to Timothy, and there styled *deacons*? The affirmative is generally assumed. They were originally appointed *διακονεῖν*, to serve, to act as deacons to, tables. And yet it is true that in the Acts of the Apostles, they are never called *deacons* (*διάκονοι*), but simply *the seven*. Neither are the special duties for which they were appointed described by Paul when speaking of the office in the First Epistle to Timothy. Hence some have supposed that the office to which the persons mentioned in the sixth chapter of the Acts were appointed, was *temporary*, as arising out of a *special emergency*; and that it did not correspond to the *diaconship*.

This reasoning is of little force. It must be admitted, indeed, that Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, speaks of *the seven*, not *the seven deacons*; (Acts xxi. 8;) but the circumstance may be explained by the currency and commonness of the name belonging to the office. It was so well known that the writer did not think it necessary to append

it. He omitted it for the sake of brevity. Thus in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, *the twelve* are named, without the addition, *apostles*. On the same principle, Paul, in his First Epistle to Timothy, omits to notice the primary duties to which the deacons were appointed. If the office had already existed for a considerable time, it was superfluous to say that the deacons were stewards and almoners. It was far more important to state *the qualifications* necessary in those who should be good deacons than the secular duties they were required to undertake; for, unless the proper qualifications preceded, it was superfluous to allude to the latter. The qualifications could not be defined too clearly; whereas the particular acts of service involved in the office were sufficiently marked in practice.

In short, there is no good reason for dissociating the office mentioned in the sixth chapter of the Acts from that which is described in the First Epistle to Timothy. Nor was it of a temporary nature, confined to the Palestinian or Jewish Christian churches: it was in the church at Philippi. If we believe that bishops were designed to be perpetual in Christian communities, we must consistently believe that deacons were also intended to be permanent.

The duties of the office consisted in the distribution of the church's alms, under the sanction of the apostles. The seven were appointed to *serve tables*, that is, to attend to pecuniary matters—*tables for money*, not for *food*. It does not necessarily follow from the record of their appointment, that they were to distribute money to the poor widows alone; but they were to receive the offerings of the brethren, to provide for the maintenance of the elders, and to distribute to such as were in need, the poor, the aged, the sick, and the infirm. They acted, in short, as the church's treasurers and almoners. Thus the office was entirely occupied with temporalities.

After elders were appointed, the deacons were subordinate to their influence, as they had been before to that of

the apostles. That they were subordinate to the elders is certain from Acts xi. 30, where it is related that pecuniary relief was sent by the disciples at Antioch to *the elders*. The contributions intended for the poorer members of the church were given into the hands of the elders, not the deacons; and it may be fairly supposed, with Neander, that the presbyters intrusted each of the deacons with a sum out of the common fund, for distribution in his own department. The fact is instructive, as showing that the elders were considered to have the general superintendence of *all affairs* belonging to the church.

It has been made a subject of inquiry whether the deacon was allowed to preach or teach. Some have even elevated him to be a *preaching officer* in the church, referring to the case of Stephen, who preached, and of Philip, who both preached and administered the ordinance of baptism.

In regard to the former, it is not expressly stated that he preached. Full of faith and power "he did great wonders and miracles among the people." Certain classes of Jews with whom he came into contact disputed with him. Hence he justified himself and his cause from the accusations of the adversaries, entering at length into his defence. To speak correctly, he did not *preach*, or make a sermon, as it is now called. And even supposing that he did preach, or do all that is substantially implied in preaching, it was not by virtue of his office of deacon. He was endowed with remarkable gifts which it was his duty to employ, as opportunities presented themselves. In the infancy of Christianity, before the church of Jerusalem was fully and permanently organized, and when peculiar endowments were bestowed by the Holy Spirit on many disciples, we need not expect exact precedents for future times. The distinction between the laity and the clergy did not then exist. It was the duty of every one who was acquainted with the truth to propagate it as best he might.

Not that the private member usurped the prerogatives of the elder, in a particular church over which the eldership had been appointed; but that all were laudably employed in promoting the faith, as God gave them ability. And it is still the incumbent duty of every man who knows and feels the truth to make it known to his fellow-men. The circumstances of modern times and those connected with the introduction of Christianity are in many respects dissimilar; while the meaning of preaching is so indeterminate as to preclude precision of argument on the point in question. Looking at the case of Stephen we infer, that *formal preaching*, like that which belongs to the elder's office in the present day, was no part of the deaconship; although a deacon was not precluded by office from doing all that lay within the sphere of his influence to commend the gospel to those with whom he might converse, while discharging the duties of his *appropriate work*. The spirit of Stephen's example transferred to modern times, justifies us in affirming that a deacon should not refrain from occasionally preaching in a pulpit, when requested to do so by a Christian church, in the absence of an elder; provided the duties of the deaconship be not neglected. For he must never engage in any work, as long as he continues a deacon, which would tend to prevent him from discharging his own *office*.

Of Philip it is expressly stated, that he preached Christ to the inhabitants of Samaria. He had left Jerusalem. The whole church and the deacons—all except the apostles—had been scattered by the persecution following Stephen's martyrdom. He had thus virtually ceased to be a deacon. And who shall blame him for making known Christ wherever he went? But he also baptized. Does not this show that the deacon was a preaching officer in the church, since none but a regular preacher is authorized to administer the ordinance of baptism? Some say that he preached and baptized by virtue of his office as an

evangelist. He is certainly styled an evangelist in the Acts of the Apostles, (xxi. 8,) but it is doubtful whether he was an evangelist at the time he is mentioned in the eighth chapter. The hypothesis is unnecessary; for the peculiarity of circumstances will more than justify his preaching and baptizing. Even those who take the *cabalistic* view of ordination should be satisfied with the explanation furnished by the character of the times. What is allowable and proper in unusual circumstances, furnishes no regular precedent for ordinary ones. Should Philip be called a layman, he was justified both in preaching and baptizing, because he had gifts of God qualifying him to be a teacher. The administration of baptism was not then confined to the clergy. To use the words of Ambrosiaster, "At first all taught and all baptized, in whatever days and times there was opportunity. Philip did not seek for a time or a day in which he might baptize the eunuch, nor did he interpose fasting," &c.* And there may be circumstances in the present day, in which a layman is authorized to baptize; for we do not look upon baptizing as a prerogative *necessarily* involved in the pastor's office. Andrew Fuller was right when he said, "It appears to me that every approved teacher of God's word, whether ordained the pastor of a particular church or not, is authorized to baptize."†

From these remarks it will be evident, that preaching is not a *part of the deacon's office*, though he may occasionally preach. But when he does so, he preaches not by virtue of his office, but by virtue of his attachment to Christ. The apostle Paul, describing the deacon's qualifications, mentions none connected with teaching; while he says expressly, that the elder should be *apt to teach*. Thus the position of Archbishop Potter is correct: "It was not properly any part of the deacon's office to preach,"‡ although

* See Note XXVII.

† Works, vol. v. p. 282.

‡ Discourse of Church Government, p. 156. London edition: 1845.

he was not debarred from giving free scope to his talents in the service of the church.

Some American Congregationalists seem extremely solicitous of confining the deacon within his own sphere. Hear the following sentiments: "Although deacons in the absence of the pastor may take the lead in religious meetings, and may read the Scriptures and make practical remarks, the order and well-being of the churches require, that they be careful not to entrench upon what are appropriately pastoral duties; and, therefore, they are not considered at liberty to select a text and preach from it what has to the audience the appearance of a sermon, and is designed to be such; nor is it proper for them to dismiss the assembly with a formal benediction, such as is customarily heard at the breaking up of religious assemblies, from the lips of the minister."* Is not this an attempt to draw distinctions, proceeding from excessive jealousy? Do we not discern in the language now quoted, an endeavour to separate things almost alike—an expedient which common sense will repudiate? We leave it to the writer himself to specify the difference between "taking the lead in religious meetings, reading the Scriptures, and making practical remarks," and "selecting a text and preaching from it *what has to the audience the appearance of a sermon.*" Why the deacon, too, after reading the Scriptures and making practical remarks, should not dismiss the assembly with the Scripture benediction, is to us mysterious. It is enough to assert that the New Testament neither directly nor indirectly condemns the idea that a deacon, should the church request him to preach a sermon, is warranted to comply with the call, if he have reason to suppose that the absent pastor has no objection. And let him pronounce the benediction at the close, for there is nothing talismanic in the words issuing from the lips of an ordained minister. A private member of the church may preach under the

* Upham's *Ratio Disciplina*, § 42, p. 77.

same circumstances. The deacon does so by virtue of his *membership*, not his *office*.*

We should not have alluded to a statement of the apostle Paul addressed to Timothy, had it not been recently reduced by Garratt to show that deacons preached the gospel generally, or under limitations. The passage in question is this: "They that have used the office of a deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus," viz. they that have used the office of deacon well, qualify themselves for a higher one, viz. that of elder. This interpretation is inadmissible, though sanctioned by a host of commentators, ancient and modern. The phrase, "a good degree," does not mean a step to a higher office, but a good estimation or standing.† The deaconship required peculiar talents, especially the power of discriminating and managing various dispositions; and therefore such as were successful naturally obtained the high esteem of their fellow-Christians.

Although it is exceedingly difficult to ascertain the true meaning of the word rendered *helps* in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, (xii. 28.) ἀντιλήψεις, it seems to us most probable that it refers to the office of deacon. In that case it denotes such assistants as had charge of the poor and sick, in addition to similar duties. This opinion is adopted by Neander and De Wette.

It appears from the Epistle to the Romans, (xvi. 1,) that there were official females in some of the apostolic churches: "I commend unto you Phœbe, our sister, which is a servant (*deaconess*, δίακονον) of the church which is at Cenchrea." The following passage also seems to allude to the same office: "Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have

* See Note XXVIII.

† See Note XXIX.

diligently followed every good work. But the younger widows refuse," &c. (1 Tim. v. 9—15.) It is generally admitted that Phœbe is styled a deaconess; but many doubt whether the latter passage applies to an office held by aged females. That it *does* refer to deaconesses has been argued on the following grounds:

1. The word rendered by our translators *taken into the number*, καταλέγσθω, signifies literally, *selected* or *chosen*. The apostle begins to speak of widows at the third verse of the chapter, enjoining the church to provide for their support; but at the *ninth verse* he says, *let not a widow be chosen*; referring apparently to some office to which she should not be chosen under sixty years of age. Here, therefore, another kind of widows is introduced, viz. *an official class*; *unofficial* widows having been described from the fifth to the ninth verse.

2. In the verses quoted, qualifications are mentioned, the want of which could not reasonably exclude widows from the charitable contributions of the church, provided they were desolate.

In opposition to these considerations it is argued that only *one kind* of widows is spoken of throughout the entire passage (verses 3—18). It is urged that the sixteenth verse, as compared with the fourth and eighth, shows that *two classes* are not specified, but merely such as are aged and truly helpless. "If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed."—"But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to show piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God. But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

It is also said that the age mentioned, *sixty*, is inconsistent with Christian activity. If office were not undertaken

till sixty, that age appears to render the female incapable of active service. The qualifications described refer to *past* works, while nothing is said of *present capabilities*. And yet Phœbe is commended to the brethren *to be assisted in whatever business she has need of*.

Between these conflicting opinions it is difficult to decide. We are inclined to adopt the former, although Neander has reasoned strongly against it. Most of his objections are obviated, in part at least, by Rothe.

There appears no valid reason for supposing that there was a *formal* office, with duties *distinctly marked out*, and *regularly performed* by certain females in the early churches. As we do not read of deaconesses in any other church than that at Cenchrea, it is hazardous to build on it and the passage in the First Epistle to Timothy already considered, the proposition that a class of official females was as uniformly appointed in all the churches as the deacons themselves. In consequence of the peculiar customs of society in the East, the women being much secluded, a deacon may have found it impossible, in many cases, to maintain such intercourse with the female members of the church as his office required, without awakening evil surmises. Hence widows were chosen as assistants to the deacons in distributing alms to the female members, according to their necessities; in visiting them when sick; and in otherwise ministering to their comfort. Such were selected whenever the church perceived the necessity of them; but it is not probable that they appeared as a distinct class in all the primitive churches, or that they were designed to be permanent officials. In that case we should have expected much clearer directions concerning them than those in the First Epistle to Timothy; and besides, the usages of society, to which they chiefly owed their existence, are now altered. Doubtless delicate cases will occasionally occur in the present day requiring the presence and assistance of females;

but these can be managed by members of the same sex whom the church may select for the emergency.*

Many have divided elders into two classes, viz, *teaching* or *preaching*, and *ruling* elders. It is admitted that *all* rule or govern; but while some preach as well as rule, others, it is said, should *confine themselves* to government, having no official authority to expound the written word.

That this is a correct statement of the Presbyterian opinion will be seen from the words of Dick: "It belongs to one class to rule, and in ruling their whole duty consists. They are required to do nothing more than to administer the laws of Christ for the regulation of the conduct of his followers. Those of the other class are joined with them in the rule of the church; but there is an additional duty incumbent upon them, in which the former have no concern, namely, to labour in word and doctrine, to preach the gospel, and administer the sacraments."†

The most important passage adduced in favour of the class of office-bearers termed *ruling elders*, is found in the First Epistle of Paul to Timothy, v. 17: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." "These words," says Dr. King, "could suggest to an unbiassed reader only one meaning: that all elders who rule well are worthy of abundant honour, but especially those of their number who, besides ruling well, also labour in word and doctrine. Of course, the passage so interpreted, bears, that of the elders who rule well, only some labour in word and doctrine; that is, there are ruling elders, and among these teaching elders, as we have at the present day."‡ Few would object to this reasoning, understood in its obvious

* See Note XXX.

† Lectures on Theology, vol. i. p. 384. 8vo. Edinburgh: 1834.

‡ The Ruling Eldership of the Christian Church, p. 54. 12mo. 2nd edition. Edinburgh: 1846.

sense; for a distinction is manifestly implied between those elders that rule well, and those who labour in word and doctrine. The point in dispute is, *the nature* of the distinction. Are they separated into two classes so widely different as that one may not do all the acts which the other performs? Or is the nature of the distinction merely such as arises from the possession of various talents directed to the discharge of different duties, while all have an equal *right* to perform the same functions? The latter position we hope to render indisputable to all but those who are resolved to abide by their opinions in the face of reasonable evidence to the contrary.

Let us look attentively at the words of the apostle addressed to Timothy. In the first place, the elders generally are mentioned—a class of persons officially distinguished by the name elders, in connexion with a certain department of their duty, by doing which well they are entitled to *double* honour. In the second place, a part of this general class of elders is singled out as specially deserving such double maintenance. The genus, if we may so speak, is *first* mentioned; and *next* a certain portion of it, distinguished for certain qualities.

Does the word *especially* (μάλιστα) mark two separate classes? Or, does it denote a distinction among individuals belonging to the same class? Unquestionably the latter. The universal usage of the adverb will bear out the assertion: “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men; *especially* unto them who are of the household of faith.” Here they who are of the household of faith are included in the *all* preceding; they belong to the all, but are particularized. “All the saints salute you, *chiefly* they that are of Cæsar’s household.” Here again they of Cæsar’s household are included among all the saints, and are simply particularized from among them. “We trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, *specially* of those that believe:” *all men, especially*

they who believe, the latter being comprehended in the former. "But if any man provide not for his own, and *specially* for those of his own house," &c.: *his own*, embracing those of his own household; the general appellation containing the latter. "The books, but *especially* the parchments;" the books, including the parchments. "For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, *specially* they of the circumcision." They of the circumcision are selected from among the many unruly and vain talkers. "A brother beloved, *specially* to me." Onesimus was beloved by many, *among whom* was Paul.

From these examples we draw the conclusion that the adverb in question precedes the mention of certain persons or things included in a more general appellation going before. A general term, denoting a class of persons or things, precedes; and the adverb afterwards serves to direct particular attention to some of these persons or things. It is employed to single out certain individuals embraced in a general epithet.

Let us apply these remarks to the passage in the Epistle to Timothy. "Let the elders that rule;" such is the general appellation; "especially they that labour;" words by which a certain part of the elders who rule are particularized as labouring in word and doctrine. The latter are included in the former, as in all the examples adduced. The elders who rule embrace those who labour in the word and doctrine. Those who labour in the word and doctrine also rule well; but the former is a more important department of duty, as is implied in the term *especially*.

It is not, however, the matter of a distinction between the preaching and ruling elders which is in dispute, but, as we have said, *the kind* of distinction. Among Presbyterians, the distinction is so marked as to constitute *two offices*. In their view the two classes are *so* distinct, as to have separate duties to which they are restricted. Ruling elders, it is contended, have no concern with preaching

and teaching. *That* is a business beyond their province. They have no authority to go out of the governing department. Here, then, we join issue with them, and affirm that the distinction lies in *different departments of the same office*. The passage in Timothy states no more than that elders possessing the ability to rule, as well as to labour in word and doctrine, deserved maintenance better than the elders who, while they also ruled well, were either deficient in the talent of teaching, or indisposed to employ it as they were able. The explanation given by Presbyterians violates the philosophy of language. If all were ruling elders, they must have been so in the same sense. All must either have been *distinctively* ruling elders,—the term *ruling* describing the official peculiarity of situation,—or else they must all have been such elders as are termed ruling in regard to one department of labour. It will not suffice to take all these ruling elders as ruling under different official characters; some having none other employment than ruling; others having more important duties to discharge than those of government. *Ruling well* is a phrase that must be understood in the same way in the same passage; so that all the persons spoken of, without exception, must be *solely ruling elders* in the appropriated sense of it, or all must be ruling elders in an unappropriated sense, and consequently having other duties to perform. Either acceptance is fatal to the argument founded on the passage in favour of a class of officers whose sole department in a church is to administer the laws of Christ.

Presbyterians gain nothing by proving that some elders in the primitive churches ruled while others preached. That is a position too manifest to be called in question. Other parts of the New Testament would warrant that conclusion, had the text in the Epistle to Timothy been wanting. In each church there was a plurality of elders. Some were chiefly employed in teaching, others in ruling.

But when it is maintained that the latter did not teach because they were officially set apart to another work, and had therefore no right to do so, the view has no countenance in the New Testament. Those who ordinarily refrained from preaching are thus metamorphosed into *laymen* or *lay elders*, in opposition to *clerical* or *preaching elders*. Such is the true view of Calvin and the Reformed churches. "This is the warpe and webbe of the laie Presbyterie, that hath so enfolded some men's wits that they cannot unreave their cogitations from admiring their newe found consistories. And in deede the credite of their first devisers did somewhat amuse me, as I thinke it doeth others, till . . . I began more seriouslie to rip up the whole; and then I found both the slenderness of the stuffe and loosenesse of the worke, that had deceived so many men's eies."*

It is curious to observe how the main point is kept out of sight in "King's Treatise on the Ruling Eldership," where the real fact of debate between Congregationalists and Presbyterians is never stated. In this modern production, the entire argument is occupied with showing that there was a distinction among the elders of the primitive churches, some of them labouring in one department, others in another.

When a new work shall be written on the same side of the question, let the matter be properly treated. Let it be candidly stated that ruling elders have nothing to do with the duties of the pastoral office except with government; that they have no authority, divine or human, to preach or teach, or preside at the Lord's supper, or at church meetings, or to baptize; for this is the true doctrine of the Presbyterian church. If there be elders whose sole office is to rule, why are they *never* allowed to preside at meetings of the church; or to be moderators of sessions,

* "BILSON: Perpetual Government of Christ's Church; Epistle to the Reader." 4to. London: 1593.

presbyteries, and synods. One should suppose that their experience in ruling, to which they are exclusively devoted, would give them a better title to preside at such assemblies than the preaching elders. But, as far as we may judge from practice, ministers of the gospel proceed on the supposition that they themselves are always superior in presiding and governing, although they have other weighty duties to perform, to men who have nothing to do with any other department of spiritual labour.

Presbyterians have created a fictitious distinction among elders. Instead of contenting themselves with the assertion that some should generally rule, because they have special talents adapted to government, they have proceeded a step farther, alleging that these elders *must confine themselves to the administration of law*, abstaining from that of the word. The apostolic age knows no such elders. By virtue of their office all were equal in right and privilege. Any one elder had a *right* to do whatever any other did. But they found it expedient to apportion different duties belonging to the same office among themselves, in accordance with the capacity and experience of each; for the sake of promoting the highest interests of the church over which they unitedly watched.

The following considerations disprove the office of lay eldership.

1. It implies, that a distinction between the laity and clergy was made in the apostolic period. That separation, however, is foreign to the New Testament. All the members of a Christian community occasionally exercised their various gifts for the edification of the body. The mouths of none were closed up by persons arrogating to themselves the exclusive appellation of *the clergy*; God's *inheritance*,* according to the origin of the term. But when the mystery of iniquity began to develop itself, a separating line was drawn between two classes of believers

* See Note XXXI.

in the same assembly, far larger than that which existed after the earliest appointment of definite officers; and the privileges of the one were abridged in proportion as those of the other were enlarged.

2. Elders (πρεσβύτεροι) is *the appropriated* appellation of bishops in other places of the New Testament. It is therefore agreeable to usage to understand it of bishops alone in the present text.

3. Stated and ordinary bishops are elsewhere said to rule. "Remember them which have the rule (ἡγούμενοι) over you." "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you and *are over you* in the Lord," or, as it might be properly translated, who rule over you (προιστάμενοι). Hence it is natural to infer, that in the present instance, the phrase *they that labour in word and doctrine*, is coextensive with *them that rule*.

4. *Double honour*, of which the elders who rule well are counted worthy, must mean, *double maintenance*, as the succeeding context shows. But in no passage of Scripture do we find the least intimation or command towards contributing to the temporal support of an order of men who do not teach or preach in public. Such contributions are due to pastors and bishops—to *speaking*, not to *silent* elders.

5. In enumerating the qualifications of elders, the apostle Paul says of all, without exception or distinction, that they should be *apt to teach* (διδασκτικοί). But if some had no concern in teaching, this qualification was absolutely worthless. It is absurd to require that all elders should be *fit to teach*, and to affirm at the same time that some of them ought not to teach because they are *laymen* or *lay-officers*.

These arguments are sufficient to overthrow the hypothesis of ruling elders, a class of officers whose existence is not recognized in the New Testament.*

* See Note XXXII.

The passage in Timothy simply recognizes the fact that some taught, and that others commonly refrained from preaching; the college of presbyters being endowed with various gifts. Some excelled in prudent superintendence of the people, others in public exposition. Seldom, if ever, was one bishop equally eminent in all departments of his office. How natural is it then to suppose, that those who had a talent for teaching should have chiefly devoted themselves to the cultivation of their talent; while others venerable for their experience and piety managed the affairs of the Christian society! Hence it happened *in practice*, that some presbyters preached, and others governed; the arrangement being simply a matter of wisdom and choice, not of inherent principle or privilege. In point of *fact*, not of *right*, a part laboured in word and doctrine; while another part administered the laws of Christ for the regulation of the conduct of his disciples.*

Two other passages have been adduced by Calvin, and repeated by his adherents, in favour of ruling elders, viz. Romans xii. 8, and 1 Cor. xii. 28. It is unnecessary to dwell on them,

The words in the Epistle to the Romans are these: "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."

It is tolerably clear that charisms peculiar to the apostolic age are spoken of in the first three clauses; but it is not equally clear that the next four, or at least three, should be so understood. Instead of considering the fourth, fifth, and sixth, as the manifestations of the charisms spoken of

* See Note XXXIII.

in the former; or as distinct from them, yet still belonging to the same general class; we are inclined to refer them to the exercise of Christian virtues in believers generally. It is true that the charism of *rule* (*προιστάναι*) may be aptly compared with that expressed by a cognate term in the parallel passage, 1 Cor. xii. 28, (*κυβέρνησις*), but this does not appear sufficient to recommend the interpretation which Neander and Olshausen follow. In any case, no definite church offices are described in the passage, but only the charisms to which those offices, afterwards instituted, corresponded.

But even on the supposition that the phrase in question, *he that ruleth*, denotes the ruling elder, we may ask, by what process of interpretation is it discovered that he who "ruleth" has no right to teach? Why is the presiding elder thrust down among *the laity*, as they are called? Could he not have been a bishop or elder who devoted himself to the department of governing because he had talents for it, leaving the preaching of the word to those who excelled in preaching? Surely this idea is probable, as it is consistent with less obscure passages which allude to elders. Those who expound each clause of a distinct office in a Christian community forget the unsettled state of the churches in which various charisms existed, no less than the fluctuating nature of the gifts themselves. It is quite probable that these gifts were so connected with each other, that he who was at one time *a prophet*, by virtue of the charism he possessed, became at another time *a teacher*, by a change or extension of the gift. Or, on the other hand, one individual might possess two charisms at the same time not definitely separated, but yet distinguishable.

The passage in the First Epistle to the Corinthians is the following: "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments,

diversities of tongues." Here *governments* are identified with *ruling elders*. "There is no other class of persons," says Dr. Dick, "to whom this title, used as it is in contradistinction to other office-bearers, will apply, but the ruling elder of Presbyterians; and it is with obvious propriety that they are designated governors, as the sole business of their office is to govern the congregation over which they are appointed."* A weak cause requires unusual logic; and we have little hesitation in characterizing that logic which makes *governments* synonymous with *modern ruling elders*, as unusual. If the interpretation be correct, these officers are placed seventh in rank. Is not this remarkable? The word translated *governments* (*κυβερνήσεις*) denotes, literally, charisms of government, which were bestowed on various individuals in the early churches, qualifying them for ruling. Who these persons were, it is difficult to determine with certainty; but it is most probable that the elders or bishops are principally meant. "These two characteristics, the *προστῆναι* and the *κυβερνᾶν*, (Epistle to Romans, xii. 8, and 1 Cor. xii. 28,) evidently exhaust what belonged from the beginning to the office of presbyter or bishop, and for which it was originally instituted."†

The office now termed the ruling eldership was invented by Calvin. After creating it, he naturally enough endeavoured to procure Scripture proof in its favour. Dr. King quotes the usual passages from Cyprian, Origen, and Hilary, to show that these fathers were acquainted with this office; but the proof will not suffice to convince an honest inquirer. Surely if he had known the thorough examination to which these quotations have been subjected by Rothe and Neander, he would have allowed them to sleep undisturbed, rather than affix interpretations to them which they refuse to bear. We repeat our assertion, that Calvin created the office. Vitranga demolished it with

* Lectures, vol. iv. p. 381.

† See Note XXXIV.

learned and unanswerable arguments. Let the advocates of it refute him if they be able.

The practice of those who have the office is inconsistent with the very passage on which they chiefly build an argument in its favour. The word translated *honour* (τιμὴ) means *maintenance* or *support*, as the context clearly shows. But we have never heard that ruling elders received a maintenance from the church over which they presided. They are never paid for their services in governing. None but the preaching presbyter receives remuneration. Judging, indeed, from the actual duties done by ruling elders, we should say that their services *deserve* no remuneration. As far as our observation has reached, the majority are the tools of the bishop. In church courts they commonly vote as he votes. *His* sentiments are *their* sentiments. Even when inclined to think and act independently, they are restrained in synods, and prevented in many cases from being *troublesome*, as it is called by the clergy.

LECTURE IV.

ELECTION OF OFFICE-BEARERS IN THE APOSTOLIC AGE.

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”—2 Cor. iii. 17.

REGARDING the election of office-bearers there are few direct notices in the New Testament. We shall collect all that can be supposed to have any connexion with the point.

In choosing an apostle to supply the place of Judas, Peter addressed himself to the entire number of the disciples, who were about one hundred and twenty, saying, “Men and brethren, this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. . . . Wherefore of these men, which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us . . . must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen; that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.” Here it is affirmed that *they*, meaning the disciples—those addressed as *men and brethren*, appointed two. They also prayed and

gave forth their lots. Thus the whole company of the disciples, and not the apostles alone, elected Matthias in room of Judas.

Again, when *the seven* were about to be chosen, the apostles called the multitude of the disciples unto them and said: "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, whom we may appoint over this business." The proposal pleased the whole multitude, and *they*, i. e. *the whole multitude*, chose seven persons, and set them before the apostles.

In the fourteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, at the twenty-third verse, another transaction is recorded bearing on the topic before us: "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." Here the word translated *ordained* (*χειροτονήσαντες*) implies, it is alleged, that the choice of elders was made by the vote of the church or body of disciples.

A fourth example of popular choice is recorded in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, viii. 18, 19: "And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches; and not that only, but who was also *chosen of the churches* to travel with us with this grace," &c. The election of the brother in question was by the churches.

In reviewing these passages every attentive reader must be forcibly struck with the paucity of evidence in favour of the popular rights. The first is scarcely appropriate, both because it relates to the appointment of *an apostle*, and because the disciples merely presented two candidates to the decision of Him who knows all hearts. They agreed in selecting two persons; but they did not choose the one successor to Judas. The fact, however, of *the initiative act* of the transaction being committed to the entire company

of disciples, is significant of the respect paid to the people's will. The apostles might justly have excluded them from all share in the contemplated appointment, and have taken the whole business on themselves. But so far from this, Peter, in the name of the other apostles, simply *recommends* an election. He requests the believers to look out among them for a suitable person to fill the place of which Judas had proved himself so unworthy. Here therefore the popular voice is recognized by apostles themselves. The highest servants of Christ pay it deference. Men gifted with infallible authority in ecclesiastical arrangements respect and regard it. When the people are allowed to take no part in the settlement of a pastor over them, *the spirit* of this arrangement is certainly contravened; although the parallelism of the case to that of choosing a scriptural bishop cannot be urged, inasmuch as the one relates to the election of an extraordinary and temporary, the latter to that of an ordinary and perpetual, officer.

I am aware that Mosheim, Hammond, Selater, and others, regard even the nomination or proposal of the two candidates as the act of *the apostles*. The noun ἀποστόλοι is made the nominative case to the verb ἔστησαν; *the eleven* appointed two. It appears however more natural and more accordant with the context, to refer the appointment or nomination to the entire company of disciples.

Two considerations are stated by Selater in favour of the other ellipsis. In speaking of Judas, Peter says, He was numbered *with us*, and had obtained a part of *this ministry*, *i. e. the apostolic* ministry. "Was Judas thus numbered then with all the brethren there present, as partaker 'with them' of that apostolic function? or with St. Peter only, and the other ten apostles in the midst of whom he then spake? Surely this latter sense alone is the utmost the words can bear, when he says, 'he was numbered with us;' and consequently they were his apostolic brethren only, to whom he addressed them.

“ Again, Peter’s words, ‘ of these men which have accompanied with us all the time, &c. must one be ordained,’ &c. Why not ‘ of some amongst yourselves?’ or some words equivalent to that; if the persons to be elected were not only to be chosen ‘ from among them,’ but themselves to be the electors also? That seems the direct expression for recommending the election to the brethren, and enjoining them to elect one from among themselves too: whereas the other, which St. Peter uses, is as plainly an address to some other electors there present, to choose out of those very brethren before them, pointing at them, as it were, by that natural expression: Out of ‘ these’ persons that have accompanied with ‘ us,’ &c.”*

The distinction here introduced seems to be strained and artificial. The words introductory to Peter’s address are unfavourable to it: “ And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of his disciples, and said, (the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty,) Men and brethren, this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled,” &c. The title *brethren* belongs to the whole company, who are equally addressed. There is no reason for looking upon it as *appropriated* to the ten apostles. To translate it with Sclater, ‘ ye men that are peculiarly my brethren,’ is unnatural. How plausible soever therefore the distinction may appear to some, the title of Peter’s address favours the more obvious view of the passage. Even Cornelius a Lapide understands it in the common acceptance.

The second example refers to the choosing of officers to manage the temporal affairs of the church. This is conclusive in favour of the people’s right to choose, as far as deacons are concerned; but it does not extend to the choice of higher officers. Some indeed affirm that if the people had the privilege of choosing the one class, they

* An Original Draught of the Primitive Church. 12mo. pp. 153-4. Oxford: 1840.

had also the privilege of choosing the other. But the argument is not conclusive. On the contrary, they may have been intrusted with the lower prerogative and not the higher, because Divine wisdom deemed it unsafe to commit to them a thing of so much importance. The case however affords a strong presumption in favour of the popular suffrage in the case of elders; since there is no express exception placing the election of spiritual officers beyond the province of the people's will. Analogy would seem to refer both cases to the same head.

The third example is ambiguous. It has been frequently pressed into a service which it refuses to perform, viz., *the direct support* of popular election. Large criticisms have been expended on the word *χειροτονήσαντες* by Calvin, Beza, Erasmus, Owen, Doddridge, Coleman, and others, to show that it necessarily includes the idea of election by the suffrages of the people. And yet it must be said, that not a few of the criticisms propounded by these writers attempt to prove too much, and fail in consequence. There is so much of the artificial about them, as would lead a candid mind to pause before it should adopt them. In some points they offer violence to the philosophy of the Greek language; and in others they make arbitrary assumptions. In short, the verb in question has been needlessly urged in favour of an opinion which may well dispense with dubious support.

It is incumbent on us, however, to look at the passage with minute attention. The term *χειροτονήσαντες* has been variously explained. Its primary etymological sense is to elect a person by vote, the vote being given by stretching forth the hand. It was usual in Athens for the people to give their suffrages in this manner. In process of time, the verb came to be employed in the sense of *elect* or *appoint*, in any way, whether the appointment was strictly speaking an election or not—whether it were made by one person or several.

In the present passage the participle has been taken in a threefold sense.

1. To elect by the suffrages of the people. This acceptation has been given by Beza, who translates "cumque ipsi per suffragia creassent," *when they had elected by suffrage*. So also in "Ratio Disciplinæ, or the Constitution of the Congregational Churches," drawn up by Upham, we find it stated that "the original of the word ORDAINED implies that the selection was made by the vote of the body of the disciples, [*i. e.*, by the church,] and not directly by the apostles."

This interpretation must be rejected for the following reasons:—

(a.) In the time of the New Testament writers the ordinary use of the word was different. The original etymological sense had been modified. This is shown by the mode in which authors who employed the same kind of Greek as that of the New Testament use the term. Philo says of Joseph, βασιλεύς ὑπαρχος ἐχειροτονεῖτο, *he was chosen* Pharaoh's lieutenant; and of Moses, ἡγεμῶν ἐχειροτονεῖτο, *he was appointed* ruler of the Israelites. In like manner, Lucian affirms with regard to Alexander's kindness to Hephæstion, θεὸν χειροτονῆσαι τὸν τετελευκότα, *to make him a god when he was dead*. Maximus Tyrius says of Darius's horse, which by neighing caused his master to be made king of the Persians, ἐχειροτόνησεν αὐτὸν (Δαρείου), *he appointed him, i. e.*, Darius. These examples are sufficient to prove that in the age to which the New Testament writers belonged, the usual meaning of the word was to *choose or appoint* in any manner, irrespective of suffrages.

(b.) The persons who performed the act indicated by the verb were Paul and Barnabas, who could not be said to have elected elders by their own suffrages, because they were doubtless agreed. They did it by mutual agreement. It was their joint act. Neither could it be said that they elected these officers by the votes of others, because the

verb χειροτονέω is uniformly applied to *the persons themselves who give their suffrages*, not to such as preside at the giving of them, or who superintend the voting and pronounce the final result. Probably Beza intended by the words *per suffragia creassent*, that Paul and Barnabas *took the poll*, to use a vulgar phrase, or presided at the voting; but this sense makes the construction clumsy and artificial; while the fact, that the verb is always used of the persons themselves who give their own votes, not of others, is unquestionable. Hence we arrive at the conclusion that the word before us does not convey the idea of Paul and Barnabas electing officers by the suffrages of others.*

2. Others understand it in the sense of *consecrating or ordaining* by the imposition of hands. Dr. Hammond paraphrases the clause: "And having consecrated bishops for them, one in every city, by fasting and prayer, and imposition of hands." So also our translators seem to have understood it. We object to this acceptance of the word on the following grounds:

(a.) There is no reason for supposing that there were elders in these churches previously. Had that been the case we should have expected a different text.

(b.) Though later ecclesiastical usage sanctions this signification, yet the practice of Greek writers, at or near the time of the sacred authors, does not countenance it. Neither does the Greek version of the Old Testament, commonly called the Septuagint, employ the word in that specific acceptance.

(c.) It is an unnecessary, arbitrary restriction to confine the action involved in the verb merely to *consecration* or *inauguration into office*. Why leave out of view the chief part of the settlement of the presbyters in particular cities, and fix the mind on the ceremony of inauguration?

(d.) In this view the following words are superfluous, or at least tautological: "Having prayed with fasting, they

* See Note XXXV.

commended them to the Lord," &c. Here is an explanation of the same idea which is contained in the participle translated, *when they had ordained*. We admit that the interpretation is possible, but it is neither natural nor probable. The succeeding clause, on the contrary, seems to express an additional idea. Paul and Barnabas performed the act involved in the word *χειροτονήσαντες*, and *then ordained* the elders, the description of the ordination being, "having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord," &c.

3. Others explain the disputed participle in the general sense of choosing or *appointing*, apart from the votes of the people, or the lifting up of their hands. Thus Paul and Barnabas appointed elders; and as they alone are said to have been the *χειροτονήσαντες*, the act cannot be termed a proper popular election. They themselves *chose* the presbyters. The *appointment* was theirs. They first chose the elders and then ordained them. We cannot tell *how* they were nominated, nor are we solicitous about the mode. One thing is clear to the candid inquirer, that Paul and Barnabas appointed the elders in question. Some, indeed, may object that the word is used of a proper election in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, viii. 19. But in that case the context restricts the general idea of appointment to that of an *election*. Here there is no determining clause. An appointment by two persons is all that can be gathered from the passage.

The verb also occurs in composition with a preposition; (Acts x. 41;) but there it refers to an appointment or designation of which God is the author, and therefore the suffrages of men are excluded.

What then? Did Paul and Barnabas choose elders for the churches? Did they place suitable persons as governors over the communities referred to? The passage states thus much. Did they proceed to do so without the concurrence of the churches themselves? We think not. The

spirit of similar transactions, and the general tenor of the New Testament, forbid the supposition. Even in appointing an apostle, the company of the believers took a prominent part. The apostles did not complete their own number of themselves. The popular will was consulted. So too in the case of deacons. Hence it may be fairly inferred that the appointment of elders here recorded was not made contrary to the wish of the disciples. It is impossible to discover whether the people signified their wishes to Paul and Barnabas, by pointing out to them individuals whom they judged to be qualified for office; or whether the two did, in the first instance, constitute and set over the disciples Christians known to themselves, the people wisely concurring in the measure adopted for their edification by men divinely authorized to collect and organize Christian communities. In either case the people's wishes were not contravened. Whether *the initiative act* originated with the members or the two apostles, we do not undertake to decide. One thing alone must be maintained, that all was done with the full approval of the brethren. It is no disparagement to their knowledge or judgment to affirm that Paul and Barnabas knew better than they, the persons most competent to discharge the duties of presidents.

Whether imposition of hands was used by Paul and Barnabas on the occasion is quite uncertain. Mr. Garratt thinks that the word does include the notion of imposition of hands in this place, or rather that it was selected because the appointment was made with imposition of hands. This idea is problematical.

The last example of popular choice is recorded in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians (viii. 19). The passage, however, does not allude to the choice of an office-bearer; it refers to the election of a delegate. The churches chose the brother in question to be Paul's travelling companion, when the contribution raised by the Gentile churches was being carried to those for whom it was intended. The case

is certainly not parallel to that of electing a stated instructor. It merely shows how much deference was paid by Paul and the other apostles to the popular will. They were not forward to make appointments themselves, but submitted them to the voice of the churches; and if they did so on the present occasion, with reference to the brother, there is a presumption, at least, that the votes of the people were not disregarded or despised in the appointment of elders. There is even a *probability* that the disciples had chiefly to do with their election.

The result of our examination of these four passages is, that none of them *proves* that the members of a church should elect their elders. They afford a *strong presumption* in favour of the fact; but they do not demonstrate it. They are not *directly* or *precisely* applicable to the point. Their bearing on it is *indirect*.

In the apostolic epistles there is a like absence of *definite* information respecting popular rights, though there are many directions about *officers* and their qualifications—many precepts, too, enjoining obedience on the part of the people to their authority. There is in truth no passage containing a clear injunction to the effect that the Christian disciples, composing a society, should choose their spiritual office-bearers, and dismiss them if found unworthy of the position to which they had been elevated. Popular control of the pastor is not heard of in the New Testament, at least in explicit terms or definite phraseology.

Is then *the principle of a hierarchy* recommended by apostolic injunction and practice? The principle *is* so recommended, says Isaac Taylor. The Epistles to Timothy and Titus contain it. The people have not the rights which many unwisely concede to them. It is not their province to call or dismiss a pastor. Such are the prelatial sentiments of this writer.* Our present object, however, is not

* Spiritual Despotism. Appendix to Section iy. p. 452. 8vo. London: 1835.

to refute them so much as to arrive at truth;—not to combat the peculiarities of any denomination, but to discover the principles sanctioned in the New Testament.

That a right conclusion may be drawn respecting the subject in question, it will be expedient to revert to the nature of a Christian society or church. A number of persons separate themselves from the world and enter into a voluntary union. This course they adopt, in obedience to the will of Christ, for the sake of mutual benefit. They deem it their duty to observe all the ordinances which the Head of the church has enjoined on his followers in their social relations. This union does not infringe the rights of other men.

Now all voluntary associations have obviously the right of choosing their own officers. It is agreeable to the light of nature that they should have the full exercise of the prerogatives arising out of the several relations they sustain. They possess natural, inalienable rights, of which they cannot be deprived except by oppression and tyranny; and one of them is the liberty to select their own office-bearers, and to frame such laws as may promote the order and stability of the body.

It will not be denied that a church is a voluntary society, every member of which is *individually* accountable to God. Obeying the precepts of heaven the body is free; but at the same time responsible for the manner in which it follows the laws of Christ, the great Master. It is accountable to God alone. The New Testament gives no *express* precept about churches choosing their own office-bearers, because they are voluntary societies. It would have been superfluous, because the right to do so belongs to all such communities *inherently* and *fundamentally*. The very nature of free communities involves a power to manage their own affairs. Revelation proceeds on the assumption of all the natural rights belonging to men in their individual or asso-

ciated capacity.* It takes them for granted. So far from abolishing, it confirms and strengthens them by showing their genuine tendency and proper application.

Individual responsibility to God is alone consistent with freedom in selecting those religious teachers who are thought best adapted to the spiritual wants of each. Whenever an external power or party steps in to furnish the Christian with ecclesiastical instruction or religious teaching, it interferes with the obligation under which he lies to inquire and act for himself in matters between his conscience and his God. The fact of his being personally accountable binds him to judge and choose for himself in regard to spiritual instructors. No fallible man has the right or power to determine for another what is best suited to that other's condition, for none is keeper of his brother's conscience; and the government that undertakes to delegate authorized expositors of truth, may be as readily deceived as the individual who selects his own teacher. In a matter of so much importance as personal progress in truth and holiness, delegated accountableness has no place. To his own master every one standeth or falleth. Who then shall interfere with the Christian's volition in selecting the mode of instruction he deems most conducive to his highest interests? None but the tyrant who would lord it over the consciences of men; or the despotic government, which forbids a community to worship otherwise than *it* prescribes. If it be a first principle in religion that each owes supreme obedience to God, and will be judged by his own thoughts and acts, not another's—it necessarily follows that he should be left to his own judgment in all things relating to the worship of God. In choosing and rejecting modes of faith, he must determine for himself. He knows what is best adapted to his moral condition. He is acquainted with the aliment which would

* See Note XXXVI.

be injurious to his spiritual health. Or, if he be not alive to these things, he *ought* at least to know them. The responsibility cleaves to him notwithstanding his ignorance. Having the means of information, he is morally culpable in not availing himself of them. In short, the genius of the New Testament is opposed to every form of interference with individual responsibility. All are addressed by it in language fitted to excite and encourage independent examination. It invites each one to decide for himself as in the sight of Omniscience, without hinting that he is amenable to human tribunals.

If there be any truth in these observations they will account for the scanty information relative to the topic before us. Here precepts would have been needless, because the Deity employs no unnecessary expenditure of means.

Nor should it be forgotten, that many circumstances recorded in the New Testament afford a presumption in favour of the people's right to elect such individuals as they judge qualified for the task of instructing them. In addition to those already mentioned we may refer to the presence of the whole church at the deliberations of the council at Jerusalem; and the virtual exclusion of the incestuous person from the Corinthian church by the members themselves. *Incidental* allusions implying the same right, also appear, such as: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." Again, Paul in writing to Timothy says: "and let *these also* first be proved," *i. e.* the deacons should be proved by time as in the case of bishops. They should not be novices, but individuals tried and tested in their qualifications for the office.

The hierarchical principle cannot be involved in the directions given to Timothy and Titus, except it can be shown that both proceeded to organize churches and ap-

point pastors without the concurrence of the believers. It is nowhere affirmed that the people were excluded from all share in the settlement of bishops among them. It is neither presupposed nor intimated that the Christians themselves were ciphers, whose will was not regarded. Apostolic arrangements were not of such a character as to offer violence to the acknowledged principles of humanity. If they respected the natural rights of man unsanctified, much more did they respect those of the renewed man. Hence, although nothing be stated in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, respecting the people's suffrage or choice, the conclusion does not follow that the popular element was absent. Analogy, on the contrary, suggests the idea that the believers themselves concurred at least in the choice of their elders. The examples of election recorded in the New Testament expressly countenance that aspect of spiritual freedom, or harmonize with the assumption of its existence; whereas the hierarchical principle involves a virtual opposition to it.

Besides, it is too much to claim for modern prelates, or ecclesiastical dignitaries however high, the same prerogatives which were exercised by extraordinary officers in primitive times. Paul was an *apostle*, Barnabas is styled an apostle too, and both appointed presbyters in the churches. Timothy and Titus were evangelists. Apostles and evangelists received their commission in another mode than modern prelates. They were not appointed by the civil power or by particular churches, but by Christ himself, or by men whom He immediately called. Show us *apostles* now; and we shall give them all power in arranging churches and providing them with office-bearers. Where are evangelists now; men called and gifted like Timothy or Titus; and we shall submit to their ecclesiastical appointments? Apostles have long passed away. No provision was made for perpetuating that select band who stood in the most intimate relation to their Divine

Master. Evangelists, too, have disappeared because they were necessarily associated with apostles, the extinction of the one class implying the cessation of the other. Others *come after* them, but cannot do the same duties, because they lack the same gifts and authority. They perform indeed *some* of the acts which their predecessors did; but they do so in consequence of other relations and circumstances. They engage in them as *Christians* or as *Christian ministers*, and not because they occupy the same position as *apostolic men*.

It has been objected to the right of the people to choose their pastors, that it is equally absurd with the right of pupils to judge of the qualifications of their teacher. Will you allow, it is asked, persons to be taught—the ignorant and unlettered—the high privilege of sitting in judgment on the capabilities of those who are to teach them? Who can believe that those seeking instruction are able to form a proper estimate of such as are best fitted to instruct them?

The cases are not analogous. The points of dissimilarity are so obvious, and of such a kind, as to destroy the force of the comparison, whose superficial plausibility can only deceive for a moment. Milton observes, that “many may be able to judge who is fit to be made a minister that would not be found fit to be made ministers themselves; as it will not be denied that he may be the competent judge of a neat picture or elegant poem that cannot limn the like.”

When we look at *the practice* of many churches in choosing pastors, we cannot but think it injudicious and unfortunate. The prevailing fault is *hastiness* in electing. They select a person as a pastor, before they be *well acquainted* with his character, attainments, and habits. Perhaps he has been recommended to them by some other minister whom they respect; and therefore they are strongly drawn towards him. But recommendations are

precarious things to rest on. The recommender may be a personal friend; and we know how friendship biases the minds even of pure men. Or, the adviser in question may have no right perception of *the proper person* needed by the vacant church. His judgment may be feeble; or his ignorance of the church's position all but entire. In other cases, a pastor is chosen after the delivery of a very few sermons pleasing to the popular taste. But a few sermons, whether made or borrowed, old or new, do not constitute a divine; neither is preaching, which, according to Lord Bacon, "every man confidently adventureth to do," all the business that a minister of the gospel has to perform. "Should I say," says South, "that preaching was the least part of a divine, it would, I believe, be thought a bold word, and look like a paradox (as the world goes); but perhaps, for all that, never the further from being a great truth." We fear that preaching has been magnified among us superstitiously, as if "the whole body of God's worship should be turned into an ear."* There ought to be more slowness of procedure. The church should be careful to have *full trial* of the candidate's gifts and graces. He should reside among them for a time. They ought to know his talents for other departments of the ministerial office besides that of preaching a sermon. They should have a good idea of his general acquaintance with the Scriptures, which cannot be collected by the ordinary members of a church from one or two carefully prepared or *industriously selected* sermons. "It is not by sitting in hard judgment upon a candidate for a few Sundays that any body of hearers can ascertain his powers or his suitability to their conditions. He may be eloquent for these occasions, and dulness itself ever after. He may be soundness itself while 'on trial,' and far below the standard of truth ever after. His prayers may be richness and variety

* See South's Sermon on Matthew xiii. 52; vol. iv. p. 24. 8vo. London: 1715—and Bacon on the Pacification of the Church.

for the few days on which the teacher is to crave from the pulpit the favour of the taught, and may ever after be but specimens of that monotony and feebleness which tell that a man may be equal to keep attention on the stretch for an occasion, and yet be without those resources which make a ministry arresting to the last."* In short, the candidate should have been walking with and among them in the fellowship of the gospel for several months at least, before the church can be competent to form a correct estimate of his full ministerial fitness. At the present time, the fact of his coming from a theological seminary where he has studied for a season, is deemed of itself a sufficient proof of ministerial qualifications. This ought not to be. No college, be it ever so watchful, can affirm that all the students who go forth from it into the ecclesiastical world are fitted to be pastors. Some of them are not so. Many of them are greatly deficient in the talent of wise, judicious rule. And yet this is as essential to success as the talent of preaching well. The personal habits of some are repulsive. The piety of others is equivocal, their religious character appearing scarcely to be fixed. In other instances, literary attainments are so meagre as to be almost imperceptible. On this subject we should learn wisdom from our fathers, if we be not disposed to think aright for ourselves. *They* were far more careful and cautious. Doddridge, more than a hundred years ago, writes: "An unordained minister is seldom chosen to the pastoral office in any of our churches, for in the members of each of these societies the whole right of election lies, till he has resided among them some months, or perhaps some years; preaching statedly to them and performing most other ministerial offices, excepting the administration of the sacraments." And in reference to the practice of New England Congregationalists in early times, Punchard informs us that it was

* Boyd's *Episcopacy and Presbytery*, p. 262.

“thought necessary for a candidate for settlement to spend months among the people of his prospective charge.” Modern practice in New England has degenerated as well as in our own land, for the latter writer states, that “some churches are satisfied with an acquaintance of a few days only; and some are ready to call a pastor without having had any *personal* acquaintaince with him.” Well may he add, “This undoubtedly is one reason why there is now so little permanency in the pastoral relation. Are we not verifying the maxim, ‘To *innovate* is not to *improve*?’”

LECTURE V.

ORDINATION OF OFFICE-BEARERS IN THE PRIMITIVE CHURCHES.

“Sanctified by the Word of God and prayer.”—1 TIM. iv. 5.

IN the treatment of this subject we propose to observe the following order, and inquire—

First. What is meant by ordination.

Secondly. Why it should be continued.

Thirdly. The mode.

Fourthly. The proper person or persons who should ordain.

Fifthly. The person to be ordained.

First. What is meant by ordination? To this question very different answers are given. According to the church of England, it is the act of conferring holy orders or sacerdotal power, by means of which office-bearers are made “a special order consecrated unto the service of the Most High in things wherewith others may not meddle.” To priests and bishops the ordainer says: “Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest or bishop in the church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained. And be thou a faithful dispenser of the word of God and of his holy sacraments,” &c.

The church of Rome takes the same view, except that she makes it a *sacrament*: “Quid est sacramentum ordinis?” asks Dens. The answer, “Est sacramentum novæ legis

quo spiritualis potestas confertur et gratia ad ecclesiastica munia rite decenterque obeunda."*

The Presbyterian view, or that held by the church of Scotland, may be ascertained from the words of Dr. Hill: "Ordination is the appointment of Jesus Christ conveying a character by the instrumentality of the office-bearers of his church." And again: "Every one who is ordained by the laying on of the hands of the office-bearers of the church, becomes a minister of the church universal. He is invested with that character in a manner the most agreeable to the example and the directions contained in the New Testament; and by this investiture he receives authority to perform all the acts belonging to the character."†

"Ordination," say the ministers of the Provincial Assembly of London, "makes a man a minister that was not one before; and consequently the essence of the ministerial call doth consist in it, not in election."‡

The Congregational view is thus stated in the Cambridge Platform: "This *ordination* we account but the solemn putting a man into his place and office in the church, whereunto he had right before by election: being like the installing of a magistrate in the Commonwealth."§

It will be seen from the preceding statements, that professing Christians have different opinions regarding ordination. For this reason, and also because considerable mystery has been thrown around the subject, it will be needful to express our ideas with as much accuracy as possible. It will be expedient to divest the rite of cabalistic obscurity, in order that we may arrive at the exact nature and import of it.

The word *ordain*, as employed to denote designation or setting apart to the duties of an office connected with the

* Theologia, vol. vii. p. 36, 12mo. Dublin: 1832.

† Lectures in Divinity, vol. ii. pp. 439, 440. 3rd edition, 12mo. Edinburgh: 1833.

‡ The Divine Right of the Gospel Ministry, p. 164, c. xi. 4to. London: 1654.

§ See Note XXXVII.

Christian religion, is represented by six different terms in the original Greek.

“Jesus *ordained* twelve to be with him,” ἐποίησε δώδεκα. Mark iii. 14.

“Must one *be ordained* to be a witness,” γενέσθαι. Acts i. 22.

“And when they *had ordained* them elders in every church,” χειροτονήσαντες. Acts xiv. 23.

“By that man whom he *hath ordained*,” ἔρισε. Acts xvii. 31.

“Whereunto I *am ordained* a preacher,” ἐτέθην. 1 Tim. ii. 7.

“That thou shouldest *ordain* elders in every city,” καταστήσης. Titus i. 5.

This induction affords an intimation, that ordination, in the *scriptural* sense of the term, differs from ordination in the *current* use of it. At the present day, it denotes something talismanic and mysterious—a certain undefinable process which metamorphoses a layman into a clergyman. A wondrous virtue or efficacy is assumed to lie in the act which it is employed to express. But had this been the New Testament usage, we should have expected that one word only in the Greek would have been uniformly adopted. A thing of so much importance and efficacy must have had its own appropriate representative. Six different verbs could scarcely have been found to symbolize a single transaction of unique character.

In what then does ordination consist? Does the essence of it lie in the imposition of hands, by a bishop or several presbyters, on the head of a person considered to be fit for an office in the church universal? Or does it lie in that character, mark, power, authority, right, office, or gracious donation, which is given through a delegate or delegates by the Holy Ghost, at the time when hands are imposed? It does *not* mean the mere laying of hands by one or more persons on the head of another. Imposition of hands is

the ceremony used at ordination rather than ordination itself. It was not even *the peculiar, distinctive* ceremony of ordination in the time of the apostles, since it was employed on various occasions. It was an *accompaniment* or *mode* of ordination, neither exclusively peculiar nor essential to it. In what then does ordination *essentially* consist? Is it in the mysterious something conveyed—the spiritual powers imparted? Those who answer in the affirmative appear to us greatly in error. The essence of it is in *the solemn invocation of the divine presence and assistance*. The divine power is implored on behalf of the person on whom hands are usually laid.* The Spirit's influence is entreated to rest on him who is publicly designated. There is no mystery in the transaction. It is palpable to the eyes of all. Whatever blessing is communicated to the ordained is imparted in answer to prayer, according to the faith of him who engages in the exercise, and the state of mind belonging to the ordained. The efficacy of prayer in his case is analogous to its power in any other. The same promises are applicable. There is not one promise annexed to the ordaining prayer, as it has been called, and another adapted to prayer on general occasions. One class of promises was equally intended for the sacred exercise under *all* circumstances.

If these observations be correct, it will be seen that many notions and modes of expression concerning ordination are most erroneous. It is not the inducting an office-bearer into an office which he did not possess till that precise time; but a formal and solemn commendation of him to the Head of the church, when about to enter on the actual discharge of the functions included in his office. As soon as he is called by the members of a church to be their bishop or deacon, and consents to the invitation, he really becomes their bishop or deacon. The election of him by the brethren constitutes him their office-bearer.

* See Note XXXVIII.

Whenever he accepts the position to which he has been invited by a church of Christ, in the free exercise of their judgment, he possesses a full title to do whatever pertains to the new situation. He has a *right* to discharge all the acts appropriate to the office to which he has been chosen. He is invested with all the authority of office. Whatever respect or obedience the people owe him afterwards, is due to him then. By virtue of their choice, and his own acceptance of it, he has authority and power to do all things required of an officer in his circumstances. We object, therefore, to such phrases as *receiving the Holy Ghost*; *investing with office*, or *with pastoral authority*, applied to *ordination*. The first appears all but blasphemous, notwithstanding Hooker's defence of it. The others are unwarranted. All that is designated by pastoral authority is not received by an individual at the time of ordination. He had it before. It comes to him from Christ through the people who ask him to take spiritual oversight of them. When he enters into a sacred engagement with them; or, in other words, into the pastoral relation, he is then as fully invested with all his rights and privileges as he can ever be scripturally. The ordaining person or persons do not invest him with "office-power," prerogative, and jurisdiction: he is already in office with all its prerogatives.

It is necessary to observe that the rite of ordination relates to the time of entering an office. It is not usual to speak of a person being *ordained* to an office, after he has been employed for a time in the discharge of its functions. An office-bearer is *ordained* at the *commencement* of his work. Should a similar rite be performed towards him after he has been actually employed in the duties of his situation, it cannot be properly termed an *ordination*; at least the customary use of language does not sanction the appellation.

Secondly. Why should ordination be continued in the churches ?

There is no express precept enjoining its observance in all future times. Yet it was practised in the apostolic age. It was performed by apostles, evangelists, and others. If, therefore, it was divinely approved and practised in the first age of Christianity, it should not be laid aside without reason. Timothy and Titus, it may be inferred, ordained elders or ministers of the gospel; and the former was enjoined to lay hands suddenly on no man: 'the term *suddenly* being inappropriate, if those entering on office were not to be ordained. Again, Paul charges Timothy to keep the commandment until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, as explained by many, to observe the various precepts and instructions recorded in the preceding parts of the epistle, until Christ's coming. This passage, it is true, is not a *certain* proof that ordination should be always continued, because *ἐντολή* may allude to the particular commandment presented in the verses immediately antecedent, *i.e.* the eleventh and twelfth verses of the chapter. We admit that ordination is of little importance in comparison of election to the pastoral office; yet it cannot be inferred, on that account, that it is worthless or insignificant. Having Scriptural precedents, and the examples of apostles themselves, it is incumbent on the churches to follow them in this case, as in others of a like nature.

Thirdly. *The mode* of ordination.

At the ordination of deacons in the church of Jerusalem, prayer and the imposition of hands were used. When Timothy and Titus laid on their hands at ordination, they doubtless prayed also. If the passage in Acts xiv. 23, relate to ordination, prayer and fasting are mentioned without imposition of hands. It would appear, therefore, that the form was not *precisely the same* in the case of

deacons and elders. The slight difference consists in the use of fasting, which *may have accompanied* the rite at all times. Still the opposite opinion is more probable.

It has been frequently asked, whether the imposition of hands should be continued in ordination. If it was employed only when spiritual gifts were bestowed, it should be laid aside, because these gifts have ceased; but if it was used on other occasions, when nothing supernatural was imparted, it may be retained with proper explanations. Let us notice the passages in which the laying on of hands is mentioned, for the purpose of ascertaining whether a supernatural gift was always conveyed at the time. "Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost."* Here the case admits of no doubt. "They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them." "Paul laid his hands on him and healed him."† These examples are obvious. "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery."‡ The meaning of this passage is not apparent. One thing, however, is generally admitted, amid the various interpretations of it, viz. that a *charism*, or something extraordinary, was communicated to Timothy when hands were laid on him. "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands."§ It is probable that something peculiar had been conveyed to Timothy by the putting on of the apostle's hands. "And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given,"|| &c. This passage attests the same truth. "And Ananias putting his hands on him, said,"¶ &c. &c. Here the receiving of the Holy Ghost accompanied the act of Ananias putting hands on Saul. "Whom they set before the apostles: and when

* Acts viii. 17.

+ Mark xvi. 18; Acts xix. 6; xxviii. 8.

† 1 Tim. iv. 14.

‡ 2 Tim. i. 6.

|| Acts viii. 18.

¶ Acts ix. 17.

they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.”* The apostles laid their hands on the newly-elected deacons. In this instance it is not affirmed that any supernatural gift was bestowed. Before the imposition of hands Stephen was full of faith and of the Holy Ghost; the latter expression probably meaning, *endowed with extraordinary gifts*. After the ceremony, it is recorded that he did great wonders and miracles among the people. *The presumption* here is, that nothing extraordinary was conveyed to him, although considerable uncertainty rests on the matter. “Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers, as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”† These words state that certain prophets and teachers laid their hands on two of the brethren, viz. Barnabas and Saul. In regard to the latter, it is certain that he possessed extraordinary powers previously; and on the present occasion he does not seem to have received additional gifts. Probably Barnabas had spiritual gifts before. The narrative at least is silent with respect to the communication of spiritual powers. “Lay hands suddenly on no man.”‡ These words do not imply, that when Timothy laid hands on the elders they received any extraordinary gift. Probably they did not. “Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands,”§ &c. This passage has nothing to do with ordination; it refers to the laying on of the priest’s hands on the head of the victim, under the Old Testament economy.

The result of our examination is, that miraculous or

* Acts vi. 6.

† Acts xiii. 1, 2, 3.

‡ 1 Tim. v. 22.

§ Hebrews vi. 2.

spiritual gifts were *generally* conveyed at the time of the ceremony. The apostles possessed such power, and also the privilege of imparting it to others. It is questionable, however, whether any other than they could bestow it. Benson and Lardner, who think that apostles alone were so privileged, are probably right in their opinion. Hence when others laid on hands nothing supernatural was bestowed. Such passages as Acts xiii. 1—3, and 1 Tim. v. 22, furnish examples of the practice apart from the communication of charisms.

Is it proper then, or is it becoming, to use the imposition of hands in modern times? We reply in the affirmative. It was, as we have seen, customary to do so in the apostolic age, and did not involve on every occasion the conveyance of gifts. Had the latter been the case, it would have been improper and impious to retain the custom; since neither gift nor grace can be imparted to Christians by mortals like themselves. But it is necessary to guard against its abuse. It should not be employed to foster superstition on the part of unenlightened people, or delusive vanity on the part of the individual who imposes his hands. The laity, who may be so ignorant as to associate some mysterious influence with the ceremony, should be dispossessed of their notion; while it is the duty of *the clergy*, as they are called, both from their knowledge and position, to permit no pandering to priestly propensities in themselves or their brethren. To minister to the diseased appetite of poor humanity, by quietly accepting the incense offered to their "consecrated" persons, is mean and dishonourable. It must never be forgotten that no virtue is derived from the person laying on his hands by him on whose head they are laid. No grace is conferred, no gift bestowed, no qualification communicated. The mind of him who is ordained is in the same condition as before, as far as the imposition of hands is concerned.

He has the same ministerial functions and equal executive power before as after it.

In this manner we dissociate from the practice all ideas which priestcraft or superstition has attached to ordination. We divest it of the extrinsic and the accessory, now so intimately united with its very nature as to form *an essential element*, in the opinion of the unreflecting. By those who are infected with the prevalent mysticism, we may be accused of making it a bare unmeaning ceremony, a mere empty form, a doctrine which leads, as an estimable writer has said, "by a necessary and very obvious, and very brief process, to absolute infidelity."* But the calm inquirer can smile at such an accusation. There is a sensuous pietism which clings to forms more than verities—to the outward and visible, rather than the inward and abstract. The former indeed should not be overlooked; but it is inexpedient to surround them with an air and aspect of importance, as if they were of supreme consequence. The ceremony in question is not an unmeaning one. It is symbolical and significant. Usage has given it a meaning. It indicates designation to a particular office or enterprise. It is *a sign* by which the object of a people's choice is marked out, and specially commended to the grace of Him by whom he has been called. In this manner he is *inaugurated*; the outward act being employed to affect the mind through the medium of the senses.

With these views we are prepared to affirm, that the laying on of hands may be still retained, as in ancient days. It has been sanctioned by time. Although sometimes employed by men with the view of impressing the beholder with veneration for the ordainer's person, yet when rightly understood it is seemly and decorous. It is

* A Letter to the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, by the Rev. A. D. Tait, p. 24. 8vo. Edinburgh: 1840.

perfectly simple in itself, without being incrustated either with priestly assumption, or with popular superstition.

Imposition of hands is not *essential* as a mode of induction to the office of elder or deacon, since all that is properly meant by *ordination* is not necessary to give validity to office. It might have been inferred *à priori*, that infinite wisdom would not have made an external rite, conferring no grace or gift, indispensable to the legitimacy of office. And yet we are not left to *à priori* considerations. Matthias, Apollos, and Paul, do not appear to have been formally inaugurated. In the case of an apostle, indeed, it would have been incongruous; since the very idea of such an officer involves an immediate sending of him on the part of Christ, without the intervention of men. But in the case of Apollos, it would have been quite appropriate. There is no account of these three having been ordained; and in the absence of all proof it should not be assumed that they were so. Of Paul it is recorded, that Ananias put his hands on him at Damascus and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost;" but this cannot be called *ordination*. On another occasion, he and Barnabas were set apart at Antioch by certain prophets and teachers; although he had been an apostle before, and preached to the Gentiles with great power. The enterprise to which he was designated at that time was *special*. He had already discharged the functions of an apostle. He had been engaged in the ministerial work. He was now separated to a particular department of that office whose functions he had previously performed in a general way. Hence it was not an ordination, but a designation of two persons as missionaries to the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas were set apart to a new sphere of labour.* In regard to Matthias, nothing is re-

* See Note XXXIX.

corded of him after his election. Apollos, again,⁴ was an eloquent and successful preacher, who mightily convinced the Jews, and attracted the cultivated heathen at Corinth. Not a word is said respecting his ordination.

Those, therefore, who think it right to omit the custom of laying on of hands are liable to no censure. They act wisely in following the suggestions of conscience or the dictates of judgment; and may well smile at the old heresy-hunting Presbyterians oracularly affirming, that they who "oppose imposition of hands may as well oppose the whole gospel-ministry, and therein overthrow Christianity itself."* The person on whose head no hands have been put, may be as scripturally ordained as he who has submitted to prevailing usage. The Bible does not sanction any one mode of ordination to the exclusion of every other. It countenances the imposition of hands, without discountenancing other forms.

Fourthly. The person or persons to be employed in the service.

Who should set apart an office-bearer in a church? To this question different answers have been given. Some suppose that those only who can trace their line of succession up to the apostles should ordain. They think that apostles alone had this privilege at first; those whom they appointed after them; and so on through successive generations down to modern prelates. "The apostles being bishops at large ordained everywhere presbyters. Titus and Timothy having received episcopal power as apostolical ambassadors or legates, the one in Greece, the other in Ephesus, they both did, by virtue thereof, likewise ordain, throughout all churches, deacons and presbyters within the circles allotted unto them."† It is unnecessary in the present place to refute this hypothesis, since it has been frequently disproved. It cannot be sup-

* Divine Right of the Gospel Ministry, p. 177.

† Hooker; Ecclesiastical Polity, Book vii. chap. 6, pp. 259, 260.

ported by valid reasoning or legitimate arguments. It is unable to stand the test of an enlightened scrutiny. The opposition presented to it by the word of God causes it to shrink from close investigation. Apostles indeed ordained; but they were extraordinary officers. So also did evangelists. Both classes of office-bearers have long since disappeared. That apostles ordained is apparent from Acts vi. 6; and that evangelists did also ordain is obvious from 1 Tim. v. 22, and Titus i. 5.

It is in accordance with the New Testament to affirm, that ordination belongs to *the presbytery* of a church. When elders are already in a church it is appropriate for them to ordain office-bearers who may be elected by the same church. This opinion is sanctioned by 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." Hence the Westminster divines state, that "ordination is the act of a presbytery:" and in another place, it belongs to "preaching presbyters." The presbytery must therefore have consisted of preaching elders alone. And yet this is opposed to the constitution of a *classical presbytery*, which is composed of *ruling* as well as *preaching* elders. *Both* form constituent parts of such an assembly. Those who argue for the right of a presbytery alone to ordain, forget to look at *the constitution* of the only presbytery spoken of in the New Testament, embracing no more than the elders of a single church. They argue for the existence of *presbyteries* in the apostolic age, quoting for that purpose the present passage in the First Epistle to Timothy; and such presbyteries they quietly *assume* to be similar in constitution to modern conventions bearing the same name. But when ordination is to be performed, and is claimed for ministers of the gospel alone, they found their claims on the same passage. If their reasoning were valid or consistent, *ruling* elders, as a part of the presbytery, should be associated with the preaching elders in

the act of ordination. The words addressed to Timothy are suitable as a proof that "ordination is only in the hands of preaching elders," on the ground that the presbytery was composed of *preaching elders alone*.

The charism bestowed on Timothy manifestly points to spiritual gifts which he had received. Something extraordinary was imparted when hands were laid on him. What the peculiar endowment was, we are now unable to ascertain. Some think that the gift denominated *prophecy* (*προφητεία*) was communicated; for so they explain the words *by prophecy, διὰ προφητείας*. But the original does not justify this exposition. *Ἐδόθη διὰ προφητείας* is a phrase importing that *the charism was given by prophecy*; which is not identical with the proposition that it *consisted in prophecy*. We do not deny that the gift may have been the peculiar qualification styled *prophecy* in the apostolic age; but the text at least does not establish it. The only tenable interpretation of the expression *διὰ προφητείας* is, *agreeably to prophecy*; or, "according to the prophecies which went before on thee." There were certain divine indications by which Timothy was singled out as likely to become a minister of eminence. And in conformity with these directions or prophecies, spiritual gifts were conferred on him.* The point in debate is, Who bestowed them? Was it the presbytery or Paul himself? The words recorded in 2 Tim. i. 6, lead to the conclusion that it was the apostle himself. "Apostles only," says Lardner, "are allowed to have had the power and privilege of conveying spiritual gifts to other Christians." If the presbytery consisted of *apostles*, they may have conferred the charism on Timothy. But if, as is usually conceded, the association consisted simply of elders, the gift or gifts must have proceeded from Paul.

The last clause of the verse, "with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery," has been abundantly canvassed.

* See Note XL.

The presbytery or elders of the church placed their hands on Timothy; while at the same time, Paul laying on his hands imparted peculiar qualifications, fitting Timothy for the ministerial work. The ordination was by Paul and the presbytery also. The former, imposing hands on this young servant of the Lord, peculiarly qualified him for the labour of an evangelist; while the college of elders concurred and acted along with the apostle, putting on their hands likewise, and setting him apart for the duties of the office. Both the apostle and the elders ordained, with this important difference, that the former conveyed a gift; while the latter merely commended him to the Head of the church.

Rothe takes a different view of the transaction, in supposing that Paul imparted a *charism* to Timothy, while the presbytery set him apart *at another time*. There is nothing improbable in the supposition that imposition of hands was occasionally repeated in relation to the same individual. Yet a comparison of 1 Tim. iv. 14, with i. 18, favours the other interpretation. If it be considered that the presbytery, so far as it consisted of persons not apostles, could bestow no gift, and that the natural signification of *μερά* is, *along with*, it will appear most probable that the imposition of hands by Paul and the presbytery was a *joint act*, performed at one and the same time.

Another passage adduced to prove that ordination belongs to the presbytery of a church is Acts xiii. 1—3, according to which, the presbytery at Antioch laid hands on Saul and Barnabas. It is doubtful, however, whether the “certain prophets and teachers in the church that was at Antioch,” can be properly called *the presbytery* of that church. They were not really office-bearers. They were gifted men who taught the body, and were to it what elders afterwards became. The church of Antioch does not seem to have been fully organized at the time. It had

no permanent officers.* The edification of it mainly depended on those who possessed spiritual gifts.† The three persons mentioned supplied the place of officers, and *may have become* its stated elders soon after. Besides, it has been already shown that the transaction was not an ordination, Paul and Barnabas being officers before. Thus the passage does not prove ordination to be in the hands of a presbytery; and certainly, on no view of the case, of a *classical* presbytery. The church of Antioch was not greater than could assemble in one place, as we learn from Acts xiv. 27. And when Paul and Barnabas returned from Jerusalem, *the multitude* were gathered together to hear the epistle sent from the metropolis, Acts xv. 30, 31. Thus the church at Antioch was one particular church, not composed of several congregations; so that if its presbytery be spoken of, it could not have been such a presbytery as modern Presbyterians have established. Nor did the individuals in question constitute a scriptural presbytery, inasmuch as they were not elders. The only evidence in favour of the position that ordination was lodged in the college of elders is the fact, that Timothy was ordained by the presbytery of Ephesus, or rather, as we suppose, of Lystra. An evangelist was set apart by the eldership of the church at Lystra.

But ordination by *a presbytery* is not the only scriptural mode. It is probable that Timothy alone ordained, as may be inferred from 1 Tim. v. 22. We are aware that the true interpretation of the passage is a matter of some uncertainty. But, after considerable hesitation, we are inclined to explain it of *ordination*, though not of it *exclusively*. Much plausibility attaches to the view of those ancient and modern expositors who refer it to laying on of hands at the absolution of penitents. We should be more disposed to agree with Berger, Baur, Hammond, and De

* See Note XLI.

† See Note XLII.

Wette, in this latter exposition, were it not that the New Testament is silent respecting the ceremony of imposition of hands at the absolution of penitents; for the words in Hebrews vi. 2 cannot refer to such a custom. And yet we are free to confess, that the succeeding clause, "neither be partaker of other men's sins," is more agreeable to this explanation: while verses 20, 21, 24, 25, harmonize with it most naturally. De Wette, however, goes too far in affirming it to be the *only* view suited to the context. Neither can we agree with those who think that the context is *decisive* in favour of the ordination view. The general character of the expressions immediately succeeding the clause in question, and the entire aspect of the vicinity, in addition to the *nature* of ordination itself, dispose us to give an interpretation so general as to include both the laying on of hands at the ordination of presbyters and deacons, and at the absolution of penitents. In *no case* where the ceremony of imposition of hands was employed, was Timothy to proceed without due care and caution. At *whatever ecclesiastical act* it was his duty to impose hands on the head of any one, he was to be well satisfied of the propriety of the procedure and the worthiness of the subject. Let us then view the passage as alluding to *ordination*, in which aspect alone we are now concerned with it.

It is possible that Timothy may have had elders associated with him in the act of ordination in some instances, where such elders already existed in churches. But that he joined with local presbyteries in all or even in most cases, is utterly improbable, not only on account of his high character and commission, but the circumstances by which he was surrounded. The obvious view is, that the instruction here given relates to himself specifically, following, as it does, the command, "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses." Nothing is said of presbyters being always with him as

indispensably necessary to the validity of the ordination; neither is the act presented in such a light in other places as that a plurality of elders ought to perform it. Some indeed have laboured to show, that Timothy had always presbyters along with him at the ceremony of ordination, Mark at least. But their attempts are miserable exhibitions of weakness. For this purpose the expression, "neither be partaker of *other men's sins*," has been adduced. "This language," says a Presbyterian writer, "incontrovertibly and necessarily implies that in the act of ordination Timothy should not act alone, but should be assisted by others, for how else could he, in this act, be a partaker of *other men's sins*? It implies further, that these other men, the presbyters, associated with Timothy," &c.* The dogmatic tone here assumed, in the total absence of a particle of logical proof, would excite surprise, were it not generally admitted that boldness of assertion supplies the place of solid argument, where the latter is impossible. Granting that the words, "neither be partaker of other men's sins," refer especially to the preceding precept, Timothy might be a partaker of other men's sins, either in relation to *the ordainers* or *the ordained*. By advising, recommending, or in any way consenting to the admission of improper persons into the ministry, or even by not preventing their induction when he had power to do so, he would incur the guilt attaching to others. It is not by any means necessarily implied that in order to be a partaker of other men's guilt Timothy must do the same acts which they did, *along with them*, or even be present to aid them in ordaining an unworthy individual. The Greek word *κοινωνέω* is not so restricted. It simply means *to have a share in*; the mode of sharing varying according to the relations of the subject.

Again, *to be partaker of other men's sins*, may refer to the

* Smyth's Presbytery, and not Prelacy, p. 168.

sins which the ordained person has committed before the act of his initiation into a church.

The word *hands*, in the plural number, has also been quoted for the purpose of proving a plurality of officiating ministers; "lay *hands* suddenly on no man." "As it has been customary to lay only the right hand upon the head of the consecrated person, especially in the case of the presiding moderator, the plural number may be supposed to indicate the plurality of the officiating ministers."* This argumentation is passing strange. Because, in modern times, the right hand alone is usually laid on the head of the minister, *therefore* Timothy laid *his* right hand alone on the head of an elder at ordination. The words accordingly are interpreted, *O Timothy, and ye presbyters, lay your hands suddenly on no man. Let each of you lay his right hand suddenly on no candidate, &c.* Who does not see the unnaturalness of this paraphrase? How it looks like the perverse distortion of one who is determined, at all hazards, to have *Scripture on his side*, instead of *being on the side of Scripture!*

In short, the directions addressed to Timothy were given him personally, in the first instance. *He* was to do the things enjoined by the apostle. In the present case, he is warned against precipitateness in reference to ordination; and as he was an evangelist, it is most accordant with all established principles of interpretation to understand from the words, that he ordained singly in most cases; because the directions given him relate chiefly to the planting of churches, by supplying, for the first time, with fixed pastors, those who had none before. We have already admitted the probability of his *sometimes* acting along with a local presbytery; but that he must have done so always, is assuredly contrary to the obvious sense of the passage, as well as the tenor of the entire epistle. It is the transference of one fixed mode of ordi-

* Smyth's Presbytery, and not Prelacy, p. 169.

nation, as settled by a particular denomination in modern times, to the New Testament period of the church, in which stereotyped modes of particular ecclesiastical proceedings were rare, because unsuited to the fresh developments of vital Christianity.

We believe that Titus, too, ordained by himself, although Zenas and Apollos have been supposed to assist him. When he went to Crete, few of the churches there appear to have had elders over them.* Hence the evangelist, according to the notions of some, would be constrained to wait, at least in the early cases of ordination, till elders should be sent for from a distance to lay hands, along with himself, on newly-elected officers.

The narratives relating to both evangelists plainly imply, that they ordained of themselves; for if they ordained only in conjunction with presbyteries, there was no need for their presence in Ephesus and Crete as far as ordination was concerned. Titus need not have been left in Crete by Paul that "he should ordain elders in every city." The presbyteries there had power to ordain without him.

According to Acts vi. 5, 6; 1 Tim. iv. 14; and Acts xiv. 23, a plurality of persons should ordain; but according to 1 Tim. v. 22, and Titus i. 5, one person is sufficient.

The proper persons to ordain an office-bearer in any church seem to be the presbytery of it. They have been appointed to execute its determinations, and to carry its judgments into effect. They possess official authority to conduct the public exercises of religion; and as they pray on behalf of the members, the orderly and decorous course is that they should ordain another office-bearer. In this manner Timothy was ordained with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. If, however, there be no *elders*, *the one elder*† should act as ordainer. But where even one elder is wanting, the question arises, who should ordain? If it be considered that the members, in constituting a pastor

* See Note XLIII.

+ See Note XLIV.

over them, devolve on him the privilege of ordaining, as a part of his official duties ; then, in the absence of a pastor, the privilege naturally reverts to them. Hence it belongs to the church to ordain. Some indeed believe, that certain persons are excluded by Scripture from taking part in the act ; but the position is untenable. The New Testament debars none from doing so. If *abstract right* be regarded, we affirm, that no proper member of a Christian church should be shut out from participating in it. The brethren of a particular community may appoint any of their number, in order that he or they may pray when an elder or deacon is formally inducted into office. They are adequate to do so. The individual fixed on comes forward and acts simply instead of the rest, invoking the Head of the church in an appropriate manner, and placing his hands on the elected. Others may join in the imposition of hands. It is a matter of no importance whether they do so or not. Perhaps one or more of the deacons will be commonly selected in the absence of elders ; although any brother, especially he who is distinguished for gravity, may be selected by the rest to pray and put hands on him who has been chosen. It is only because ordination has been supposed to imply *jurisdiction*, that it has been assigned to elders alone. It does *not* in reality involve *jurisdiction*, but *order*. It concerns order and nothing else. No power is conveyed by it. Hence it need not be restricted to such as are in office. Several believers may ordain in the name of a church ; or even one, deputed on behalf of his brethren. The act of one person virtually becomes the act of all the disciples.

The views now advanced in regard to the ordaining parties or party, are confirmed by a passage in the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The apostles said to the assembled brethren, "Look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give our-

selves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose, &c. . . . whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them." Here the brethren themselves are not excluded from the ordination service; for the nominative to the verb *appoint*, includes both the apostles speaking, and the persons addressed. This is manifest from the fact that *ἡμεῖς* is not prefixed to *καταστήσωμεν*, whereas it is inserted before the verb *προσκαρτερήσωμεν*: "*we* (apostles and brethren) may appoint"—but "*we* (apostles alone) will continue in prayer," &c. The word translated *appoint*, might have been rendered *ordain*, with equal propriety. The very same verb is translated *ordain* in Titus i. 5, ("and ordain elders in every city,") so that there is no difference between *appoint* and *ordain* in our English version, in the passage before us. Both are representatives of one verb. In the sixth verse the narrative runs thus: "whom they set before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them." Although there is some uncertainty in regard to the precise persons who prayed and laid their hands on the newly-elected deacons, it is more natural to restrict them to the apostles alone. The apostles alone prayed, and laid their hands on the seven. Hence, some immediately conclude, that *the apostles alone* ordained in this case, the people having no share in the transaction. And in one sense they did here ordain. But the believers might have done so along with them. In the presence of apostles they took no part in the ceremony. Yet the clause "whom we may appoint" settles *the principle*. The apostles prayed, and laid on their hands: the multitude of the disciples *virtually* joined. It would have led to confusion had *all* prayed and put on their hands. The apostles did so for themselves and the entire company. The transaction was *outwardly* performed by the twelve, but *virtually* by all. The brethren concurred in the ceremony. The apostles

carried their own desires and those of the brethren into effect. They represented the whole society.

From this example of ordination, an important inference may be drawn in favour of the people's privileges. These privileges it is the aim of some to abridge, of others to extinguish. But the act of ordination was one, in which, as far as we can see, the people might have taken part. They might have joined apostles in ordaining.

It will be remembered, however, that this apostolic precedent belongs to the case of deacons. The same thing is not affirmed of elders. With respect to the latter, it is not distinctly stated, that the people might have joined with apostles, evangelists, or elders. Yet, since there is nothing to the contrary, the principle of the case before us may be fairly applied to the ordination of ministers. It is a narrow mode of dealing with apostolic usages which would restrict their spirit to cases *exactly* similar. Although therefore a like statement in regard to the ordination of elders be not found in the New Testament, it is fair to conclude, that if the people were allowed to take part in the ordination of one class of officers, they were not absolutely forbidden to participate in the ordination of the other class. It should also be observed, that *the choice* of a pastor is a greater and more important act than his *ordination*. If the body of believers be competent to the greater, they must be reckoned competent to the less duty. "If the people," says the Cambridge Platform, "may elect officers, which is the greater, and wherein the substance of the office doth consist, they may much more (occasion and need so requiring) impose hands in ordination, which is less, and but the accomplishment of the other."* In like manner, Robinson expresses his sentiments: "If the church without officers may elect, it may also ordain officers; if it have the power and commission of Christ for the one, and that the greater, it hath

* Chapter ix.

also for the other which is the lesse.”* Thus the principle involved in ordination establishes the right of the church electing a minister to ordain him also.† How the privilege has been obscured by another practice, it is needless to describe. If however it be a scriptural mode, it might be followed where a church has no elders. So far from being objectionable to recur to the original method, as has been said, it would be highly commendable.‡ Let those who think lightly of Scripture authority adhere to a practice less liberal than the spirit of apostles.

The remarks just made will show that the right to ordain does not belong to elders *exclusively*. It is true they ought to perform it for order's sake; but they need not arrogate it to themselves. A great majority of the instances of ordination recorded in the New Testament, mention *extraordinary* officers as the prominent persons in the ceremony, such as *apostles* and *evangelists*. And if Paul's *ordination* be described in the thirteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, as some suppose, it will be seen that he was ordained by prophets and teachers—*unofficial* men—possessed of spiritual gifts. The transaction there recorded was not however an ordination, but rather a designation to a new sphere of labour. Now it can never be proved that ministers of the gospel *alone* come into the place of *apostles* and *evangelists*, as the *sole ordaining party*. Neither does a modern classical presbytery occupy the place in this transaction which belonged to a New Testament presbytery. A number of elders gathered together from neighbouring churches are not a scriptural presbytery.

Ordination may be legitimately performed by presbyters in a church, or a single presbyter; and, where a church is destitute of an elder, by deacons, or a single deacon, by several brethren, or by one brother. It is of no moment.

* Justification of Separation from the Church of England, p. 338, 4to. 1639.

† See Note XLV.

‡ See Note XLVI.

whether it be assigned to one person, or to several. It depends on the circumstances of the case, whether official or unofficial men should take part in it. In apostolic times various individuals acted in concert, apostles, presbyters, prophets, and teachers. In some instances it is probable that a single person prayed and imposed hands. Whoever may be selected by the church, in the absence of elders, whether several brethren, or one brother, they or he may ordain. One is sufficient, provided he act with the express approbation and in the name of the church. One appears for many—so that the body may be said to do what he transacts on their behalf. He steps forth as the organ of the whole community, by whom he is requested to commend a brother solemnly and formally to the Head of the church.*

But it will be objected that one person should not ordain, because Timothy and Titus were not *ordinary* but *extraordinary* officers; and although *they* might ordain singly, it does not follow that one may perform' the ceremony in the present day. The reply is easy. There is as much ground for concluding that one elder or one believer may do what an evangelist did, as that a presbytery may perform the same act. A presbytery has not come into the place of an evangelist any more than a single elder or saint. The cases are equally justifiable, a presbytery ordaining an ordinary officer *in a particular church*, because a presbytery did once ordain Timothy *an evangelist*, and an elder or believer performing the same act. We know of nothing which vitiates the scripturality of the latter, and leaves the propriety of the other intact. If one be right, the other can scarcely be wrong.

The inquiry still remains, should the pastors of other churches be invited to ordain? They may certainly ordain, should the societies who have elected pastors or deacons, whom they wish to be inducted, think fit to ask them.† In

* See Note XLVII.

† See Note XLVIII.

doing so, they act as *members* of the particular churches to which they belong. But in the same manner, any member of a neighbouring or distant church may be asked to take part. Other churches do not act in the matter by sending their pastors as *delegates*, or *representatives*. If a person belonging to another religious body be requested to take part in the ceremony, it is a *privilege*; just as one minister preaches to a people not under his own care by privilege. A neighbouring pastor has no *right*, in virtue of his office, to perform any work in another church. He is simply pastor to the society who have elected him. Neighbouring elders have no jurisdiction among the body of disciples who invite them to set apart an elected officer. Why should the church of one place thus apply to the church of another, as if they were not fully competent to manage their own affairs? They elect their own office-bearers, by and for themselves; they admit and exclude members; they observe all the ordinances which Christ has appointed; why then should they be thought incompetent to set apart those officers whom they have chosen? Doubtless they are competent to do so, however much usage may be against them.

But we are met by the Westminster divines affirming that there is "no example in Scripture of any single congregation which might conveniently associate assuming to itself sole power in ordination, neither is there any rule which may warrant such a practice." This objection does not neutralize the strength of the statements already made. In the very same terms it might be alleged, that there is no example in Scripture of elders belonging to one church ordaining the elders or deacons of a neighbouring church; a proposition that may be proved against all gainsayers. After it is freely conceded that Timothy's ordination is recorded in 1 Tim. iv. 14, who shall show that *the presbytery* consisted of the preaching elders belonging to a number of neighbouring churches? It was

composed of the elders of *one church, not of several churches.**

Prayer, and the imposition of hands, were not peculiar to an individual entering on the duties of the ministerial office. They were used on many occasions. When one engaged in a special enterprise, he was commended in this manner to the grace of the Most High. Paul was an apostle before he was set apart at Antioch, in connexion with Barnabas. The spirit of apostolic times and precedents sanctions *a renewed* use of the ceremony, when an office-bearer already ordained enters on a new work, or a new sphere of labour. It is our opinion, that imposition of hands and prayer may be employed repeatedly, with reference to the same person, should the circumstances of his life harmonize with the repetition. *Re-ordination* might be practised with propriety. There is no reason why it should not accompany a new election of the same individual by another church. It is only the notion of *the indelible character* in ordination that has operated to prevent it. It is true that a *re-ordination*, in the proper sense of the term, is not brought before us in the New Testament; but there is a sufficient reason for the silence of the records in the fact, that the removal of a pastor from one church to another is unknown in them. It is probable that if an example of such translation had been recorded, *re-ordination* would have been stated as an accompaniment.

Fifthly. The person to be ordained.

He who has been chosen by a church as an elder or deacon is the proper subject of ordination. This is virtually implied in the preceding discussion. Till he have been selected by a Christian society for the ministerial office or deaconship, he should not be ordained. It is not remarkable that those who look on ordination as an appointment or designation to the Christian ministry,

* See Note XLIX.

should *ordain* persons *not yet elected to office in a Christian church, to the work of the ministry* generally; but it is impossible to find any example of such general designation in the New Testament. The passage in Acts xiv. 23, which has been quoted in favour of it, is not applicable. If, as we believe, ordination be a part or adjunct of appointment to office in a Christian church, it must be preceded by election to office in that church. If, then, the choice of a Christian people should precede the rite, what shall be said of him who goes abroad to the heathen to preach Christ crucified? Where there are no Christians, there is no church. The missionary spontaneously engages to spend his life and energies among the idolatrous and ignorant. Is such an one not to be *ordained* before his departure from a christianized to a heathen land? Properly speaking, *ordination* does not apply to him. The church, however, of which he is a member, may solemnly commend him to the grace of Christ, and pray for him in a manner suitable to the circumstances of the case. A religious service of this nature is becoming and appropriate. But it should not be called *an ordination*, because the individual is not in office, not having been elected to the pastoral duties by any people. Nor does the ceremony invest him with an official character. He is still an unofficial personage. He has no more right to preside at the ordinance of the Lord's supper than he had before. All Christians are bound to make known the truth, or in other words, to preach; and on that ground he goes forth as a missionary to the heathen. And it is very becoming in the members of the Christian society to which he belongs, to testify their regard for him by public and special prayer on his behalf. He needs their intercession at that peculiar juncture. Yet he is not a pastor. The pastoral relation has not been formed. Those who think that he is metamorphosed into an official person, after public services and imposition of hands, are deceived in their

opinion. To bring pastors from other churches to put their hands on his head, as if *they* were required to convey office, savours of priestly arrogance or ignorance. Why should the service not be wholly conducted by the elders and members of that society with which the intending missionary is still connected? A minister is either the minister of one church, viz., that by which he has been chosen, or else he is not a minister at all. When he ceases to be pastor of a church, he ceases to be a minister of the gospel, till he be elected by another. Every objection urged against this view is founded on an erroneous conception of the essence of ordination. "Every minister," said a member of the Westminster Assembly, "is so a minister of a particular congregation, as that he hath relation and is a minister of the whole church." This opinion is unscriptural. He is not made a minister by the act of ordination, but by the people's call, and his acceptance of it, by virtue of which a solemn engagement is entered into; and when the engagement terminates, he ceases to be a minister. It is true that he has a relation to the whole church—the true catholic church of Christ—but he has the same connexion with it in the capacity of a *believer* which he sustains in the capacity of *minister*. By virtue of his ministerial relation to one church, he has no more rights towards the church universal, than an unofficial member. The relation he sustains to the mystical body of Christ is that of *member*, not *pastor*. His ministerial authority ceases beyond the sphere of the brethren among whom he was appointed to labour in word and doctrine.

It has been asked whether a person be *disorderly* who refuses to submit to ordination. Those who think that the validity of his office depends on the rite may say so; but such as entertain other sentiments cannot consistently answer in the affirmative. As far as we can see, the New Testament has not enjoined it as *necessary* either by precept or by *uniform* example; and therefore he cannot be

styled *disorderly* who does not see it a duty to comply with the arrangement. In the eyes of a denomination, he may be irregular; but in other respects he is quite orderly. It is right to hold that the practice should be generally observed, for this is accordant with Scripture. But since all ecclesiastical officers of whom we read in the New Testament were not ordained, it is presumptuous to aver that *every* unordained preacher or deacon is irregular. In some circumstances it might be exceedingly inconvenient to obtain ordination. "If," says Carson, "an individual church member were cast accidentally upon a heathen island, and by his labours many were converted, could these persons never become a church? Could they never have a minister because there were no ministers to put hands on him?"* The question resolves itself to a large extent into the peculiar circumstances of each particular case. In ordinary circumstances it is proper that a pastor should be ordained, and he is a singular man who does not wish for it. Where there is no apparent obstacle in the way, the minister is at least peculiar in sentiment. But where he has a strong conscientious objection, or where it might be exceedingly inconvenient, he cannot well be blamed for not having ordination. The distinction between an *authorized* and an *orderly* ministry is nugatory. That which is *authorized* in the sight of God must be *orderly* also. Who shall dare to pronounce the ministry *irregular* which Heaven has sanctioned and blessed? Authorized by the Head of the church and yet irregular! The idea is self-contradictory. What is authorized in the divine judgment must be orderly too in the divine judgment. And if the term *irregular* be employed in reference to human enactments, it is quite possible that authority and order, in the estimate of God, may be nullity and disorder in the eyes of human societies; for the wisdom of man does not always coincide with that of the Creator.

* Reply to Brown, p. 234.

The entire subject has been much obscured by modern usage, as well as by the separation of the ordination of officers from their election. Because the act of ordination has been severed from the calling or choice of officers, it has been unduly exalted into an independent ordinance possessing a peculiar importance of its own. But it is properly a part of the *appointment* of officers. Appointment includes their election by the people, and what is technically termed ordination. Both are embraced in the one institute. The former is the essence of the appointment; the latter, the adjunct and consummation of it.* Perplexity has arisen when the two acts or steps of the one transaction are separated by an interval of time. There is no Scripture example of such severance; and it is very desirable that primitive usage should be resumed in this particular. The antecedent and consequent ought to follow one another closely, inasmuch as they are constituent parts of the same transaction. Let the choice be formally and publicly declared, and the formalities of ordination forthwith succeed. Thus the *entire appointment* will be completed, and the office-bearer cease to occupy an ambiguous position in the eyes of those who have been accustomed to regard ordination as the conveyancer of official authority, or of an indelible character.

The importance of connecting election and ordination as parts of *one transaction*, or as making up together *the appointment* of an office-bearer, cannot easily be overrated. Much misconception has arisen from the unwarrantable separation of them into *two distinct transactions*. And yet *both* are often comprehended in one word; for example, the Greek verb *καθίστημι*, to *appoint* or *constitute*. Hence the keen advocates of systems frequently take that term and apply it to *the ordination part* alone, throwing *the election part* entirely into the background. This is done by the ministers of the Provincial Assembly of London, who argue in favour of "the essence of the ministerial call"

* See Note L.

being in *ordination*, not in *election*. They urge the term used in Acts vi. 3, and in Titus i. 5, comparing its signification in other passages that speak of civil offices, and hence concluding that it means "putting a man into office which he had not before," *which they identify with* ORDINATION. But they did not know the nominative to the verb in the former passage, else they would have shrunk back from the text as militating against them. And in the latter they quietly *assume* that the word is applied to ordination, *exclusive of election*, whereas it means the entire appointment, without the idea of any separation of it into parts.

The supposed propriety of the modern division of *the one* transaction is all that gives plausibility to another argument employed by the same writers. "The solemnity," say they, "used in ordination is prayer, fasting, and imposition of hands. We do not read the like solemnity expressed in Scripture in election; and therefore it is against reason to think that election should constitute the minister and give him all his essentials, and ordination only give him a ceremonial complement."* The solemnity in question belongs to *the entire appointment*, of which election, in our view, was the main part.

Nothing appears to us more clear than that the mystery of modern ordination was unknown to the apostolic age. The appointments to office noticed in the New Testament were not surrounded with the air of importance, formality, and stiffness, which they are now invested with. Each was viewed as a whole. Hence the precept, "lay hands suddenly on no man," by a common figure means, to appoint no man suddenly to office, in whatever mode that appointment may have been made. "To ordain elders in every church," signifies simply *the appointing or constituting* of elders. In these instances the manner of the appointment is not indicated. Whether the people took the chief part in the nomination is not stated. It agrees better with the

* Page 133.

plain narratives to suppose, that apostolic men had most to do with the appointments in question.

It may not be irrelevant here to append an enumeration of all the passages which can be fairly adduced as bearing on the subject of *ordination*. They are Acts vi. 5, 6; 1 Tim. iv. 14. We have also treated 1 Tim. v. 22, and Titus i. 5, as referring to the same, though they properly describe *the entire appointment*, of which ordination is the consummation. In like manner, Acts xiv. 23, after the election of elders, their ordination is noticed in the words, "having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord." Other places are too precarious to be quoted, being either surrounded with great uncertainty, or foreign to the question.*

The practice of inviting the pastors of neighbouring churches to ordain, is deemed by many of great importance towards preserving the ability and purity of the ministerial character. It is looked on as a safeguard of evangelical truth in the churches. This is a prudential view of the matter which will be urged with greater or less earnestness, in proportion to *the disposition* of particular preachers. Here they suppose they have a check on the admission of unworthy members into the pastoral office, because they may refuse to ordain one whom they judge unsound in the faith, or otherwise objectionable. By standing aloof from him, or, in current phraseology, not *recognizing* him, they imagine that a taint and stigma are affixed to his person in the eyes of the people. Some have even proposed to raise the character and attainments of the ministry, by subjecting the applicant for ordination to examination; professing that they intend to promote in that way the intercommunion of churches belonging to the same order, and to exclude every approach to heretical sentiments—or to such sentiments at least as *they imagine* to be heretical. In this interference of one church

* See Note LI.

with another, American Congregationalists proceed to a considerable length. They have "ordaining councils," consisting of the pastors and delegates of neighbouring churches, who examine the testimonials of the candidate and the proceedings which have been taken in reference to his settlement, "inquire as a matter of course for all the papers which concern the church-standing and the proposed ordination of the candidate, viz., the certificate of church-membership, the license to preach, the call by the church, the answer to the same, &c. In reference to these papers, if they are found to be satisfactory, it is customary to take a formal vote, That the proceedings of the church and the society, and the answer of the candidate to the call to settle, are according to Congregational usage. And this is very proper, because, if there be no evidence of any kind of church-membership, or of a license to preach, or of a call to settle and an answer to the same, Congregational usage would render any further proceedings inadmissible. No council would assume the responsibility of proceeding under such circumstances. . . . The council are not expected by the church that convenes them, nor would they be permitted by the duty they owe to the Saviour, to limit themselves to the mere ascertainment of regularity in the forms of proceeding. Something more is incumbent on them. It is their duty to inquire as far may be necessary for their satisfaction, in respect of the literary and moral qualifications of the candidate; particularly his theological knowledge, his personal religious experience, and the motives which lead him to the undertaking of a work so arduous. It is incumbent on them likewise to attend to any objections which may be made to the candidate from any quarter."*

This apparatus in the settlement of a pastor is attended with several advantages. Perhaps the love and friendship of those who have frequent occasion to consult and act

* Ratio Disciplina, § 74, 75.

together, may be strengthened by it. Complete confidence among all churches of the same order may possibly be maintained and perpetuated. Pastors may be stimulated to farther attainments, and unworthy aspirants to the office of the ministry frowned on, to the effectual diminution of their number. The different churches comprehended in one denomination, may perhaps be drawn closer together, so as to lose much of their isolated character. But there are disadvantages to be set over against the benefits. The proposed method of effecting or preserving purity and love can scarcely be recommended as unexceptionable. We feel that a desire for external association and unity may be carried too far. The plan which some wish for, resembling perhaps the American, begins at the wrong end. It professes to bring about a spiritual reform by external means. From the outward it goes to the inward, healing and conserving principles by a kind of mechanical process. It is better to leaven the members of our churches with the true spirit of Christianity—to educate them as highly as possible—and to promote their intellectual and moral advancement with earnest zeal. Teach them to aim at a higher standard themselves, and not to be satisfied with a low degree of ministerial excellence. Teach the churches themselves what they have a right to expect from pastors, according to the qualifications described in Scripture and the varied acquirements demanded by the age—train them to self-reflection—keep elevating principles and holy aims before their minds—and pastors of the right stamp will be more effectually, not to say legitimately, secured. Ordaining councils and examinations of *candidates*, as they are called, too plainly betray a want of faith in the church's judgment; for they come in as an adventitious agency to bolster and supplement the popular choice. They are a considerable approach to *the principle* of Presbyterianism, which is neither seemly nor scriptural. Better is it to tell a church

honestly, We have not sufficient confidence in your wisdom, without seeing and trying for ourselves whether the man you have selected be one whom we deem suitable for yourselves and for the denomination. *We* think it desirable to have a right-minded associate whom we can meet on equal terms as a brother in the gospel; but *you* cannot draw nice theological distinctions, so as to know whether he be orthodox or heterodox. *We* must sound the depths of his theology before we lay our hands on his head. Perhaps he may be a man of no learning; and do you imagine we shall willingly admit into our denomination one on whose humble birth fair science has frowned? We will not consent to do so.

Such would be the straightforward, manly course of proceeding, instead of introducing measures *gradually* and *less openly*, by which the liberties of churches *may be* fettered, should the ministry generally be hereafter occupied (which Heaven forbid) by a race of ambitious, domineering, despotic *priests*. Human nature is the same in all denominations.

LECTURE VI.

THE PROPER BALANCE OF POWER SUBSISTING IN A CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

“Jesus Christ in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.”—EPHES. ii. 20, 21.

WHEN we speak of *the power* inherent in a church of Christ, the idea suggested is that of a society having the management of its own affairs. As a voluntary association it possesses a self-sustaining, self-regulating principle, by virtue of which it is competent to transact all matters connected with itself. Nothing can arise which it has not the right to settle. No possible case can happen which it need submit to an external party. It is exempt alike from secular and from ecclesiastical control. Accountable to the sovereign Head of the universal church for all its acts, it acknowledges none other sovereignty. Individually and collectively other churches are equally fallible. Their decisions could have no binding force on the score of infallible wisdom. But there is a higher ground on which a Christian association claims exemption from foreign control. It asserts an entire freedom, on the basis of the New Testament. Its plea of independency is founded on apostolic precept and precedent.

In the present lecture, it is not our intention to discuss the general question of the power possessed by scripturally constituted churches, in relation to foreign jurisdiction; but the balance of power within a Christian society itself.

We purpose to speak of the government lodged in a church of Christ—to inquire where it is deposited—to whom it is intrusted. We shall endeavour to ascertain the authority of the elders in connexion with the privileges of the brethren. And here we cannot refrain from observing, that the term *power* has been used by writers on ecclesiastical polity in an indefinite sense. The notion attached to it has been vague. Hence some diversity of opinion has arisen respecting its extent. The word is unhappily chosen. What precise idea, for instance, can be assigned to the phrase, “proper formal power or authority spiritual,” so much insisted on in some treatises? Much controversy among the older writers would have been prevented, had the term been well defined; or had they seen fit to use another instead of it, capable of suggesting an uniform and determinate idea. It should not have been applied both to the brethren and to the elders, because it cannot mean precisely the same thing in both cases. According to Bucer’s axiom, *power* belongs to the church; *authority* to the elders. We should prefer to speak of the *privileges* or *rights* of the brethren; *the authority* or *rule* of the elders. The use of *power*, apart from an approximation to philosophical precision, has imparted *additional* indefiniteness to a topic already surrounded with sufficient vagueness in the New Testament. In examining the subject before us we shall endeavour to avoid the artificial distinctions made by the ancient authors, from whom much mysticism has arisen. For this purpose, it will be expedient to take a church in its incipient state, and trace its various proceedings, distinguishing the component parts of it, and endeavouring to ascertain what prerogatives appropriately belong to each. It will not be necessary to unfold *all the duties* of the elders and the members belonging to the same society. To expound the proper *prerogatives* of both will be sufficient for our purpose. *The power* which each class is said to possess, is the only point we are now concerned with.

Confining ourselves therefore to a discussion of *the authority* belonging to office-bearers, and the *privileges* pertaining to the people, some of the duties devolving on both will be necessarily omitted.

Before commencing the subject, however, it is necessary to direct attention to a remark of considerable importance in its bearing on the entire question. The titles and functions peculiar to apostles and evangelists, have been largely confounded with those belonging to ordinary elders. The latter preach, and perform other duties; but they are not armed with the same authority which apostles possessed. Neither are they competent or warranted to perform the same things which apostles did. *In certain respects* they resemble those extraordinary officers; but in many others the difference is great and essential. It is therefore incumbent on the inquirer to distinguish the titles belonging to apostles alone from those rightfully borne by preachers at the present day. So also with regard to evangelists. Nothing is more common than to discuss the subject of church-power, or the authority vested in a church of Christ, on the tacit assumption of modern pastors possessing the same titles and functions with *extraordinary* officers who have no proper successors. And yet nothing is more gratuitous or illogical. Many, doubtless, fall into the error *unconsciously*; consecrated as it has been by the practice of ages, and bolstered up by a distinction in the apostolic office itself, which we shall hereafter discard.

Thus the title *ambassador* is peculiar to the apostles, though often appropriated by ordinary ministers. According to the great lexicographer of the English language, the word means, "a person sent in a public manner from one sovereign power to another, and supposed to represent the power from which he is sent. The person of an ambassador is inviolable." In 2 Cor. v. 20, as also in the 19th verse, the first personal pronoun in the plural number refers to Paul himself, or at most to him and his fellow

apostles, who were *instead of Christ* acting in His place, as his proper representatives, invested with full authority to transact ecclesiastical affairs *for Him*.*

Another observation, in this discussion, is necessary to a clear apprehension of the whole.

The duties devolving on office-bearers in a church could all be performed without such individuals. This principle holds good, not only in sacred but civil affairs. Why then, it may be asked, are officers appointed? Because the interests of the society are best promoted by having them. Churches have a *right* to do the various duties involved in the offices of pastors and deacons. These offices were not instituted because the churches had no right to do certain things without them. They were appointed because the churches can do certain things better with them. They are not necessary to *the being*, but to *the well-being* of churches; for which reason they are a divine institution, God having intimated his will in favour of their perpetual succession. Thus, when a number of believers come together for the worship of God and mutual edification, one person may be selected to preach to or exhort the rest, on the occasion. It is the inherent right of every man to preach the gospel; and the person so selected may feel himself strongly prompted to comply. At another period, some other believer may be selected at the time of assembling to address the brethren. But who does not see, that preaching could not be done so well in this mode as by having some one or more duly qualified and appointed to give himself wholly to preaching and the other pastoral duties connected with it? In the same way, the temporal affairs of a church might be managed without stated office-bearers; but they are better transacted by the appointment of a class of men whose business it is to attend exclusively to the distribution of the church's alms and other cognate temporalities. This view is fully war-

* See Note LII.

ranted by the words of the apostle in the First Epistle to the Corinthians: "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ." (xii. 11, 12.) Office-bearers are for the *edification*, not the bare existence of a church. A church necessarily exists before it has officers, for the latter are chosen by it. In its character of a church composed of scriptural elements, it has a power to do, without officers, all that is done after officers are elected. But it is necessary to its edification, increase, and growth in grace, to obtain immediately such persons as possess the qualifications mentioned in the New Testament. Indeed, no church could even exist for a length of time, much less prosper, without pastors and deacons. Hence the appointment of such office-bearers is sanctioned by Christ in the New Testament.

The right view was stated long ago by Tertullian: "As far as the thing itself is concerned, the laity have the right to administer the sacraments and to teach in the churches. The word of God and the sacraments were communicated by God's grace to all Christians, and may therefore be communicated by all Christians as instruments of God's grace. But the inquiry is here not merely what is *lawful* in general, but also what is convenient under existing circumstances. We must here apply the declaration of St. Paul,—'All things which are lawful are not convenient.' With a view therefore to the maintenance of that order which is necessary in the church, the laity should make use of their priestly rights as to the administration of the sacraments, only where time and circumstances require it."*

Let us now take a church and trace its various proceedings. A number of believers agree to associate together. In a united capacity they resolve to confess Christ, to ob-

* See Note LIII.

serve His precepts, and to follow His will. They choose pastors whom they judge to possess the qualifications described in the New Testament. In this way the believer chosen by them becomes an official person as soon as he accepts their invitation. From that time *peculiar* duties belong to him in relation to them; and *peculiar* duties belong to them in relation to him; while *common duties* devolve on both together as a church of Christ possessing a scriptural character and fully constituted.

The official person has certain *titles* implying certain duties. He is a *pastor and teacher*, a *ruler*, a *president* of the brethren, an *elder*, a *bishop* or *overseer*. The titles of *ruler* and *president* imply that the pastors or elders of a church govern, rule, or exercise authority over it; which is further evident, because the people are required to *obey*, to *submit* themselves to them that *have the rule*. In like manner, the flock is *under* the shepherd.

Much useless discussion has arisen in regard to the source of the government with which ecclesiastical rulers are invested. If the ministry be a divine institution, as we believe it to be, the authority it possesses must come from God. The preachers of the word are qualified for ecclesiastical government by the grace of God. They do not obtain the gift and qualifications by virtue of which they rule, from the church electing them to the pastoral office, but from the Fountain of all legitimate power. The believers who associate together in accordance with the will of God, and for the right management of the society, look out for rulers whom they judge to be qualified for office. They consider the capabilities possessed by such individuals for conducting their ecclesiastical organization in a prudent and orderly manner; and invite the brethren possessing them to take oversight of the church in the Lord. They reckon them gifted of God with talents for government; and hence they call them to exercise such talents publicly. And in doing so, they promise to *obey*.

This is the simple account of the matter. In many minds, however, there exists a vague, erroneous idea of sacerdotal authority as coming directly from an ordaining bishop or ordaining presbyters. It is supposed that a minister is invested with an official character by the act of others ordaining him. This is unscriptural. When the brethren invite him to take the oversight of them, and he assents, he is *then* invested with an official character. By mutual agreement he is *over* them, and they are *under* him. They conclude that God has endowed him with the gift of government; and in the exercise of that wisdom which has led them to choose, they promise to obey cheerfully and readily. Thus the gift of government comes from God the Father of lights, like all other gifts conducive to the edification of the churches. It proceeds from the sovereign Head of the church universal. Doubtless the person may become more skilled in the art of government in answer to his own and the people's prayers; but it is Christ who imparts the progress.

The compact entered into between the ruler and the ruled may be dissolved by one or both of the parties. The union formed between pastor and people may be severed. This may arise from various causes.

First. The brethren, having had trial of the gift of government, may be convinced that the person who has been over them for a time does not possess the proper talent for ruling. Judging calmly and prayerfully in the light of Scripture, they may reckon him whom they had chosen ill-qualified for the important office of governor. This is a conclusion to which the members should not hastily come; but it is one at which they may legitimately arrive notwithstanding. And it reflects discredit on themselves for having proceeded too hastily, ere they had sufficient evidence of the abilities possessed by the individual invited to watch over them; or for a defect of Christian discernment. In either case the idea is a humiliating one. They ought to

look on it as a reason for self-abasement, and mourn over their deficiencies before God. They have committed a great mistake; they have hindered their own progress; they have retarded their spirituality; they have impeded their prosperity. They should take shame to themselves that they have been so blind; so defective in one characteristic of an enlightened church.

It is highly incumbent on the church to arrive at such a determination slowly, deliberately, and cautiously, having the fear of God before their eyes. And when they have so resolved, the teacher will naturally be apprised of it in such a manner as becomes those who are still his flock. It is then his duty to resign the official character, and to cease ruling the society.

Secondly. On the other hand, the ruler may perceive several things in the church over which he has been appointed that seem incongruous with the scriptural character of a spiritual association. These he has laboured to correct, but in vain. Piety may be languid among his flock; or the spirit of anti-christian insubordination may prevail. In these and similar cases he may resolve to govern and teach the society no longer. But let him also proceed in his deliberations with caution. The society cannot retain him among them when he wishes to depart, any more than he can continue to labour among them when they wish him to leave them. Both entered into a voluntary agreement; and when either party becomes dissatisfied, on reasonable grounds, with the other, let them part in peace.

With regard to the nature and degree of the rule exercised by a pastor over the brethren committed to his oversight, nothing definite is stated in the New Testament. Here all may be regulated by the general spirit of the Christian religion. If the church be well satisfied with the piety, intelligence, and ruling abilities of him whom they have called, it will be in harmony with their interest to repose a large measure of confidence in him. They will

be slow to question the contrariety of his proceedings to the word of God. Still they are at perfect liberty to do so, since they have the Bible in their own hands, and are commanded to think for themselves in every thing relative to the church. They may fairly judge of the authority which a pastor ought to exercise, agreeably to the tenor of the New Testament; and should he transgress that boundary he may be tenderly told of it. Collisions respecting the degree of authority which a minister of the gospel ought to have, should be most studiously avoided; and wherever self is subordinated to the honour of the Great Master, they *will* be infrequent. When the hearts of people and pastors are right they will seldom occur.

According to the Westminster divines, the authority of pastors is *ministerial* and *subordinate*. These epithets convey no definite idea. Others would limit it to *advice* or *counsel*. But the terms employed in the New Testament, viz., *rule*, as applied to the elders, *obedience*, as applied to the church, mean more than this; else they have been ill chosen. It is not natural to dilute the whole authority possessed by pastors into mere advice or counsel. The following ideas appear to us included in the government of elders.

1. They preside in all meetings of the church.
2. They call the attention of the members to the principles or laws laid down by Christ, and insist on obedience to them.

As presidents of the society, it naturally belongs to them to call the church together, when any matter may arise sufficiently important in their view to require a meeting of the brethren. In this case duty demands of the members to obey the summons.

In meetings of the church, no member should speak without permission of the elders, nor continue to do so when they impose silence. The elders give and withhold liberty of speech when the church is assembled.

In such meetings no member should oppose the judgment of the presiding elder.

In relation to these three examples, the only exception to obedience on the part of the members lies in their having a just and sufficient reason for non-compliance. In the position they occupy, they should have a thorough persuasion of the propriety of resistance by virtue of Christ's laws, before they venture to assume an attitude of insubordination. And not only must they have this conviction, but be also able to set it forth before the church, commending it to them as reasonable and right. They must explain *the grounds* of their conviction, placing them in the clear light of reason and Scripture, and demonstrating their adequateness to justify disobedience.

By virtue of their official position, it also belongs to the elders to prepare such matters as they may judge fit to come before the church—to put them in a proper posture for being heard and transacted. This agrees with the spirit of the example recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (xxi. 18, &c.), where Paul received directions from the apostles and elders how to conduct himself towards the church, so as not to give offence when he should appear among them. “Hence when the offence of a brother is (according to the rule in Matt. xviii. 17) to be brought to the church, they are beforehand to consider and inquire, whether the offence be really given or no, whether duly proved, and orderly proceeded in by the brethren, according to rule, and not duly satisfied by the offender: lest themselves and the church be openly cumbered with unnecessary and tedious agitations: but that all things transacted before the church be carried along with most expedition, and best edification. In which respect they have power to reject causeless and disorderly complaints, as well as to propound and handle just complaints before the congregation.”*

* The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, by John Cotton, &c. p. 22, 4to. London: 1644.

3. They instruct and persuade the church.

4. They reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all authority.

5. They propose to the church whatever they may think conducive to its well-being, making any regulations, in harmony with the genius of Christianity, which they may deem desirable for the church's guidance ; but always with the concurrence and sanction of the brethren.

6. As long as they preside over a church, nothing done by that church in their absence is valid without them, except they have given their assent to such an arrangement.

7. They alone formally pronounce and execute any censure or sentence, in the presence and with the consent of the church.

It will thus be seen that their authority or rule lies chiefly in their ability to instruct, convince, and persuade. It has to do with the understanding and conscience. They bring the laws of Christ to bear on particular cases, demanding absolute obedience to them on the part of the brethren. The authority they have over the church is binding ; but its binding virtue is chiefly derived from the charge they have in trust—the message from heaven they are called to unfold and enforce. It should never be forgotten by the people over whom they are set, that elders are an institute of God, ordained over them and for their benefit.

On the whole, the authority with which elders are invested is essentially *executive*, not *legislative*. They carry into effect the laws of Christ regarding the church, or decisions founded on those laws. Having explained and authoritatively declared the will of Christ concerning matters brought before the brethren, the minister pronounces sentence with their consent. He has no authority to enact regulations for the guidance or discomfort of the brethren without their approval. On the contrary, he must proceed all along with their knowledge and sanc-

tion. It is expedient and necessary that they admit the propriety of all his measures, having no just cause of exception against them.

It may appear surprising to some, that in a delicate point like the present, so much scope should be allowed to Christian discretion. But similar cases are not unusual. Where the life of Christ exists in the soul and pervades the members of a Christian community, minute prescriptions would be prejudicial to intelligent piety.

Agreeably to the preceding account of pastoral rule or authority, the following duties naturally devolve on the elders.

1. The "power" of ordaining office-bearers belongs to them.

(a.) Here the term *power*, though commonly applied, is irrelevant. There is no *power* in the matter, when the nature of ordination is properly understood. It is an abuse of the word to apply it to ordination. When elders are already in a church, they are certainly the proper persons. It is their duty to induct an official brother formally. But when there are none, it is usual to send for elders from other churches, although they have neither right, power, nor privilege, in any society except their own. There can be little objection to this step, provided the position these invited persons occupy, in relation to the church to which they come, be properly understood. They confer nothing on the minister which he had not before; no character, or office, or power. If it be considered undesirable or inconvenient to send for the elders of another church, or of several churches, then some one of the deacons may be requested by the church to ask a blessing on the newly-formed relation. Should the disposition of the pastor and people be to make the matter imposing, *several* persons may be invited to discourse of certain topics connected with inauguration, who may afterwards lay hands on the head of the elder; but where no such desire exists,

one person solemnly imploring the divine blessing to descend on pastor and people in their new relation—one of the brethren themselves—is quite sufficient.

(b.) The privilege of presiding at the Lord's supper naturally belongs to the elders, because they are rulers of the church. They preside at every meeting of the church, and consequently, when the members meet for observing the ordinance commemorative of Christ's sacrificial death, they are the presidents.

(c.) In like manner they baptize, agreeably to established order and practice.

Here ecclesiastical phraseology affirms, that ordinary elders possess the peculiar power of *administering* or *dispensing the sacraments*. But we may remark, that the term *administering* is one not only not found in the New Testament, but ill-selected. It has been borrowed from the vocabulary of hierarchism, not from the simple statute-book of heaven. It savours of the priestly source from which it has been taken. So also the terms *dispense*, and *sacraments*; both which serve to *convey*, or at least to *confirm*, erroneous ideas. Those who desire to follow the Scriptures alone, divesting their minds of human inventions and sacerdotal notions, should abandon them to the advocates of prelatie power; or to the imitators of high-church practices among non-conforming denominations. It must not be supposed that baptism is not rightly performed, or the Lord's supper improperly observed, in the *absence* of ordained elders. These officers are not necessary to *the validity* of the institutions in question. Where they are wanting, the brethren may legitimately observe the ordinance of the supper; and baptism may also take place. Some of the proofs adduced in favour of the idea that none but ordinary elders should *ever dispense* the sacraments are irrelevant; such as Matt. xxviii. 18—20: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, bap-

tizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." Here it is said, that in the same commission, addressed to the same office-bearers, the preaching of the word and baptism are joined together. But the company addressed, which consisted of more than the apostles, represented the church. No one class is singled out to whom the terms apply exclusively.

The words of 1 Cor. xi. 24, 25, are also quoted as evidence:—"And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." "Ministers alone," says Baxter, "may administer the sacrament of the Lord's supper, because he that administereth it (in breaking the bread, delivering it to all, bidding them, *Take, eat, &c.*) must represent the Lord Jesus, who himself did this at the institution. But only ministers, and no private men, are persons who should represent the Lord Jesus in church-administrations: therefore only ministers, and no private men, may administer the Lord's supper."* The passage in question is still more irrelevant, for it is Christ who appears, instituting and dispensing the supper. It is both illogical and unnatural to introduce elders here as successors of Christ, that they may stand forth as his representatives in the ordinance of the supper. It is a bold thing to say that ministers of the gospel represent apostles, or are the successors of the apostles in the present day; but it is still bolder to say, with Baxter, that they represent Christ; in reality they represent neither.

* Plain Scripture Proof of Infants' Church Membership and Baptism, pp. 221, 222. 4to. London: 1651.

Again, there is no one passage in all the New Testament which proves that it is *the exclusive* prerogative of the elders to baptize. And yet the notion is tenaciously held. Coming, as it does, from the church of Rome, and received from that source by the Protestant Episcopal church, it has taken hold of other denominations.

In Acts ii. 38—41, when three thousand were converted in a day to Christianity, in consequence of Peter's discourse, it is simply said they were baptized. It is not even affirmed that they were baptized by the apostles, as if that were a matter of importance. The number of the converts renders it probable that many of the hundred and twenty disciples assisted at the general baptism. Paul himself was baptized by Ananias, who was a disciple and a devout man, but not an official person,—an apostle, or evangelist, or elder. In modern phraseology, Ananias was a layman. Cornelius, with his family, appears to have been baptized by the brethren, though Peter was present; for the apostle "*commanded them to be baptized* in the name of the Lord." Besides, the position in which baptism is placed by the apostle of the Gentiles, is unfavourable to the notion of its exclusively belonging to office-bearers in the church; *so exclusively, that it can be performed by none else in their absence.* "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." Thus, in Paul's estimation, baptizing was inferior to preaching. It is certainly easier than preaching. There is nothing connected with it which a believer cannot do. When water is applied to the body of an adult, or to the face of an infant, the person immersing or sprinkling communicates no moral efficacy or holiness to the baptized. The essential point is the state of mind possessed by the adults baptized, or by the parents of the infant. Without right views and feelings on their part, all else will be of little avail. The outward element is significant of spiritual truth; and the person who applies the external symbol, according to the Divine injunction,

gives no spiritualizing efficacy to it by the act of handling. He does not consecrate or make it holy, for it is incapable of holiness. He cannot render it more significant of truth in itself than it really is; or convert it into a medium of inward purification. He can merely bring out into prominent view the particular doctrine of which it is symbolical. It may be presumed, indeed, that the pastor who has been accustomed to public teaching and exposition—to the admonition and warning of others—can render a religious service connected with the act of baptism more edifying to the parties immediately concerned, than a believer who has not been similarly exercised. Yet a religious service forms no essential part of the ordinance; and therefore the presence of one who, from his office, may be supposed best able to improve the occasion, is not indispensable. Those who regard the substance rather than the form of baptism—who view it as a symbolical rite by which truth is palpably presented, will hardly fail to perceive that nothing essential to the validity or value of it lies in the person applying water to the body of the baptized. Any one of the spiritual priesthood composing a church may “administer” the rite, when elders are wanting in a church. It is true that the apostles usually baptized; so also evangelists and deacons, elders or bishops; but it is incapable of proof, and inconsonant with a right view of the ordinance itself, as well as of *ordination*, that elders always baptized in the absence of *extraordinary* officers. They baptized *generally*. Hence it is meet that elders should dispense it. Custom has sanctioned the notion that they should do it in ordinary cases. No advantage is gained by acting in opposition to established order. But where a church has no elders, there is no need to resort to the elders of other churches in this matter; or to wait till it obtain office-bearers. Any one of the deacons or brethren selected by the church may be the baptizer.

Many of these observations will apply to the Lord's supper. It is supposed by some that none may *in any case* "administer" it, except an ordained elder. Viewing the ordinance in the light of the New Testament, it does not seem to us that it would be necessarily desecrated if observed in the absence of pastors. Others may preside, without impairing the value of it to the recipients; and without the guilt of presumption. It may be as worthily received in the absence of a presiding office-bearer, as in his presence. When an elder is present, he properly presides at the ordinance, inasmuch as he is the ruler of the church. Intrusted with the constant oversight of the society, he is perpetual president at every meeting of the brethren. This is involved in his office of ruling or governing. But yet no virtue is transferred from the individual who thus presides—whether he be styled clergyman, priest, or elder—to the communicants. He simply invokes the Divine blessing, and distributes the bread and wine; addressing perhaps a few words of exhortation to the assembled church. Thus, when a church has no elders, the members may legitimately partake of the supper. An elder's presence is not *essential* to the validity of it. It is *desirable*, because the presumption is, that such an one is better qualified to lead the devotions of the brethren more profitably than an individual selected from among themselves. Hence it may be *most advantageous* to have an official person presiding. But it is certainly unnecessary to send for the elder of another church; for such an one bears no *official* relation to any society except his own. Standing among the brethren of another church he occupies the same position with one of the brethren themselves.* All that he brings with him is the experience he has gained in profitably presiding at the ordinance in his own church. When a church therefore is without elders or pastors, let them by all means partake of the

* See Note LIV.

sacred supper.* It is their duty and their privilege to do so. To neglect it is highly culpable. A deacon selected by the brethren may preside. This is sufficient. Edification on particular occasions may be equally promoted in the absence of bishops.

The view now given is in accordance with the New Testament. From the First Epistle to the Corinthians we infer that the church at Corinth had no office-bearers at the time when Paul wrote to them.† He regarded the ordinance of the supper as peculiarly belonging to the disciples, to be attended to by them even in the absence of ordinary pastors. In the observance of it certain abuses prevailed, which the apostle wished to correct. Hence he instructs and expostulates. His exhortations and rebukes, however, are not addressed to the elders, but to *the disciples themselves*. *The brethren* are addressed, not the authorized administrators of ordinances. Should not the latter have been addressed, had the church been provided with them? The body of the disciples is not blamed by the apostle for observing the ordinance without elders. It is apparent, therefore, either that the Corinthians had no stated elders, or else that the directions in question should have been addressed to the latter rather than to the disciples generally.

The New Testament intimates, in other places, that the first churches partook of the supper before they had pastors. This is admitted by Mr. Ewing himself, and need not be urged. But in order to weaken the force of the concession, the miraculous gifts existing in the primitive churches are summoned to supply the place of bishops, till the latter were provided. This is improbable. It is a mere conjecture, destitute of historic foundation. Individuals miraculously gifted were not bishops; neither were they office-bearers. They were members, not officers of the churches. They did not become officers by virtue of

* See Note LV.

† See Note LVI.

the gifts they possessed ; nor were the gifts in all cases intended to supply the place of officers. What reference, for instance, had the gift of healing to the pastoral office ? Some miracles also were said to be for a sign to them who believe not.

There is, besides, nothing in the nature of the Lord's supper which would render the presence of an elder essential to its right observance. The ordinance is simple. It is chiefly commemorative.* Neither does the New Testament speak in any place, expressly or by implication, of its being *given* by one person—the pastor—to the brethren or disciples.† The latter are said to eat the Lord's supper, to come together to break bread, to be partakers of the Lord's table—phraseology more accordant with the idea of the ordinance belonging to the disciples, than that one or more office-bearers should *necessarily* be present to break the bread, pour forth the wine, and “ dispense ” the elements.

To the church *in conjunction* with *its rulers*, is committed the power of discipline. “ Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone : if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church : but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” ‡

This passage is highly instructive. When a Christian injures his fellow-Christian, private admonition is the first duty. More than one attempt should be made to obtain satisfaction and restore fraternal affection. The mediation of others should be called into action. The influence of two or three witnesses should be brought to bear on the

* See Note LVII.

† See Note LVIII.

‡ Matt. xviii. 15, 16, 17.

difficulty. It is only after the incorrigible perseverance of the offender in iniquity—after the failure of private admonition—that the matter should be carried before the Christian church to which the parties belong. Every *offence*, however trifling, should not be publicly brought before the church, any more than every *measure*. This would be unprofitable and injurious to the interests of the society. When the offender refuses to attend to the admonition of the church, persisting in his sin he becomes unworthy of Christian communion, and must be *excommunicated*. “Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” Here there is no specification of church-rulers or elders as distinct from the church itself, the body of the brethren. The entire society has to do with the case of discipline.

Such is the rule of proceeding in dealing with *private offences* committed by one member against another, between whom; if the matter be not settled, it is referred to the decision of the church to which the two individuals belong.

But there are offences of a public nature, requiring a different treatment. They are openly scandalous. They concern all the members equally; and therefore they come at once before the church. To this class belong scandalous vices or immoralities, to which the following passage is appropriate.

“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 the Lord Jesus.”*

Amid all the difficulties of this intricate passage it is clear that the phrase, “delivering to Satan,” *includes* excommunication from the church. Whether the import of

* 1 Cor. v. 3, 4. See Note LIX.

the expression be exhausted by the meaning in question, we shall not stop at present to inquire. The second and thirteenth verses of the chapter plainly show, that *expulsion from the society* is chiefly intended.

Properly speaking, the act of excommunication was performed by the church at Corinth in obedience to apostolic instruction. Paul, as an apostle, was invested with authority by Christ over all the churches. In their organization and management he possessed absolute power. In the present instance, however, as in most others, he does not issue an authoritative mandate, or insist on his official character. He assumes another attitude, and adopts other language. "I have judged already," he says, "as though I were present, to deliver him that hath so done this deed, unto Satan." But although the act of excommunication was done in compliance with the judgment of the apostle, it was the church's act notwithstanding; and whatever peculiarity may have been in the case, all examples of expulsion from Christian churches are essentially analogous. In the former, the sentence of excommunication was carried into effect in obedience to the determination of Paul, who was "in Christ's stead;" in the latter, the same sentence is executed in obedience to the laws of Christ. In the former, an apostle was with the Corinthians in spirit; in the latter, Christ himself is present, according to his promise. Let it be observed, then,

1. That the whole church are represented as gathered together at the excommunication of the incestuous person: "When ye are gathered together, and my spirit." (v. 4.)

2. They are enjoined to "put away from among themselves that wicked person." (v. 13.)

3. They had a diacritical power in the matter of discipline: "Do not ye *judge* them that are within?" (v. 12.)

4. In allusion, as we suppose, to the same case, the apostle says: "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many." (2 Cor. ii. 6.) It may

be *certainly* inferred, from these words, that *some* act of discipline had been exercised on him by *the majority*, which Paul declares to be sufficient. We do not here inquire into the difficult questions connected with the verse; such as, whether the act of excommunication recommended by the apostle had been really performed or not; whether the majority had carried a milder sentence, the minority opposing; whether the word translated *punishment* means censure, &c., &c.

5. "When the apostle directeth them upon the repentance of an offender to forgive him, (2 Cor. ii. 4—10,) he speaketh to the brethren, as well as to their elders, *to forgive him*. As they were all (the brethren as well as the elders) offended with his sin, so it was meet that they should all alike be satisfied, and being satisfied, should forgive him."*

The conclusion to be drawn from the whole case is, that the entire Corinthian church is addressed by the apostle as having the power within itself to excommunicate the incestuous man; no one class in the society being singled out or separated from the other as the exclusive possessor of that prerogative.

The following admonitions, though not referring directly to the admission or exclusion of members from a Christian church, are quite accordant in spirit with those already adduced to prove the privileges of the people in matters of discipline: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." The spiritual men, *namely* the members generally, especially the more enlightened—not the rulers alone—are commanded to restore the man overtaken in a fault. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye," &c., *i. e.*, admit him into your society and friendship. To the church at Colosse Paul writes of Mark: "Touching whom ye received commandments; if he come unto you, receive him."

* Cotton on the Keyes, p. 46.

The conduct of the disciples at Jerusalem in relation to Saul, tends to establish the same privilege as belonging to the church generally. We find from Acts ix. 26, &c., that when Saul endeavoured to join himself to the church of Jerusalem, the brethren were unwilling to receive him. They were ignorant of the great change that had taken place in his character. Hence he had recourse to Barnabas, who brought him to the apostles and stated the facts connected with his conversion. After being thus recommended by one acquainted with his character—by one in whom the apostles and disciples had perfect confidence—"he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem."

It is not at all necessary for the members and pastors to meet together to consider the propriety of receiving a disciple; as Brown, reasoning on this case, takes for granted. The members may receive a member on the recommendation of one in whom they have confidence. Or, they may depute one or more to inquire into the circumstances of a candidate; and admit the applicant, should the report be satisfactory.

The opinion of a church on any subject that may come before it, whether it be the admission or exclusion of a member, the election of a pastor, or any other matter, is usually expressed by a vote. And here the opinion of the majority must be taken as that of the body. It is the duty of the minority to submit to the decision of the majority, when absolute unanimity cannot be attained. *All* the members of the church have an equal right to express their sentiments and to vote. Some indeed would exclude females both from delivering their opinion in a church-meeting, and from voting, on the ground of 1 Cor. xiv. 33, 34, and 1 Timothy ii. 11. But the context of the passages intimates that the apostle forbids a woman to pray or preach, or exercise any similar gift, *for edification only*. If the words be pressed to their utmost extent, let them

be fairly carried out, and let a female be debarred from singing psalms, from saying Amen to the church's prayers, from making profession of her faith, or a public confession of sin. To insist that she should not speak at all in the church, or even vote, is not warranted by Paul's words. Certain inalienable privileges belong to them as members of a church, of which they should not be deprived by erroneous interpretations of the divine word.

Some claim this prerogative as belonging exclusively to the elders. They think that bishops alone should exercise discipline; the people having no power in the matter except "a passive power in submitting to the authoritative acts of church-governors; as when in excommunication of any incorrigible sinner they tacitly consent to the sentence, and dutifully withdraw society from the excommunicated, as they are appointed."* The pastors alone, it is contended, should admit or excommunicate members on their sole responsibility. They should act agreeably to their own judgment, without consulting the church, or obtaining their approbation in the matter of discipline. This appears to us an erroneous view of the authority belonging to the governors of a church. They have no right to admit or exclude members without the knowledge and consent of the people. As a voluntary society of worshippers the people have a right to know who is to be associated with them. It is arbitrary in an official brother to act alone in this case. Rather should he carry into effect the sentence of the church, appearing as their *organ* or *representative*, not their *lord*.

Let us now consider the chief arguments of those who affirm that the power of discipline is vested in the office-bearers alone. "It seems manifest," says Brown, "from the sacred oracles, that this work is committed exclusively to the pastors of the church, and not to them merely as conjoined with the members. At the effusion on Pente-

* Divine Right of Church Government, p. 92.

cost, for instance, we are told that in what remained of a single day, after a sermon from the apostles, about three thousand souls were added to the church. But how was it possible that in so short a space the members at large could meet with the pastors and hear them examined, and express in order their approbation or disapprobation of the confession and character of every individual in such a multitude? When Philip went down to Samaria and baptized many, both men and women; and baptized and received the Ethiopian eunuch as a member of the church; as well as when Ananias baptized Paul, though in the city of Damascus where there was a Christian church, it is plain that this act was performed solely by ministers without convening or consulting members."*

This reasoning proceeds on the assumption that ordinary pastors come into the place of apostles, of men gifted with inspiration and infallibility; and of evangelists, who also possessed extraordinary endowments. The assumption, however, should have been proved. As soon as it is *proved*, we shall allow the conclusiveness of the argument. Till that be done, it is sufficient to confront it with the simple affirmation, ordinary elders do *not* represent apostles and evangelists; so that they may *unhesitatingly* and *legitimately* do *whatever* devolved on primitive and temporary office-bearers. The extraordinary circumstances also in which apostles and evangelists acted, as referred to by Brown, present a striking contrast to the circumstances of Christian churches at the present day. There is no proper analogy between the examples adduced and the case of ordinary officers.

With regard to the three thousand added to the church at Jerusalem, it must be recollected that the apostles were present and sanctioned the proceeding. And when the apostles acted so, the church must have been satisfied, inasmuch as they had authority over all the churches, and

* Vindication of Presbyterian Church Government, p. 57.

were gifted with inspiration for the infallible determination of all measures relating to ecclesiastical organization. In the presence of apostles, there was no need of examining members for admission into churches. The fact that *they* were satisfied of the belief of the three thousand, rendered individual examination superfluous. In regard to Philip's baptizing many, as well as the Ethiopian eunuch, the case is foreign to the point. The baptizing of adults is not identical with the admission of them as members into a church. Baptism was not the only qualification for membership. Such persons, though baptized, were not necessarily fitted to be members of churches.

In order to neutralize the force of the passage in Matthew xviii. 15, 16, 17, it has been thought by some, that the term rendered *church* means the Jewish synagogue, or the Sanhedrim. So Wolf, Calvin, Beza, Paræus, and Goodwin himself. It cannot mean the Sanhedrim, because the word never bears that signification. The Sanhedrim is called *συνέδριον*, never *ἐκκλησία*. It is true that *ἐκκλησία* is sometimes employed in the Septuagint and in Josephus to denote *the synagogue* of a particular place—the assembly of Jewish worshippers—but it was never restricted to *the rulers* of that assembly. It means *the entire body of the people*; and thus it will still remain to be shown, that the synagogue is put for *its rulers*. But, indeed, it is quite improbable that either the Sanhedrim or a synagogue tribunal is meant. How could the Saviour refer his followers to a Jewish synagogue; a body not only devoid of sympathy with them, but even alien in spirit and temper? To have referred them to such a tribunal, for the purpose of restoring brotherly affection and conduct, would have been a strange phenomenon in the history of the compassionate Jesus.* The allusion, therefore, can only be to the spiritual society, the church, to which both the offender and the offended belong. In the present passage, as

* See Note LX.

Vitringa has rightly remarked, Jesus gives directions respecting the procedure of churches after his death.

In the same manner the *Christian* not the *Jewish* church is meant in Matt. xvi. 18, although the former did not then exist. There is no weight in the objection, that if Christ had not meant *the Jewish* church, the apostles could not have understood his meaning. His immediate followers looked for a church which the Redeemer was to establish; although they had very imperfect views of it till after the day of Pentecost. Besides, the objection would not be valid, even if the apostles had *no conception* of a church to be founded by their Master, because his language was not always accommodated to the meanness of their ideas. He delivered to them many instructions which they did not understand at the time—instructions relating to their future conduct and his cause in the world as committed to them. In short, the Jewish synagogue cannot be meant by the word *church* in this passage. It means *the Christian church*.*

The older Protestants disputed much respecting the precise meaning of ἐκκλησία here. Is it meant of the church rulers, they asked, or of the entire church? Of the former, according to Chrysostom. But the Lutherans were right in explaining it of the latter. In the New Testament the term is never applied to the elders alone. It is never used synonymously with πρεσβυτέριον, *the presbytery*. On the contrary, it is sometimes applied to the entire body of the members *as distinguished from* the elders. So in Acts xv. 22. We know that passages from the Old Testament have been adduced where the word rendered *congregation* denotes simply *the elders and rulers* of the congregation. But such passages are irrelevant. The Hebrew word employed in the Old Testament is not equivalent to the Greek word ἐκκλησία in the New Testament in its appropriated sense. The constitution of the congregation was essentially dif-

* See Note LXI.

ferent from the constitution of a Christian church; and it is wholly unwarrantable to reason from the one to the other.

We take *ἐκκλησία* in its ordinary, uniform signification, of a collection of believers; neither the members alone distinct from the officers, nor the officers distinct from the members, but a church fully constituted, and therefore consisting of both. Hammond's explanation, "Tell it IN THE PRESENCE of all the people, that before them the governor may rebuke him," is unworthy of an expositor. It is a mere evasion.

The only plausible argument against the view already deduced from the passages in the first and second Epistles to the Corinthians, is thus stated by the London ministers after Augustine, Beza, and Grotius. "It is not said, Sufficient to such an one is the rebuke inflicted of all, *ὑπὸ τῶν πάντων*; but of many, *ὑπὸ τῶν πλειόνων*, namely, of the presbytery, which consisted of many officers." The term *πλειόνων* literally signifies *the majority, the greater number*. The officers, however, belonging to the supposed "divers particular congregations in the presbyterial church of Corinth," were not the majority as compared with the members composing those congregations. Thus the criticism is not only powerless, but absolutely untenable.*

It is also argued by some, that "the power of discipline" is conferred on the office-bearers alone, because it is written in the Epistle to Titus, "A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition reject;" and in that to Timothy, "Against an elder receive not an accusation but before two or three witnesses." Timothy and Titus, however, were evangelists, or sent by an apostle to do the work of evangelists. They were also endowed with extraordinary gifts. It would be necessary to the conclusiveness of the proof derived from these passages to demonstrate that ordinary office-bearers *represent* evangelists.

Another passage, quoted by Brown for the same purpose,

* See Note LXII.

is in John xx. 21—23: “Then said Jesus to them again (the eleven apostles), Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” Here ordinary elders are unceremoniously assumed to be the representatives of the apostles, and power claimed for the former which was originally conferred on the latter. Let it be proved that the power of remitting and retaining sins was not *peculiar* to the apostles, but is still in the church of Christ; and we shall then undertake to show that it is not peculiar to church-rulers.

It should be considered, finally, that in the New Testament, elders are not exhorted to exercise discipline, or censured for the neglect of it, in distinction from the church. *The brethren* are admonished or blamed. The body of the members are addressed in such cases. Surely this fact implies, that discipline is the business of the whole society; of the church in connexion with its rulers, and not of one part of it. It is the common concern and interest of all the disciples.

The preceding discussion would be imperfect did we not allude to another prerogative claimed for the elders of a church apart from the private members; we mean the power of *binding* and *loosing* spoken of in the Gospel of Matthew, which is generally thought to be synonymous with the *remitting* and *retaining of sins*, mentioned in John’s Gospel.

The passage in Matthew is this: “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.” With this the two following passages have been connected: “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” “Whose soever

sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”*

The three texts just quoted have been variously applied to a Christian church. It has been supposed that they demonstrate peculiar privileges belonging either to the rulers of it alone, or to the members in connexion with the rulers, or even to the members alone. Great obscurity, however, attaches to the words. It is exceedingly difficult to discover their true meaning. Let us, in the first place, attempt to ascertain it; and then notice of what persons they speak.

(a.) In Matthew xvi. 19, the keys of the kingdom of heaven denote the power of opening, and by implication of shutting it. But what is meant by the kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God? We answer, a state or condition in which the kingly power of Messiah is owned and willingly submitted to—where His sovereign, peaceful reign is remarkably manifested. Now this condition is exhibited by the spiritual subjects of Jesus, part of whom are on earth and part in heaven. All the saints, and none others, belong to the kingdom. It is seldom, however, that both divisions of the kingdom are rendered *prominent* at the same time in the same passage. There is usually a special reference to the one or to the other, including the idea of locality—to the saints above, or those below.

This one signification always belongs to the phrase, although it is variously modified by the circumstances of the context. Different aspects of the kingdom are presented in different passages—the external and internal aspect.

From denoting the state or constitution of things under which the true people of God live, it comes by an easy and natural transition to denote the people themselves. It signifies at once *the state*, and *the subjects of that state*. Thus it is written, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand;”

* Matt. xviii. 18; xvi. 19.—John xx. 23.

the true reign of Messiah is about to commence in the subjection of a willing people to himself, in the world. This is the external aspect of the kingdom. Or again, the kingdom of God is within you;" the reign of the Messiah is in your hearts. The phrase is synonymous with a *church-state*, a *true church-state*, understanding the term Church in its comprehensive sense as denoting the entire company of believers. Admission into the kingdom is coordinate with admission into the mystical body of Christ, whose members are citizens of heaven.*

If this be the true sense of the expression, it will be desirable not to confound it with *the visible church*, which suggests a very indefinite and apparently unscriptural idea. The kingdom in question is the true gospel state in which all are willing subjects of Messiah. In this method we arrive at a solution of the various passages in which it occurs both natural and satisfactory.

What then are the keys of this kingdom? They are the gospel by which men are introduced into it. As soon as sinners believe the gospel of Christ, the door of the true church is opened to them, and they are admitted. Peter was intrusted with this instrument. He was invested with the power of preaching it infallibly, of opening the kingdom to all who should believe, and of shutting it against all who should not believe. The message of salvation was consigned to him as an apostle. With that divine instrument he went forth into the world, *an ambassador for Christ*.

The parallel passage in John xx. 23, favours the view that the terms *binding* and *loosing* respect *sins*. Applied to sins, they mean *remitting* and *retaining* them. But since no human being has power to forgive sins, and since none of the apostles claimed for himself so great an authority, the meaning must be that Peter, intrusted with the gospel, was able to declare the remission of sins to those

* See Note LXIII.

who believed, the non-remission to those who remained impenitent. "I give unto *thee*," is the address, without ever hinting at his representing either colleagues or successors. The very same power indeed that Jesus gave to Peter he gave to all the apostles; but he gave it to themselves in the commission which they received from him, and not by being represented in Peter. The keys are not an emblem of church power, but of apostolical power. This language amounts to neither more nor less than the import of the commission which all the apostles received from Jesus before his ascension; the power of infallibly preaching the doctrines of the gospel, and of declaring to what characters the kingdom of heaven is open, and to whom it is shut. All who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are admitted into this kingdom; all who do not are excluded; while the characters of believers and unbelievers are infallibly drawn, so that those who are approved by the apostles are approved by Jesus; those condemned by them will be condemned by him."*

The passage in John xx. 23 refers, as has been already intimated, to the same subject. In it the Saviour formally gives to all the apostles what he had before conferred on Peter. Here they receive infallible qualifications for preaching the gospel; for declaring the remission of sins to such as should believe; and pronouncing exclusion from the kingdom of heaven on the unbelieving.

In regard to Matthew xviii. 18, many considerations appear to require the same exposition. The preceding context, however, favours another view, agreeably to which the passage refers to the exercise of discipline in a church of Christ. The apostles are represented as binding and loosing on earth, and their acts are ratified in heaven.

(*b.*) The preceding remarks show that the passage in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew's gospel applies to Peter alone; while, in John xx., the same power is conferred on

* Carson, Reply to Brown, p. 56.

all the apostles. Neither of them relates to discipline or to the government of a church on earth. They are therefore inapplicable to the subject before us.* The words recorded in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel *are* appropriate, inasmuch as they allude to the exercise of discipline. Primarily and properly they speak of the apostles. The decisions of apostles alone are ratified in heaven. It is remarkable that the context speaks of the conduct of members in a church towards each other in case of offence; while, in the verse itself, the address is altered, "whatsoever *ye* shall bind on earth," &c. &c.: meaning *the apostles*. From the nature of the context, the words may be referred to a church administering discipline according to the apostles, or agreeable to apostolic rule. Then its proceedings are ratified of God. But in that case it is properly the apostles who admit and exclude—the authority of their infallible word, and not the word of man. There is no warrant, in any right view of the passage, for confining the act intended to church-rulers, because they are never denominated the church, nor are they the representatives of the apostles.

We propose this explanation with much diffidence, because no satisfactory view of the meaning conveyed by these passages has yet been given, although much has been built on them by various denominations. Before they be adduced in behalf of the ecclesiastical authority claimed by pope, prelate, priest, or presbyter, it should be proved that any of these parties is the legitimate successor of Peter and the apostles, or that any of them is scripturally entitled *the church*. Till then, the reflecting inquirer will look on their citation on behalf of powers assumed, as entirely arbitrary. As long as their true sense is so obscure, arguments founded on them should be proposed with extreme modesty, not with the dogmatism characteristic of ecclesiastical partisans.

* See Note LXIV.

We have now to indicate very briefly the privileges of the people.

1. They have the right of choosing their own office-bearers, as has been fully shown in a previous lecture.

2. If they are competent to elect their own officers, they are also competent to remove them out of office, or to deprive them of their official character. This power is inherent in every voluntary society, and consequently in every church.

3. They have the right to expostulate with an offending elder in case of doctrinal aberrations or mal-administration. This is implied in the preceding; the less being always contained in the greater; and should precede the final step of removal from office. It is agreeable to the direction given by Paul to the church at Colosse respecting Archippus, if it be allowed that Archippus was an elder: "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it."

4. It belongs to them to judge of the application of the laws of Christ to any case that may arise in the church. This is accordant with the tenor of the New Testament, and the apostolic condescension to popular privileges on all occasions.

5. It is their privilege to inquire with the elders into all cases that come before them as a church. They hear and judge of offences, concur with the elders, and sanction the measures which the rulers carry into effect. Every thing is transacted in their presence. The consent of the majority at least, is necessary to all church acts; and no sentence should be pronounced in opposition to their will. This is founded on the expression in Matthew's gospel, "Hear the church;" and on the language used by Paul in the first and second Epistles to the Corinthians regarding the case of the incestuous person.

6. They have privilege to make exception to the ad-

mission of members to church-fellowship, if they can show just cause. This is in accordance with the conduct of the disciples at Jerusalem in relation to Saul (Acts ix. 26, 27).

In looking at a church of Christ constituted after his own word, we observe in it *the appearance* of a *democracy*, and a proper *aristocracy*. In regard to the elders who rule, it is an aristocracy; but with relation to the power of the members generally, it *resembles democracy* to a certain extent, though it is not a *real* democracy. The two classes, the rulers and the ruled, each possessing its own rights, need not clash with each other. A due balance may be maintained between them. The golden equipoise of prerogative may be preserved.* It is possible, indeed, that the government of the elders may become oppression; while the prerogative of the people may become lawlessness and anarchy. But where the vital, peaceable power of godliness prevails, neither party will encroach on the other. The authority of the elders and the power of the people will be in unison. No jarring discord will agitate the society and drive away the spirit of love.

* See Note LXV.

LECTURE VII.

AUTHORITATIVE COURTS OF REVIEW EXAMINED AND DISCUSSED.

“I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.”—REV. ii. 24, 25.

HAVING spoken of “classical presbytery” in a former lecture, we now proceed to consider other governing assemblies of greater extent—such, for example, as have received the name of *synods*. These are ampler associations than presbyteries, consisting of members belonging to several presbyteries. Synods are divided into *provincial*, *national*, and *œcumenical*, differing from one another merely in extent. The first are more frequently held than the second; and the second than the third.

The proposition set forth by many is, that “Jesus Christ hath laid down in his word a pattern of a juridical synod consisting of governing officers of divers presbyterial churches, for a rule to the churches of Christ in all succeeding ages.”*

Thus a synod constitutes a court of review for the authoritative determination of all cases which may be brought before it; while the various congregations and presbyteries embraced within its range are bound to submit.

In proof of the existence and permanent obligation of synods, reference is made to the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Here it is said is a divine warrant for them, clear and express, which the ingenuity of opponents cannot shake or overthrow. “No divine,” says Rutherford, “that ever did write or speak of this chapter, except some

* The Divine Right of Church Government, p. 219.

of late, but they acknowledge Acts xv. to be a formal copy and draught of a general assembly. I might cite all our Protestant divines, the Lutherans, Papists, schoolmen, casuists, all the fathers and councils, all the doctors ancient and modern, but this was to fetch water to the sea." *

We purpose at present to consider this alleged scriptural basis of synods with all the impartiality and calmness which so grave a subject demands, not deterred by the formidable host, multitudinous as the waters of the sea, to which Rutherford refers.

While Paul and Barnabas abode with the believers at Antioch, confirming and building them up in the faith, certain men from Jerusalem—pharisaically-minded Christians—came to the city and assured the disciples that they could not obtain salvation without circumcision. This statement was contrary to the doctrine of Paul and Barnabas, who accordingly opposed the narrow views of such teachers. After much disputation between them and the two apostles, it was agreed to send a deputation to Jerusalem for the proper settlement of the question. The record does not inform us, whether this measure was adopted at the suggestion of Paul himself, who had particular reasons for going up to Jerusalem independently of the present business; but we think it very probable. Certain others of the brethren belonging to the church at Antioch accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their mission; though the pharisaic individuals themselves do not seem to have been present at the public consultation in Jerusalem, as Brown supposes. This may be inferred from the twenty-fourth verse; "Forasmuch as we have heard that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words subverting your souls, saying, ye must be circumcised and keep the law; to whom he gave no such

* A Peaceable and Temperate Plea for Paul's Presbyterie in Scotland, p. 217. 4to. London: 1642.

commandment," &c. The case was one of reference to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem from the church at Antioch, regarding a point which had distracted the minds of the disciples.

The document or epistle embodying the decision of the meeting was written in the name of the apostles, elders, and brethren. It is also evident that the measures recommended were obligatory on all Gentile Christians; although the epistle was addressed only to the churches specified in it, because the dispute had first arisen in them. The argument founded on this chapter in favour of synods may be presented in the words of the "sundry ministers of Christ within the city of London."

1. "Here was a proper ground and occasion for a juridical synod. 2. Here were proper members of a synod convened to consider of this question. 3. Here all the members of the synod, as they were convened by like ordinary authority, so they acted by like ordinary and equal power in the whole business laid before them. 4. Here was the ordinary way and method of synodal proceedings by the apostles, elders, and brethren. 5. Here were several authoritative and juridical acts of power put forth in this synod."*

In opposition to this mode of parallelising modern synods with the so-called synod at Jerusalem, in which it is not difficult to see how the view taken of Scripture is controlled by modern ideas and practice, we remark—

(a.) That such synods are never noticed in any other part of the New Testament, even where their appearance might have been expected. When errors in doctrine and practice were disseminated, the apostles did not write to synods for the purpose of suppressing them. In Corinth, where it is affirmed there were "several congregations under one presbyterial government," Paul does not write to the elders composing the presbytery, to excommunicate

* The Divine Right of Church Government, p. 219, et seqq.

the incestuous person; but to the church generally. In like manner, the seven churches of Asia Minor are addressed in the Apocalypse separately and apart. They are reprovèd, warnèd, and exhorted, each church by itself, as though it had the power within itself to rectify abuses. If, however, there had been a provincial synod, its proper business would have been to consider such matters. In that case the Saviour's reproof would have been specially addressed to it as having neglected to exercise the power with which it was intrusted for correcting error. The governing body which possessed control over these churches was the appropriate court to which the epistle or epistles should have been sent, rather than to individual churches.

(b.) The composition of this assembly was peculiar. It was composed in part of apostles. These were inspired, and therefore infallible in unfolding the will of God. But in the present instance it has been deemed desirable to set aside their inspiration and infallibility. It is averred that they did not act as apostles in the meeting, but as *ordinary elders*; and the following reasons are adduced in favour of the position.

1. "Because the apostle Paul and Barnabas his colleague were sent as members to this synod by order and determination (*ἔταξαν*) of the church at Antioch, and they submitted themselves to that determination, which they could not have submitted unto as apostles, but as ordinary elders and members of the presbytery at Antioch: they that send being greater than those that are sent by them."*

This argument becomes invalid, as soon as the humility of the apostles, and their scrupulousness in refraining from the assumption of ecclesiastical authority over the churches, are distinctly brought into view. Besides, it cannot be proved that the idea of referring the matter to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem *originated* with the church at

* The Divine Right of Church Government, pp. 222, 223.

Antioch.* For aught the New Testament teaches to the contrary, the reference in question was suggested by Paul himself. And what was the inferiority implied in Paul's "submitting" to the determination of the church? Was he unwilling to undertake the duty in question? Was it a task imposed on him? Nothing to that effect is either contained or implied in Luke's narrative. On the contrary, he undertook the service for the benefit of the Gentile churches, that there might be an amicable adjustment of the dispute, sufficiently decisive to discourage Judaizers.

2. "Because the manner of proceeding in this synod convened was not extraordinary and apostolical, as when they acted by an immediate infallible inspiration of the Spirit in penning the Holy Scriptures, (without all disputing, examining or judging of the matter that they writ so far as we can read,) but ordinary, presbyterial, and synodal; by ordinary helps and means, stating the question, proof and evidence from Scripture what was the good and acceptable will of God concerning the present controversy, and upon evidence of Scripture concluding, 'It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us.'"†

There is nothing in this verbiage tending to establish the point contended for. The apostles seem not to have delivered their sentiments immediately. But that is no reason why their sentiments when delivered were not the sentiments of the apostles as such. The Old Testament was appropriately adduced by James, because it would have special weight in showing the advocates of circumcision the right bearing of the Jewish Scriptures on the point debated.

Much stress has been laid on the fact of *disputing*. Nor are we at all disposed to question it. But that the apostles disputed with one another, or differed in opinion among themselves, there is not the least circumstance to show. No doubt many persons in the assembly concurred in

* See Note LXVI.

† Divine Right, &c., p. 223.

opinion with the pharisaically-minded individuals who had gone from Judæa to Antioch; and refused to submit to the sentiments even of apostles. It is questionable also, whether the apostles were regarded as infallible in their exposition of the divine will, either by these believing Pharisees, or by the converts generally. We are inclined to suppose that they were not so regarded. And if they were not viewed in the real character which they undoubtedly had, the act of disputing, which many are so anxious to fix on them, makes nothing for the Presbyterian side of the question, as long as it cannot be shown that different and varying opinions were expressed by *them*. It is very probable that some of *the elders* themselves did not recognize apostolic utterances in the true character of infallibility belonging to them. That many of the Jewish Christian disciples did not, is certain. Enlarged views of Christian freedom under the Gospel, were not entertained at this early period by the newly-converted Jews. Let it be considered then, that the infallibility of the apostles in all their expositions of the mind of God was not universally admitted; and *the much disputation*, in which some are desirous to make them parties, will cease to appear strange. The careful reader of the entire narrative will see that many were present at the deliberation besides the apostles and elders, to whom the disputation may be fairly attributed. The part taken by the apostles is clearly indicated—their sayings distinctly given; and why they should be mixed up with the previous proceedings cannot be understood, except to serve the purpose of reducing them to the level of ordinary men. The narrative itself intimates that the apostles had no part in the disputing; for not till after it did Peter rise up and speak—then Barnabas and Paul—and lastly, James. After they had uttered their sentiments, we hear of no more debating. Unanimity prevailed. The sentiments of all present happily coincided in a conciliatory measure. Thus all that can

be fairly extracted from the narrative is, that there was disputing *in the presence of* the apostles. Apostles were in the assembly, and heard the clashing of opinions. It is neither said nor implied, that they joined in such proceedings. Rather is the contrary hinted.

3. It is further argued, that the apostles acted throughout as ordinary elders, because "certain other of the church of Antioch, as well as Paul and Barnabas, were sent as delegates from the church at Antioch. They were all sent as well to the elders as to the apostles, at Jerusalem, about this matter. They were received at Jerusalem as well by the elders as the apostles, and reported their case to them both. The elders as well as the apostles met together to consider thereof. The letters containing the synodal decrees and determinations were written in the name of the elders and brethren, as well as in the name of the apostles. The elders and brethren, as well as the apostles, brand the false teachers. The elders and brethren, as well as the apostles, say, 'It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us.' The elders and brethren, as well as the apostles, did impose upon the churches no other burden than these necessary things. The elders, as well as the apostles, being assembled, thought good to send chosen men of themselves to Antioch, to deliver the synodal decrees to them, and to tell them the same things by mouth. And the decrees are said to be ordained as well by the elders as by the apostles at Jerusalem. So that throughout this whole synodal transaction, the elders are declared in the text to go on in a full authentic equipage with the apostles from point to point."* The fact of the elders and brethren being *associated with* the apostles throughout the narrative, does not prove that the former acted in the same capacity with the latter; or that the latter were divested of their inspiration at the meeting. All that we learn from the circumstance is, the extreme

* Divine Right, &c., p. 224.

prudence, humility, and peace-loving spirit of the apostles. If the reasoning of our opponents were valid, and carried out to its legitimate length, the apostles should be stripped of their official character entirely, and reduced to the simple level of the brethren—the private members of the church.

The distinction so often made, namely, that the apostles acted sometimes as apostles, and sometimes as ordinary elders or presbyters, is a questionable one. The apostolic office included that of elder; the apostles themselves sometimes assumed that title; their acts were substantially such as ordinary elders perform; and they were often joined with elders. Such are the reasons alleged for the hypothesis, that they acted in many cases as ordinary, uninspired elders. The attempt, however, to discriminate the sentiments and actions proceeding from them as apostles, and those proceeding from them as ordinary elders, is an attempt to divide what was never intended to be severed. The line of distinction so drawn seems needless, unwarranted, and injurious to truth. The apostles were always apostles. *They never ceased to be inspired.* In all their announcements of the divine will and expositions of its meaning, infallibility never deserted them. They taught *as apostles* and nothing else. In that capacity they are brought before us in the New Testament; and we cannot consent to denude them of their extraordinary inspiration. *As apostles*, they are a pattern to Christians in all ages. *As apostles*, they should be imitated by believers, so far as the New Testament warrants us in extending that imitation. They are never held out as examples of imitation to one class of believers more than to another. In following them, Christians generally must proceed according to the spirit of the Bible. They are presented as the universal bishops of the churches, in their complex office; and it is equally impossible as it is unnecessary for us to investigate their conduct and teachings in the light of a

distinction invented by men, and frequently used in support of high pretensions on the part of *the clergy*.

Thus we reject that *double aspect* of their person which plays a prominent part in the books of partisans, believing that it is totally impossible, even were it of any use, to discover the times and acts of their *presbytership*, and the times and acts of their *apostleship*.

So also with regard to *evangelists*, who have been considered in a double aspect; in their *extraordinary* character as *evangelists* strictly, and in their *ordinary* character as *presbyters*.

Even *prophets* have been subjected to the like distinction, being made both extraordinary officers and ordinary ministers or presbyters.

But the case of all is analogous. The attempt to pronounce an opinion on their acts as *extraordinary*, *temporary* offices; and their doings, as *ordinary* elders, is utterly nugatory. All that concerns the plain reader of the Bible is to know that they were persons invested with certain powers, in the infancy of Christianity, which none possess in the present day. Many things, it is true, are done, and very properly so, by Christians appointed by a church, which these highly-gifted individuals performed; but that is no reason for splitting up their individuality into two parts, one or other of which may be made use of in the explanation of a particular passage, according as it suits the views of a controversialist. Men will be always contending about *the aspect* or *character* in which the officers in question appeared on a particular occasion, as important to their argument or system.

The root of this arbitrary division lies in the notion of *succession*, which clings more or less to all parties. It is deemed honourable to be in a line connecting us with *apostles* or *apostolic* men. To be able to trace descent to these marvellous teachers and governors is a high privilege, which ambition does not easily abandon. All love succes-

sion *in one sense or other*. Prelatists make *diocesan bishops* the legitimate successors of the apostles, in doing which they look to "the ordinary office of the apostolate," affirming that "in the extraordinary privileges of the apostles they had no successors."* Presbyterians, on the other hand, who regard *presbyters* as the apostles' successors, have respect simply to the *general* character which apostles had as *ministers*. The same remark may be applied to the mode in which the two parties view *evangelists*; the one making prelates their modern representatives, the other presbyters.

Even the commission given by our Lord to *the church*, or to the persons representing the church, before his ascension, has felt the influence of this distinction, being explained of the apostles and *their successors*, namely, *bishops*, according to Churchmen; but *presbyters*, according to Presbyterians.

We repudiate the arbitrary severance in question as an invention of men, who, by introducing artificialities into the interpretation of Scripture, perpetuate disputes between ecclesiastical parties.

As to the allegation, that "the apostles themselves carefully distinguished between their authoritative character as inspired apostles, and their ordinary character as weak and fallible ministers of the word,"† it rests on no good foundation. The apostles indeed occasionally style themselves *elders* and *preachers*, not employing the title *apostle* at all times; but that circumstance only shows that they were not confined to the use of *a single term*. And if *elder* or *preacher* were less honourable than *apostle*, their application of it to themselves may be truly attributed to the absence of ambition. But while they style themselves *presbyters*, they were at the very same time *apostles*, and *vice versá*. The apostolic power was inseparable from them.

* Jeremy Taylor.

† Smyth. Presbytery and not Prelacy, &c., p. 14.

There is, in truth, no cause for anxiety about *ministerial succession*. It is of more importance to possess *the same truth* which apostles and evangelists taught, than to catch at a *double character* in their person for the sake of making out something that will at least look like an uninterrupted succession from them. The men who teach the same doctrines and rule according to the spiritual laws of Christ, are their legitimate successors. *They* are the only and proper representatives of these extraordinary men, whose *doctrine and spirit* are the same. A Christian society composed of such as give credible evidence of their belief in the gospel, may in this manner constitute *successors* to the apostles, *i. e.*, men *living after* them, who teach the same gospel which they promulgated, and govern the church by the principles of the great Legislator communicated to them by inspiration. To *this succession* the mystery of modern *ordination* is not necessary; though *scriptural ordination*, or, in other words, solemn prayer for grace and success in the discharge of duties, is very desirable.

Besides apostles, there were *elders* in the assembly. Who these were we have no specific mode of ascertaining. They were the teachers and rulers of the church at Jerusalem. It is highly probable that some of them were endowed with extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps all were not so.

But why were the elders joined with the apostles in the determination of the question? Presbyterians, proceeding on the assumption that they were *all ordinary, uninspired elders*, would reply, that there might be the model of a church court consisting of official persons alone. Were it a point of any importance, we should undertake to *prove* the improbability of *all* the elders in question being *unendowed* with the gifts of the Holy Spirit; for we know that the church of Jerusalem possessed a large measure of such charisms. Let it be granted, however, that they possessed none of these endowments, and were merely

ordinary presbyters. Why, then, was the reference made to apostles, provided they acted in an apostolic capacity, and at the same time to common elders? Could the wisdom of the latter improve the dictates of inspiration proceeding from the former? We answer, a matter of fact was to be ascertained. From the first verse of the fifteenth chapter of Acts, compared with the twenty-fourth, it would seem, that the Pharisaic teachers had alleged the authority of the church (or of its elders) at Jerusalem for their peculiar opinions. They came from the mother church, and alleged its sanction for what they taught. Hence the rulers of the society in the metropolis were concerned in the matter. It belonged to them to say, whether the case were really such as it had been represented by the Judaizing teachers. This appears to have been the reason why the elders were associated with the apostles. It was to ascertain a matter of fact; to learn whether the statement of the pharisaically-disposed Christians was true or false, from those with whom they had been connected and whose authority they alleged. But Dr. Dick objects to this explanation, because "the truth could have been ascertained with much less trouble by a single messenger, and without a solemn and public consultation. Besides, when the apostles and elders assembled, the subject of inquiry was not a question of fact, but of doctrine; not whether the men from Judæa had authority to teach, but whether the observance of the law of Moses should be urged upon the Gentiles."* We grant that the truth *on this point* might have been ascertained with less trouble. But *that* was a very subordinate part of the entire business. *The primary question* was the reference to apostolic authority on a doctrinal point. Hence we hear nothing, in the proceedings of the assembly, concerning the men from Judæa having authority to teach, yet it is distinctly noticed in the letter. Dr. Dick's objection would be conclusive, had the question

* Lectures on the Acts, p. 68.

of fact been *the sole* or *chief* question. But since it forms a small, subordinate point, the objection is innocuous.

The *brethren* were also present at the meeting. In this respect it was unlike modern synods, from which the people generally are excluded as members. There they have neither voice nor vote. To neutralize, however, this feature of dissimilarity between the assembly in question and modern synods, the term *brethren* has received a peculiar meaning. "They were," says Brown, "either prophets and evangelists, or other ministers who were at that time in Jerusalem." Thus *the members of the court*, as they are styled by the Presbyterian writer, were in his opinion *office-bearers alone*. This sense of the term *brethren* is contrary to uniform usage. The word is never confined to elders or ministers of the gospel as such. It denotes the disciples generally, as an induction of all the passages where it occurs amply demonstrates. Rutherford explains *the brethren* by "choice and able men," affirming "that the church may send, in some cases, learned men and holy men to synods, who are neither pastors, elders, nor doctors. Dr. Smyth, another Presbyterian author, makes them *ruling elders*, who sat in the assembly as "delegated commissioners." Thus these latter authors admit that some *laymen* may have been members of the assembly. Happily, however, we are not left without a sufficient refutation of such narrow interpretations, in the record itself. *The brethren* is an expression evidently parallel with *all the multitude*, (verse 12,) and *the whole church* (verse 22). But here, again, we encounter Dr. M'Leod. "The Christian $\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu \tau\acute{o} \pi\lambda\eta\theta\omicron\varsigma$ is the general synod, the $\delta\lambda\eta \tau\eta \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$, verse 22. There is not a class of persons distinct from the apostles and elders held up to our view in this verse. It only informs us that the apostles and elders acted in a collective capacity, and that the enacting assembly was a proper representation of the whole church."* But if $\pi\lambda\eta\theta\omicron\varsigma$ be

* Ecclesiastical Catechism.

synonymous with *ἐκκλησία*, as this writer affirms, then the usage of the latter restricts both to the body of the Christians generally composing the church at Jerusalem. *The whole church* is an expression which cannot, without violence, be restricted to the apostles and elders without absurdity, for it is written, "then it pleased the apostles and elders, *with* the whole church." The whole church must have been a class of persons different from the apostles and elders, viz., the body of the believers at Jerusalem, who statedly worshipped together as the saints of God.* To a candid reader looking at the expressions, *all the multitude*, *the whole church*, *the brethren*, it will ever appear more probable that all the disciples were convened, notwithstanding the objection advanced by Mosheim and others after him, that no house in Jerusalem was large enough to contain the multitude. But "there is no evidence that the body of the believers was very large at this time in Jerusalem, for a very considerable proportion of the early converts were residents of other places; and of those who belonged to the city, the persecution had driven many away."† In consequence of the immense number of persons discovered by Mosheim in Jerusalem, he is obliged to understand the expression, "the whole church," of a certain part of it invested with the power of determining the proposed question, an explanation sufficiently unnatural to be at once rejected.

It is the opinion of some, that delegates from the churches of Syria and Cilicia were also present at the meeting, because it is difficult to explain, on any other principle, how such churches were bound by its decrees. The controversy probably existed in the Syrian and Cilician churches, but there is no good reason for assuming that their "commissioners" or representatives were at the

* See Note LXVII.

† Abbott. See the New Testament, with brief explanatory notes, 8vo. Boston: 1842.

assembly. The determination of the apostles at Jerusalem would be of weight in the eyes of the disciples living in those localities. Coming from the mother-church, and the majority of Christ's immediate followers, it would be clothed with importance, and effectually relieve the minds of the Gentile believers. The persons enacting the decree possessed sufficient spiritual authority to recommend its observance. But it is objected, that "the decree was enacted by the elders; and what right the elders of Jerusalem had to make laws for other churches, no man is able to tell." The elders were associated with the apostles in deliberating. They consulted with the apostles. So also did the brethren. The apostles did not claim the exercise of great official authority. They insisted not on their peculiar prerogatives. They acted along with the elders and disciples, without assuming that *they* were to decide the question. They listened to arguments against their own sentiments—they presented facts—they explained the Old Testament—they put themselves, outwardly at least, on a level with the others then present, without losing aught withal of the extraordinary influence which always accompanied them. They exercised no lordly authority over others. In the present instance they suggested, rather than dictated. And when the meeting came to a decision, they allowed it to go forth in the name of the apostles, *elders*, and *brethren*. What an example of freedom from ambition! How lowly and cautiously do they conduct themselves, when they might have claimed unlimited power over the newly-formed societies! And yet this very habitude of refraining from *the assumption* of authoritative control is urged as an argument, that the extraordinary influence which rested on their minds in all ecclesiastical proceedings relating to the development of divine truth, was suspended. *Because* they waived their exercise of official authority, putting themselves *in the attitude of elders*, and even of *brethren*; *therefore* they did not pronounce the

dictates of inspiration. *Because* elders consulted with them, *therefore* the apostles acted as *ordinary elders*, and not as the highest office-bearers in the churches of Christ. *Because* the reference was made at the same time to *the elders*, *therefore* it was not made to *them* as *inspired*. *Because* no person "rose and pronounced the dictates of inspiration by which the rest were overawed;" *therefore* inspiration was not applied by the apostles throughout the whole matter. Such is the reasoning of Dick. We may freely admit, however, that the reference was not made to them as inspired men; that no person pronounced the dictates of inspiration, *so that* the rest were overawed; that elders co-operated with them; and believe notwithstanding, that they spoke under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, exercising the functions of apostles, and ceasing not to speak in that capacity in the entire controversy. What though all the primitive disciples did not clearly perceive or fully recognize their apostolic qualifications, and consequent infallibility; does that circumstance divest them of the character essentially belonging to them? The opinions of other men do not alter reality. What though they assumed not a dictatorial tone, nor claimed immediate, unconditional submission to their utterances; had these utterances the less claim to infallibility? Does *the mode* in which sentiments are set forth necessarily indicate *the real character* of these sentiments? Because an apostle consults with others, proposes, suggests, hears opposite arguments, states facts, reasons; does he therefore cease to be an apostle? Does his humility deprive him, for the time, of his inspiration? Does the subordinate position in which he places himself externally, take away the functions of an office habitually held? No. Let us admire the apostles, in their lowliness becoming all things to all men; but let not the very contrast they present to such as claim their mantle, tempt us to strip them of an essential attribute.

The letter was sent in the name of the apostles, elders,

and brethren, though it was virtually and truly the letter of the apostles present in the meeting; or rather, as appears most probable, of the apostle James who dictated it. The elders finally approved of the apostolic sentiments uttered in the meeting;—the whole multitude concurred; and the names of these persons, associated with those of the apostles, would procure for the decree a more cordial reception. The precise part taken by the elders and people is a matter of little moment. It is of no importance whether they were active or passive. It is sufficient to know that the sentiments expressed by Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James, approved themselves finally to all present, and were alone embodied in the letter. The decision emanated virtually and really from *inspired* men.

The assembly had thus a popular element in it. Apostles and elders did not consider it derogatory to their dignity to have the entire church associated with them in their deliberations. When a weighty question was agitated, *the laity*, as they are called, were not unworthy the respect of *such* office-bearers. They were present at the meeting, and took part in its proceedings.

We have seen that the character of the assembly was *peculiar*, inasmuch as apostles—infallible men—were members of it, leading the minds of all present to a right determination. And it was also *peculiar*, as compared with modern synods, because *the brethren*, or *the whole church*, were recognized as members; a feature too *democratic* to be tolerated by church-rulers at the present day.

(c.) The question which gave rise to the meeting was one peculiar to primitive times. None like it can happen in modern times.

(d.) The mode in which the decision goes forth is peculiar. It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, *i.e.*, to us under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The document bears the Spirit's seal. *He* willed it so, and the apostles were only his organs. No other assembly, from which infallible expounders of God's will are absent, can

venture to say so without presumption. It were an act of impiety to take the name of the Holy Ghost in vain, by appending it to the decisions of fallible men, however wise and holy; particularly when such decisions are intended, like the present, to bind the conscience; "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, *to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.*" Had the assembly enjoyed no other assistance than what is termed the ordinary influence of the Spirit, authoritative decrees would have been withheld. In that case counsel alone should have been given. I am quite aware that the solemn language in question is not regarded by all in a light so sacred. Presbyterian and prelatie writers think that it would *not* be arrogant in other councils to speak in the same style, if their decrees were clearly based on Scripture. But all councils are fallible. In investigating the meaning of Scripture in its bearing on doctrines and practice, how can they venture to set forth their expositions and inferences with the *imprimatur* before us? Are they quite sure they have clearly apprehended the mind of the Holy Ghost? Has no dimness obscured their mental vision? How dare they claim *the direct sanction of the Deity* to their deductions from the text of the Bible?

(e.) The account is very brief. The intimations it affords of the constitution of the council or synod, are obscure. Had it been intended as a model, we should have expected clearer and more definite information, not only in respect to its constitution, but its mode of proceeding. It was rather a meeting in which the apostles were appealed to, but to which they gave the *apparent form* of a consultation, originating in a peculiar emergency, than a formal synod acting according to a premeditated plan. The arrangements were adapted to the unique character of the case, informal and singular. It is therefore difficult to suppose that the Deity intended to set forth a pattern for all future ages, in the present consultation. There is not the re-

motest hint that the actors themselves dreamt of their proceedings as constituting an essential part of a system which should be perpetual ; or that the Holy Spirit, under whose influence Luke wrote, intended the transaction to be regarded in that light. The brevity and obscurity of the account rather lead to the opposite conclusion.

The dissimilarity between the case of public reference to which we have been adverting, and a Præsbyterian synod, has been already indicated in the peculiar character of the former. Hence there is no need to bring out the points of contrast into prominent view. And as synods have been divided into provincial, national, and œcumenical, so *all* are supposed to have their model in the narrative before us, inasmuch as they are *substantially* alike.

Some authors, with greater caution than those to whom we have alluded, content themselves with affirming, that the history in the Acts of the Apostles affords *a warrant* for courts of review generally, without insisting on the points of similarity supposed to exist between a meeting where apostles and evangelists were present, and modern courts of review. The account shows, say they, that there ought to be authoritative courts in the church ; and we need not be solicitous about the precise constitution of this primitive council, or the nature of its proceedings. It is of little moment to the argument whether it bear a close resemblance to modern synods or not ; all that we contend for is, that it establishes the general principle of subordination to courts superior to a single congregation, exhibiting decided evidence of the subjection of one court of ordinary ministers to the authoritative superintendence of another. When the argument drawn from *the form* of the assembly at Jerusalem fails ; when it is found inconvenient to reason from that form as *a model* for ecclesiastical organization in all future times, it is desirable to assume a lower tone, by saying that here is the general principle of subordination in one ecclesiastical court to another quite

distinct. Some authors, as Brown, have disingenuously adopted both modes of defending authoritative courts. The parallel between the assembly at Jerusalem and a modern synod has been carried out, as far as possible, on the ground that the former was proposed as a model of the latter: but when the parallel fails, when the type and antitype become intractable in their points of resemblance, it is quietly stated that no more need be insisted on than *the simple principle* according to which the one furnishes a sufficient warrant for the other.

It is easy to see the impracticability and unfairness of applying both expedients in the course of reasoning. Either the one or the other must be adhered to. Both are unjustifiable in the same advocate. But when the latter ground is taken, who, it may be asked, should settle the constitution and character of modern synods? The answer will be, *the clergy*. The matter is supposed to be left to their discretion. They may mould and fashion the courts as they wish, provided the latter consist of elders alone, and have full power over presbyteries and congregations. All this is doubtless gratifying to human ambition; but we greatly doubt whether it accord with the spirit of apostles, of whom we read, "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock: not for that we have dominion over your faith:"—"ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

As to *the warrant* for ecclesiastical courts of review, the reader who sets out with the purpose of supporting no particular system will be at a loss to find it. On that point the narrative is wholly silent; nay, the uniqueness of the assembly is opposed to it. The narrative is highly instructive; but *that* is not the kind of instruction it naturally suggests. The supposed warrant can only be judged of by *the similarity* of the meeting to a modern assembly, or by an express direction to that effect. The idea that the meeting was intended to serve either as a

model or warrant for councils, whether provincial, national, or œcumenical, is foreign to the account. The occasion which gave rise to it was peculiar, as we have seen; the parties whose sentiments were adopted have had no successors; the decrees enacted were imperatively binding on the Gentile churches, because *it seemed good to the Holy Spirit* that they were the best which could be adopted in the particular emergency. The decision was an infallible one. Thus the assembly was unique, presenting no warrant for judicial synods in after times. Its *constitution* too, as well as its proceedings, are so *imperfectly* described in respect to fulness and clearness, that the reader is prompted to consider the meeting apart from the notion of its being a model or precedent to regulate ecclesiastical transactions throughout Christendom.*

Many have thought that although it is no model for the standing use of synods, it is a warrant for *the occasional use* of such meetings to advise and consult. "Synods," says Dr. Owen, "are consecrated unto the use of the churches in all ages, by the example of the apostles in their guidance of the first churches of Jews and Gentiles; which hath the force of a divine institution, as being given by them under the infallible conduct of the Holy Ghost; Acts xv." † This idea appears to us utterly at variance with the record of the convention. Consociations of this nature are more unlike the apostolic assembly than juridical synods, because the apostles and elders issued decrees which were *infallible*, and consequently binding on the consciences of the disciples. *Consultative* assemblies, as they have been styled, should not be upheld on the ground of their similarity to that which we have been considering. They have no proper warrant here. If deemed desirable, let them be advocated on grounds of expediency, but not on the basis of Scriptural precept or precedent. The

* See Note LXVIII.

† Works, vol. xx. p. 586. 8vo. London: 1826.

friends of them need not look for *divine* authority on their behalf. They must be contented with lower, though possibly sufficient, ground.

We have thus considered the narrative in the Acts of the Apostles by itself, lest it should be said that undue advantage had been taken of it, in opposing the institution of synods, by bringing another account into comparison. It is right, however, to view it in the light of a parallel passage, provided that it can be shown that another passage is really parallel. The journey described in the Epistle to the Galatians, second chapter, appears to be identical with the journey in question; but the chief reasons for forming this conclusion need not be adduced on the present occasion. In identifying the journeys, we have the authority of many distinguished names—of Irenæus, Pearson, Semler, Koppe, Vogel, Gabler, Hase-laar, Schmidt, Borger, Hug, Winer, Schott, Macknight, De Wette, Olshausen, Credner, Neander, and others.

If the parallelism of both accounts be admitted, it would appear that Paul had a particular and weighty reason for going up to Jerusalem at the time, besides the public commission with which he was intrusted by the church at Antioch. He went by divine illumination “partly for private interview with the most eminent of the apostles; partly to render an account in public before the assembled church, of his conduct in publishing the gospel, that no one might suppose that all his labours had been in vain, but might learn that he preached the same gospel as themselves, and that it had been effective with divine power among the Gentiles.”*

We know not whether the Holy Spirit expressly intimated his will to the brethren at Antioch, or whether the determination originated with Paul himself instructed by a divine revelation, though the latter is more probable. In whatever way the point is viewed, Paul did not undertake the journey without the direct sanction of Heaven.

* Neander's *Planting and Training*, &c. Vol. i. p. 206 of the original.

Let this fact be brought to bear on the hypothesis that Paul acted as an ordinary elder, else he would not have submitted to the determination of the church, and it dissipates the notion.

Again, we learn from the Epistle to the Galatians that Paul maintained his apostolic authority at Jerusalem. "But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: and that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. But of those who seemed to be somewhat, whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person: for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me." This language is adverse to the idea that he acted as an ordinary elder, and not as an apostle endowed with the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Some have endeavoured to show, from a comparison of both accounts, that all the apostles living were then in Jerusalem; James, Peter, and John being selected as the most eminent,—“those who seemed to be pillars;” but this position appears improbable. Whatever view is taken of the subject, the question was carried to Jerusalem that it might be settled by the highest authority. Doubtless Paul could have decided it by virtue of the inspiration and authority which he possessed; but the false teachers would scarcely have been satisfied with this. Even after the conference Judaizers denied his apostleship. The dispute could not have been brought to so amicable a conclusion—one likely to operate so beneficially on the minds of the believers everywhere, as by following the very course adopted. The authoritative decrees of *the apostles, elders, and brethren*, passed at *Jerusalem*, would naturally have great weight with the churches generally.

Having disposed of the subject of juridical synods and

councils, we shall advert to the relation which churches bear to one another. Although these Christian societies are independent in regard to foreign jurisdiction and authority, it should not be supposed that they are completely isolated and separate. They possess indeed a true internal union—the oneness of faith and hope subsisting between all the disciples of Christ—which is of infinitely higher consequence than outward organization; but that is not a pure abstraction. It must find outward expression. It manifests itself to the world; the manifestation speaking in favour of an unselfish religion. It is quite possible, however, that there may be an *excessive* striving after intercommunion of churches; an extreme, whose injurious effects are amply shown by the history of Christianity in the world. The principle of outward comprehension and connexion may be carried too far, so as to violate the essential characteristics of a spiritual society constituted in accordance with the New Testament.

Avoiding then the two extremes of abstract independency, agreeably to which churches have no outward manifestation of communion with one another; or an external communion, in which one or several united possess *jurisdiction* over others, let us look at the kind of intercommunity which is alone desirable.

The duty of private Christians towards one another is clearly taught in the New Testament. And while this is recognized, there is a degree of accountability which Christians owe to Christians in their associate capacity. Churches are branches of a common family, and as such have an interest in each other's welfare. It is only natural that every member of a family should wish to preserve every other from errors. They are *sister societies* walking by the same rule, and owning subjection to the same Lord. Professing one Lord, one faith, one baptism, they have a bond of union strong and indissoluble. It is therefore consonant with reason, as it is agreeable to Scripture,

that they should feel a special interest in one another, being jealous of the honour of the Master whom they serve, and unwilling to allow a blot to remain on any sister church which would retard her advancement, or belie her character in the eyes of spiritual men. Hence a society will be ready to give an account of its faith and practice to another that may desire it, to listen to friendly counsel, and to hear with patience whatever censures may be preferred against it.

In accordance with this principle of intercommunion, letters of recommendation or dismissal are given by a church to any member whom duty calls to continue for a longer or shorter time in the vicinity of another Christian society of the same order. By virtue of these documents, testifying of the Christian deportment of a brother, he is welcomed by another body of Christians, and forthwith admitted into their fellowship. This is agreeable to the spirit of Paul's recommendation of Phœbe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchrea, to the disciples at Rome. Here is mutual confidence. One church presumes that an individual who has been walking in fellowship with a sister church, is thereby attested to be a proper member of the Christian family; and receives him accordingly. In the same manner, members of sister churches are admitted to occasional communion. Convenience, choice, or necessity, may dictate this procedure, so that a believer desires to commune with another Christian society rather than his own.

And when some require aid in temporal things, others contribute to their relief. Thus the poor saints at Jerusalem were assisted in apostolic times by the churches of the Gentiles.

There are also cases in which societies give assistance by supplying a weak sister church with one or more officers. Men possessing suitable qualifications for the ministry or deaconship, are sometimes found in the bosom

of a church which may and ought to part with them for the well-being of another. Here the highly-favoured body may supply the known necessities of one possessing fewer advantages.

Again, when a case arises which is difficult or delicate, affecting the purity of religion, the peace, or the very existence of a church, whether it be a case of doctrine or discipline, it is proper to consult with others, that the minds of many may be brought to bear on the subject, and the final decision have greater weight.

By virtue of their common interest in each other's welfare, churches admonish one another, should any just ground for admonition appear in any of them. And if repeated admonitions be disregarded; if a body of disciples persist in an erroneous course; others may withdraw communion from it as unworthy of Christian confidence.

In carrying out the intercommunion of churches as manifested in these particulars, different expedients have been adopted. The entire subject is left to Christian discretion. Hence various organizations have been called into existence which have received different names, and proceeded to perform the duties belonging to them in various modes.

To such associations there is no valid objection, provided they leave the liberties of each separate church untouched. As long as they neither *aim at* abridging the privileges of an individual society, nor *actually* curtail them;—while they claim or assume no power of jurisdiction, but simply give counsel; they cannot be denounced as unscriptural merely because there is no precedent for them in apostolic times. Whether they be termed synods, councils, or associations, they may be very useful to the churches, and subserve the interests of true religion. In a multitude of counsellors there is safety. Whatever wisdom be centred

in a single Christian society, cases will arise in which it may be benefited by the counsel of others.

Yet it is not wise to resort to them often. Their assistance may be sought far too frequently. Matters comparatively trifling, which might be adjusted in another way, may be brought before such tribunals. This is not judicious. There must be a felt, urgent necessity for councils. They ought not to be lightly summoned, or hastily appealed to. Nothing but unusual difficulty or injustice should bring them into being.

American Congregationalists deal largely in these organizations, whether prudently or otherwise we forbear to discuss. They have *synods*, *councils* mutual and ex-parte, *associations*, and *consociations*.

Synods are ecclesiastical assemblies called together to debate and determine controversies of faith and cases of conscience, to deduce from the word of God holy directions for the worship of God and the good government of the churches, to testify against corruption in doctrine and manners in any particular church, and to give directions for the reformation of them. They are composed of ministers and lay delegates; those who advocate them, as the authors of the Cambridge Platform, endeavouring to find a pattern for their constitution and procedure as well as a warrant for their existence, in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. It is nugatory, however, to appeal to that chapter on the subject. The true ground on which they are called ought to be their probable utility. At the present time they appear to have gone into disuse in New England, because other ecclesiastical assemblies are held for the purpose of consulting on the general interests of the churches, though not embracing, perhaps, so ample a representation as the early synods of the Congregational churches.

In regard to *mutual councils*, they are summoned only in

cases of doubt and difficulty, where there is a difference of opinion between two parties. When, therefore, they give advice, it is virtually the advice of the body of Congregationalists, because they are a representation of the entire churches.

Ex-parte councils differ from mutual in being called by one of the parties, without the concurrence of the other. It is admitted that they should be resorted to only in case of the refusal of a mutual council. An aggrieved individual, or a number of such persons, appeal to them in cases of necessity. In this way they are useful in securing against oppression.

Associations are composed of ministers alone, meeting stately for mutual council, sympathy, and prayer.

Consociations are standing mutual councils composed of certain churches within a district, represented in them by their respective ministers, and by lay delegates.

In reference to *councils* and *associations* our opinion is, that, if it be deemed desirable to have them at all, they should be sparingly summoned, and only in cases of great difficulty; that duties should not be assigned to them which can as well be managed otherwise; and that they should lay no restraint on the internal and inalienable liberties of the individual churches. We repeat our assertion, that they are too frequently called by the Congregationalists of New England; and that by practice, matters have come to be assigned them which need not and ought not to be so transferred. Thus they *license* men to preach the gospel;* *ordain* those called to be pastors, deliberate on the removal of a minister from one place to another, and depose a pastor from his office.† These and other things should not be consigned to councils or associations, because they may be transacted equally well by the churches themselves in their individual capacity, each of which is

* i. e. *Associations*.

† These duties, among many others, are assigned to *councils*.

competent to manage its own affairs. The cases which justify the calling of a council should be doubtful and difficult, deeply affecting the purity of a church in doctrine and discipline, or the rights of parties belonging to it.

As to *standing* councils or *consociations*, they are exposed to so many objections, that they ought to be discarded.* For their undoubted tendency is, to *invite* or *encourage* cases of appeal—to foster elements of strife—and to prepare the way for abridgment of the liberties rightfully belonging to every Christian church. We object to them as injurious to the general interests of truth and freedom. We should not wish to see them erected. Far distant be the day when the consociations of Connecticut shall appear in the mother country among our Congregational churches! Unlike the stated associations formed among us in most counties they lead to Presbyterianism.

In short, although there may be abuses in the practice of calling occasional councils for important purposes, important benefits may fairly overbalance the evil. While we deprecate the frequent introduction of them, we should not object to their *occasional* existence, for they are still *advisory* and *persuasive*. Churches are free to follow their counsel or not as they may see fit. Surely they might heal unseemly breaches by wise and judicious measures.

* See Note LXIX.

LECTURE VIII.

THE NUMBER OF OFFICE-BEARERS IN A CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

“ Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.”

PHILIPP. i. 1.

BEFORE proceeding to the subject proposed, we shall make a few remarks illustrative of the usage of language, which may serve to render various statements to be submitted to the reader clearer to his apprehension.

There are two ways in which nouns are employed, viz., in a general or indefinite, and in a specific signification. In other words, they have an appropriated and unappropriated meaning. Thus *διάκονος*, in its general, unappropriated sense, denotes *a servant, one who ministers*. Hence it is variously applied. It is used in relation to preachers of the gospel in general, to Paul the apostle, to Christ. But in its *appropriated*, specific signification, it means a certain class of officers in the church usually termed *deacons*.

These two modes of employing nouns are distinct, and should not be confounded, though it is very common for controversialists to take advantage of the peculiarity in question, as if it were a matter of indifference whether the one or the other be applied in a particular case. When refuted by the help of one, they take refuge in the other.

It is easy to discover the process by which the specific arose out of the unappropriated meaning. And if it be asked how it is ascertained when the restricted or unrestricted sense is employed, the answer is, in the same way

in which the meaning of all written language is discovered, viz., by the circumstances in which the term in question is employed, the context by which it is surrounded. There is nothing arbitrary in the application. There are definite means of fixing the sense which the writer meant to convey.

In connexion with these remarks is an axiomatic principle to which we shall have occasion to refer; *a word cannot be taken in its appropriated and unappropriated signification conjointly.* It must either have the one or the other acceptance. Hence it follows as a corollary, that when an appropriated term occurs in the plural number, it cannot include persons or things to whom it is elsewhere appropriated, and persons or things to whom it is elsewhere unappropriated, though probably applied.

Let us consider, *First*, the number of elders or bishops in a Christian church.

In the apostolic churches there appears to have been a plurality of elders, as the following passages show: "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting," &c. "And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them." "Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send," &c. "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church." "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting; and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee." "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."

These testimonies are explicit as to the practice of

several churches; nor is any disapprobation expressed in regard to such an institute in them. The apostles, on the contrary, deemed it right and beneficial. The arrangement was agreeable to the mind of the Redeemer. It is not surprising, however, that several ways of evading the fact should have been invented. We shall allude to the strongest objections that have been urged against it.

(a.) In some of the examples quoted, the word *elders* is said to include *the bishop* and *the deacons*. Hence arises, it is alleged, the use of the plural. Thus, in Acts xv. 22, the term *elder*, *πρεσβύτερος*, is generic. It is applied to various persons. It is even used of an apostle. This, however, is its *general*, not its *appropriated* signification. In the latter, it distinctly belongs to the persons otherwise styled bishops. There is no passage in which the deacons are denominated *elders* along with bishops or overseers, because that would imply the fact of *elder* being appropriated to both offices, both being of equal rank. In its general sense, the term *elder* might, perhaps, be applied to the deacon, although the New Testament furnishes no example of that usage. But to affirm that it can be employed in the same place, inclusive of two distinct classes of officers, such as bishops and deacons, is contrary to the philosophy of language. This were to allege in effect, that the word is applied at the same time in its unappropriated and its appropriated signification; in the former as applied to deacons, in the latter as applied to bishops. The usage of the Scriptures and the laws of language equally contradict the affirmation that the term *elders* ever includes *deacons*. But were there no *deacons* in the church at Jerusalem when the letter was written? Bilson thinks that there were; and finds no other place for them than in the comprehensive term *elders*. If there were deacons at the time spoken of, they must be included in the term *brethren*, *ἀδελφοί*, a title applied both to official and non-official Christians. It is unnecessary to

refer to other passages quoted by Bilson* to show that *deacon* is included in *elder*, such as Acts xiv. 23, "When they had ordained them *elders* in every church;" and 1 Tim. v. 19, "Against an *elder* receive not an accusation," &c. In both places no mention is made of the deacons; nor are they included in the title *πρεσβύτεροι*; for, in the latter instance, Paul speaks of the deacons separately, and then of the bishops as a distinct class of officers.

(b.) "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a *bishop*, he desireth a good work. A *bishop* then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, *one that ruleth* well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Likewise must *the deacons* be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let *these* also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. (1 Tim. iii. 1—10.)

This passage furnishes the basis of an argument against a plurality of elders in one church. And yet it is a very precarious foundation for the opinion that only one bishop and several deacons existed in each worshipping society. Attention is particularly called by Mr. Ewing to the definite article prefixed to bishop—*THE bishop*—and to the want of an article before deacons. "The definite article which he uses when speaking of the bishop, though nowhere translated that we have seen, except in some French versions, ought not to be omitted, because it seems emphatically to

* See Note LXX.

mark the contrast between the precise singular in the one case, and the indefinite plural in the other."*

With respect to the definite article, it proves nothing, either in relation to one or several bishops belonging to a church. Had the apostle been speaking of some particular church and its officers, the singular and plural would have been significant; but since he is describing the qualifications of bishops in general—the bishops of all churches—the use of the singular or plural establishes nothing. In the present example, the article, according to Middleton's doctrine, is subservient to the purpose of hypothesis. It is the representative of something of which, whether known or unknown, an assumption is to be made. It is the symbol of universality, denoting the whole genus. In this way the expression *the bishop*, signifies every bishop. But the plural, we are reminded, is employed without the article, when the apostle speaks of *deacons* immediately after. There is nothing singular or uncommon in varying phraseology. It is unreasonable to expect uniformity of diction from the sacred writers. Instead of saying *the bishop* and *the deacon*, Paul has written *the bishop, deacons*. As far as concerns the particular number of bishops or deacons that should be in one church, these expressions are interchangeable. The writer might have said *bishops—the deacon*, precisely in the same sense. Neither determines the number of each class which should properly belong to a separate society of Christians. Only one deacon might be the scriptural institute, as far as the present passage warrants; because Paul's object is not to describe the officers of one church, but the qualifications of the officers of every church. Dr. Bennett and Mr. Ewing, after Clement of Alexandria, observe, that the comparison instituted between ruling one's own family and superintending the church of God, implies that there should be but one ruler

* An Attempt towards a Statement of the Doctrine of Scripture, &c., p. 80. 12mo. Glasgow: 1807.

in the church, as there is one in the household. But this argument proves too much; for deacons, as well as the bishop, are commanded to rule their children well; and therefore by parity of reasoning there ought to be only *one deacon* in a church. The apostle states no analogy between the number of persons who rule in both cases. That was not a point of comparison which he meant directly or indirectly to express. His reasoning is, if a man be not qualified for an inferior department of government, he is not qualified for a higher.

(c.) The expression occurring in the Epistle to Titus, "elders in every city," with the synonymous one in the Acts of the Apostles, "elders in every church," is said by Ewing to determine nothing respecting *the number* of elders, because their meaning is, *ordain elders to be bishops and deacons in every city or church*. The ellipsis so supplied is far-fetched and unnatural. It would not readily occur to a mind not determined to uphold a particular system. The words *κατὰ πόλιν*, and *κατὰ ἐκκλησίαν*, signify *in every city* and *in every church considered singly*. They are distributive, and necessarily imply, that several elders were ordained in each single city, and in each single church. They do not mean elders—one elder in each city, one elder in each church; for that interpretation is inconsistent with the original. A passage in the Acts of the Apostles is precisely parallel in phraseology: "For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogue every Sabbath day." These words do not mean that there was but one preacher in each synagogue every Sabbath, but that several persons preached in each city, where there was a synagogue. Nothing can be clearer to a simple reader than the expressions in question. The ellipsis supplied by Ewing must therefore be rejected as forced. We reject, too, the interpretation of Baur, who locates one elder in each city or church, contrary to the true sense of the original, as every competent Greek scholar

will allow.* If it be alleged that elders is a general term including bishops and deacons, that assumption has been already disproved.

(d.) Another objection is founded on the passage: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." According to Presbyterians, the word presbytery denotes the elders of neighbouring churches or congregations, associated together. Others suppose that it denotes the presbyters, *i.e.*, the bishops and deacons. But if *elder*, *πρεσβύτερος*, be not appropriated to bishop and deacon conjointly, as has been already shown, *eldership*, *πρεσβυτέριον*, cannot mean *associated elders and deacons*. The word denotes the body or college of elders belonging to one congregational church. It is true, that in the passage we have quoted, the presbytery is not said to belong to a particular church. But other plain examples prove that there was a plurality of elders in the primitive churches. The expression *presbytery* or *eldership* is founded on the general organization of the worshipping societies, and confirmatory of it. It occurs but once in the New Testament in reference to a Christian church. Hence it is natural to explain it by the light of *obvious* passages. Had it meant no more than the elders of several neighbouring congregations collected for a certain purpose, there would have been no necessity for employing a new term, since *elders*, *πρεσβύτεροι*, would have been sufficient. It would have served the writer's purpose to have said *by the laying on of the hands of the elders*, or *by the laying on of the hands of the assembled elders*. But a new word is used to express a certain kind of plurality, symbolizing several elders standing in close and stated relationship to one another. We conclude, therefore, that there was a permanent society of elders in the church where Timothy was set apart by the imposition of hands and prayer. The mode in which

* See Note LXXI.

πρεσβυτέριον, *presbytery*, is applied by Luke to the Jewish senate or Sanhedrim, intimates or implies, that the same term transferred to the Christian church, does not refer to the occasional assembling of elders belonging to adjoining churches, but to a close and continued association of these office-bearers. It comprehends the relation existing between the members of a council who sit and deliberate respecting the affairs of a people, as a body corporate intrusted with the management of civil causes. The definite article prefixed to the noun, *THE presbytery*, shows, that the body spoken of was a well-known company, accustomed to act together. Unless the particular association had been familiar to the readers of the New Testament, such a term would not have been employed; since it occurs but once with reference to Christian societies. But on the assumption that a plurality of elders existed in each church, the association intended was a thing so common as at once to justify the use of the word, and render its meaning apparent. We never read of stated associations consisting of the presbyters of different churches. That fact is not presented in the New Testament. And if the fact be not elsewhere stated or implied, it does not comport with the wisdom of an apostle to employ a new term, with the definite article, expressive of an institute named for the first time. Hence we infer that since stated associations of separate churches or elders are not mentioned elsewhere, the word *presbytery* must denote the elders set over a single congregational church.

An objection has been made to this view from a comparison of 2 Tim. i. 6, where it is written: "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands." It is hence inferred that Paul was one of *the presbytery* with whom other elders joined in the act of laying hands on Timothy—such elders as happened to be at Lystra, where the evangelist was. It cannot, however, be allowed, that the

presbytery consisted of the apostle and ordinary elders, because presbyter was not *appropriated* to an apostle, while it was the appropriated title of bishops. Both cannot be called elders or presbyters conjointly, for that would imply that the same term can be taken in its *general* and its *appropriated* sense in the same place. The philosophy of language forbids the solecism.

(e.) The passage quoted to prove a plurality of elders in the church of Ephesus has been explained by some so as to be inapposite; "and from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called *the elders* of the church," &c. According to Hammond, these were the bishops of Asia who met at Ephesus the metropolis. Irenæus is very decided in maintaining this opinion; and even Neander in one place seems inclined to it. But it is far more natural to restrict the elders to those belonging to the church of Ephesus. The singular τὸ ποίμνιον, *the flock*, refers to one church rather than to an assemblage of many, as Neander candidly allows. The bias of the episcopal system sufficiently accounts for Irenæus's explanation. A fatal objection to the view in question, is the use of the word *church*, which is not used in the sense of an assemblage of congregations or worshipping societies, but of one congregational church. Hence the elders must mean the elders of the Ephesian church alone.

(f.) The expression, *angel of the church*, in the Apocalypse, has been adduced to show that there was originally one elder or bishop in each church, not a presbytery. The phrase in question, as has been already said, is obscure. It is confessedly difficult of explanation. Nothing certain can be based on it. It is usual to explain what is dark and doubtful by the clear and the incontrovertible—the more difficult by the less obscure. But in opposition to this common-sense procedure, many build on the expression before us an argument subversive of institutions described or implied in plain narratives.

If the term *angel of the church* be interpreted agreeably to the symbolic character of the Apocalypse, it will form no valid objection to the fact, that a plurality of elders existed in each of these seven churches. It has been ingeniously conjectured, that the phrase may denote *the associated presbytery* of the church, the singular number *angel* representing the closeness and intimacy of the association. As the seven spirits before the throne denote the Holy Spirit in the fulness and distinction of his manifold gifts; so *conversely*, the angel of the church may denote the associated eldership of the society, in the united capacity in which they act towards the community they preside over. We are more inclined, however, to the interpretation formerly proposed.

Nothing seems to us more certain, than that there was a plurality of elders in the primitive churches. The fact is admitted by the ablest historians. "A council of elders," says Neander, "was everywhere set over the churches, to conduct their affairs." Gieseler and Rothe maintain the same opinion. "Let it be proved," says Isaac Taylor, (rare instances, if indeed there are any such, excepted,) "that primitive churches generally, like our modern congregations, were served by a solitary clerical person. This can never be done; the bishop, or the principal pastor, how humble soever his state, and how narrow soever his circle, had his colleagues—his presbyters and his deacons."* All the ingenuity which has been applied to overthrow the fact, has not been successful. It is contrary indeed to modern usage. Hence much perverted ability has been employed for the purpose of showing the likeness of modern usage to apostolic precedent.

There are obvious advantages in the primitive method, which only require to be stated :

1. The people would be better instructed. One should

* *Spiritual Despotism*, p. 438. Second Edition, 8vo. London: 1835.

think that this truth is self-evident. And yet it is even combated. Dr. King asks: "What would have been the use of so many stated instructors? Had they been all ministers of the word, and had twelve, or six, or so few as three of them been placed over a handful of people, how would they have found room for the exercise of their gifts? There would have been here such a waste of means as we nowhere find in a divine administration. . . . And since the pulpit can be supplied as well by one as by a dozen, and the support of more than one minister is burdensome or impossible, they ('our Independent friends') content themselves with one such (teaching) elder for a church, as equal to its necessities."*

In reply to these statements, we beg to ask the writer in what part of the New Testament he finds settled Christian churches, consisting of "handfuls" of people? The primitive churches were generally large and healthy, although it is necessary to the essence of a church that it should consist of many members. It serves, however, the purpose of a polemic to conjure into existence a "handful of people," presided over by twelve bishops. If a church of that sort, with so many pastors, really existed, we should pronounce it unlike the apostolic societies. Very small churches do not resemble the primitive ones. Those which are sound, vigorous, and large, come nearest the apostolic. It is usually a hazardous experiment, perilous to religion, injurious to the full scope of truth, and contrary to the tenor of the New Testament examples, to split up a number of Christians into small, distinct, worshipping societies, each independent of the other. None but a cogent reason can at all justify a practice so disjoining and weakening.

We have said that the New Testament churches were *generally* large, not *universally*. The exception is the case

* The Ruling Eldership of the Christian Church, p. 32.

of a church in the house of an individual. Thus there was a church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, at Ephesus, and at Rome; of Nymphas, at Laodicea; and of Philemon, at Colosse. In regard to these societies, there were peculiarities which prevent them from forming a proper ground for objection to the sentiments advanced. Neither can it be shown, that though small they had but one pastor. It can be as well proved that they had various instructors and guides as that they had one.

The circumstances of the society in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, at Ephesus, have been sufficiently explained in a preceding lecture. These individuals had no fixed dwelling in that city; and the few who met in their premises, during their sojourn, were not intended to be a permanent church. They constituted a church, formed and existing under peculiar circumstances, and were probably not fully organized. Hence they were afterwards incorporated with *the church of Ephesus*. Besides it cannot be shown, that Aquila was either sole pastor of the church in his house, or pastor of it in any sense. He imparted, without doubt, such instructions to the assembled brethren as he could; but it is equally probable that other disciples, whose knowledge of Christianity was superior to that of the brethren generally, expounded the way of salvation, and exhorted. It is not at all likely that one or more had been elected by the disciples to fill definite offices. They were scarcely organized as a regular, settled church. These remarks will equally apply to the church in the house of Aquila at Rome, which was subsequently merged into the one church of the city.

In regard to the church at Nymphas' house at Laodicea, we must suppose the number of the brethren to have been comparatively small in that city when the apostle wrote to the Colossians. Whether all the disciples belonging to Laodicea or its vicinity met in his house, is uncertain. We know not whether they had a pastor or pastors. As the

meeting in his house was a temporary arrangement, the church may not have been properly or fully organized in regard to office-bearers. Respecting the church in Philemon's house at Colosse there is the same uncertainty. It had not a *fixed* or *settled* character at the time the apostle speaks of its existence.

But what shall we say of the asseveration that many stated instructors are useless; and that the pulpit can be supplied as well by one as by a dozen? This is a new discovery. One man teach a people as well as twelve! Theology is a vast science. It is fitted to exercise the noblest powers of man. It may be treated in various methods. It consists of different departments. Besides, the talents of preachers are diversified. No *one* elder excels in all the duties which devolve on the eldership. Some excel in exposition; others in appeals to sinners; others in administering consolation; others in refuting and silencing gainsayers. The field is immense. The capacities of human beings are limited. There is, therefore, the greatest wisdom in employing various gifts in the ministerial work, because one man is not well fitted for all, nor capable of performing all things well. "One may supply a pulpit as well as twelve;" so we are informed. But will the writer be so bold as to affirm, that the "supply" will be more than one twelfth part as good? or will it be half as good? To pass over *the amount* of supply in the two cases, what shall we say about *the quality* of it? Can the people be as well instructed? Can they have the same variety furnished to them? Can they be alike edified? Will one man adapt himself to the intellectual and spiritual tastes with the like facility as twelve? There are various modes of supplying a people. Some preachers give them the same things *usque ad nauseam*. Others fling forth crude, undigested matters, which come into the mind without preparation. Others deal out dry, intellectual food; and the feelings are starved. Others stimulate the

emotions with incessant appeals; and the understanding receives no nourishment. Dr. King's one bishop gives the hearers all kinds of spiritual and intellectual nutriment in rich abundance, imparting as much edification as they need, so that it were a waste of means to have others associated with him. Such a bishop belongs to *Utopia*, not to earth. He bears so little resemblance to all we see and know, that Paul himself, were he now on earth, could not be compared with him in the grasp of his intellect, or the scope of his powers. In short, he is not a human being.

How forcibly does the argumentation of this writer illustrate that scripture which pronounces the foolishness of God to be wiser than men! It is hazardous to erect a human battery against a divine institution. We fear, however, that it will be so in all ages. Men will not like things of heavenly origin, occasionally. They will find excuses for setting them aside. They will ask, What would have been the use of such and such things? inferring, that because they *cannot* or *will not* see the utility of them, the arrangements could not have been made. They will go so far as to assert that one man can instruct a people as well as twelve. Solomon said, or rather the Holy Ghost by Solomon, "in the multitude of counsellors there is safety;" but it has been discovered, that there is as much safety in one counsellor as in many. A plurality of them is useless!

The ministers of the New England Fathers, whose memory is justly surrounded with a hallowed fragrance, were wiser in their day. "They were expected," says Leonard Bacon, "to do the work of the sanctuary well. They did not suppose that a little unstudied declamation, or a little prosy, traditional metaphysics, uttered from one Lord's day to another, 'thought echoing to thought, and sermon to sermon,' in perpetual monotony, was enough to feed the flock of God. They did not imagine that men whose spirits were continually jaded and exhausted by

excess of labour, were the most likely to build up and adorn God's living temple. They intended that their ministers should not only be well qualified before entering the ministry, but should also, while in the ministry, have no excuse in the burthensomeness of their duties for not maintaining, by various and continued study, that elastic vigour of mind which is always essential to successful effort. Their plan was to place in every congregation, two preachers, well qualified, who, dividing between them the work of the ministry, should hold up each other's hands, and stimulate each other to constant personal and mutual improvement. To the enlarged views with which they acted, we of this generation are greatly indebted."*

As long as human nature continues as it is, few will recur to primitive practice. Ambition is not confined to the laity. It is a plant which grows even in the hearts of the clergy. The love of power is natural to the human mind. It is hard to expect it even from the renewed heart. Genuine humility is the last lesson which the regenerated ordinarily learn. There is a desire to have the reins of government solely in the hands of self, which effectually excludes any idea of admitting others to a participation.

" I am monarch of all I survey,
My right there is none to dispute,"

embodies a thought, which many a pastor finds *virtually* realized in himself, who, perhaps under a form of church-government all but democratic in theory, resists every attempt to subvert his *monarchy*. And in addition to the single pastor of a church objecting, we can fancy a deacon who imagines himself to be a wise and eminently practical man, staring at the suggestion of resuming a plurality of pastors. What! Are we to have several ministers, when it is found difficult to procure an adequate temporal maintenance for one? As if it were proposed to furnish *the*

* Thirteen Historical Discourses, &c., p. 74. 8vo. New Haven: 1839.

particular church to which the objector in question belongs, and from which alone he illogically draws his general conclusion, with a presbytery, in its present state; or, as if the existing liberality of any church were the ultimate standard beyond which it should not go. When the spirit of the world shall have mingled less with the churches, and their pastors shall have studied less conformity to the artificial, and therefore expensive, usages of society; when the zeal of apostolic times shall be emulated more, and mammon worshipped less;—when deacons shall have read the New Testament more carefully, and put greater faith in the wisdom of heaven than their own sagacity or parsimony—then may we expect less objection, on their part, to an institute which certainly existed in the early age of Christianity.

2. Pastoral visitation would be properly attended to. Where a church is large, this duty must be in a great measure neglected. One pastor has not sufficient time for it. And yet it is of special importance. Much aid may be given to the flock in this way. Consolation may be administered, the promises of Scripture duly applied, and the desponding elevated. The continued oversight of the brethren by elders, is indeed the chief part of their office. What is specially required is not so much the preaching of a sermon on the Sabbath, as the performance of numerous duties in watching over and guiding the flock. These demand the wisdom, talents, and time of various individuals, that they may be rightly discharged.

3. A greater impression would be produced on the surrounding population. Every member of a Christian church is a witness for Christ; and many disciples together give forth a united testimony on behalf of truth, far more effective than their separate influences. A plurality of elders, situated in the midst of a congregation of disciples large and prosperous, are as a light set on a golden candlestick. The entire society so constituted sends forth the gospel by which sinners are converted; and the multiplied be-

lievers form themselves into new churches. In this method the gospel was spread in early times. Proceeding from a church in a regular orderly way, with the sanction of the eldership, it exerted the most beneficial effects on the adjacent parts. The large influences issuing from such a company, arrested the attention of the worldly—the careless were awakened—the unreflecting began to meditate and pause. The spectacle of a body compact and harmonious, steadily holding forth the word of life, must draw on it the eyes of many.

4. This system would materially lessen the unsettled state of those sustaining the pastoral office. The number of removals from churches to churches, or from churches to secular life, made by ministers of religion, would be fewer. The loose and migratory character attaching to the official position of many pastors, affords matter for grave consideration. We do not say that it arises from the single fact of each church having but one elder over it; for the causes are various; but we *do* affirm that the circumstance in question contributes to the commonness of the practice alluded to. The demands made on the single pastor are too great. His mental and physical energies are highly tasked; and if he be faithful to his Master in heaven, he will find these energies give way beneath undue pressure, in the course of a few years. After the lapse of some time, his sermons will contain the same circle of ideas. His preaching will become a thing of common-place character. His stock of thoughts will be essentially exhausted. He begins therefore to seek a change—to long for a little of intellectual as well as physical rest. He thinks, and perhaps justly, that a removal to another sphere, where his sermons would be new, might be highly beneficial. If we add to this picture the murmuring of the people attending his ministrations, after they have been treated for some time to sameness and repetition, a circumstance by no means uncommon, we have the portrait of a

man sinking beneath the weight of a position too onerous for the highest talents. But where there is a plurality of elders, variety is secured. One is not overtasked. There will be less shifting of ministers from place to place. They will cease to be *travelling* preachers. The churches will be satisfied, because better instructed and managed; while the pastors will be contented and stationary.

5. The associations commonly called county unions, would be in a great measure superseded. In the present weak state of many churches, these societies are most useful, exemplifying, as they do, a scriptural principle, that the stronger should help the weaker. Yet it is difficult to work them wisely and well, without infringing the rights of Independent churches. It is almost impossible for those who contribute largely of their substance to the maintenance of less favoured sister churches, to refrain from a kind of interference with their self-management, which wears an aspect, at least, of unscriptural meddling with them. Those who give moneys generally like to see or be assured that they are not unwisely or uselessly spent. County unions might perhaps be otherwise managed; but human nature forbids perfection.

Such are some of the benefits that might accrue from a return to the original practice of the churches. Others will occur to the reflecting mind, which it were superfluous to notice at present.

But it may be thought that a plurality of elders was not intended to be perpetuated. The institute was admirably suited to the exigencies of the times when it was adopted, but may be fairly laid aside at the present day. It was peculiar to a period. Hence the saying, *one bishop, one church*. In the working of the original institution, it was soon discovered, that one elder alone should be retained, while the rest might be dispensed with. We cannot agree with these sentiments, nor believe that the arrangement was meant to be temporary. Its universality, or all but

universality, in the primitive churches, is against the supposition. The feature does not appear in a worshipping society of Christians here and there; but is, on the contrary, a general feature in their composition. It is too plainly and extensively marked to countenance the notion of its absolute unimportance in subsequent times.

We know how tenaciously it is pleaded, that a plurality of elders originated in the circumstances of the early churches, and may be conveniently laid aside in modern times. We know to what peculiar features it is attributed—features that do not appear in the present day. Thus it is alleged that most of the primitive elders laboured at some trade or secular business, and hence in part the necessity of several. The larger churches, in times of persecution particularly, were compelled to meet in small companies, in private houses, in vaults or caves, and other places of security, that they might be able to worship God unmolested; and each of these companies would need an elder to conduct its religious services. Then again, the elders were specially liable to be cut off by persecution; and had there been only one to a church, that church might have been suddenly deprived of an overseer.*

These observations are true in relation to some of the primitive elders. We know, for example, that Aquila, who, if not a formal elder, acted in some measure as an instructor of others, wrought at the same occupation with Paul. Nor should we greatly object to a similar arrangement in the present day. All need not be supported by the church. Some of the elders might labour gratuitously in this department, having sufficient means arising from other sources. They might be partially engaged in a secular calling; especially such as should devote themselves chiefly to ruling. But that the circumstances specified apply generally to the primitive elders when the

* Campbell on Ecclesiastical History, Lecture iv.; and Punchard, View of Congregationalism, p. 87.

churches may be fairly regarded as *organized*, is exceedingly doubtful. The facts stated happened occasionally, but were not of general occurrence. Several churches, which were neither oppressed by poverty nor visited by persecution,—such as that at Philippi,—had a plurality. The argument—if such it can be called, for the author of it prefaces it with *probably* and *perhaps*—is invalid, because built on too narrow a foundation. A general conclusion is drawn from a very few particular cases. The induction is by no means so wide as to warrant the inference.

We are strongly inclined to believe that the Redeemer meant to provide for the perpetuity of several elders in each Christian society, under all ordinary circumstances. The condition of the time when Christianity was established in the world was not so peculiar or unique as to warrant the idea of its requiring a company of elders in newly-formed bodies, *to the exclusion of succeeding ages*. Amid considerable diversity of features there is a similarity in the circumstances of all times sufficient to sanction the notion of uniformity in regard to a college of presbyters. Surely they are fitted to be highly beneficial throughout the history of Christianity. Should it be affirmed that the matter has been left to human discretion, the importance of it forbids the supposition. By adopting one bishop instead of several, the form of government is essentially changed. Instead of being an *aristocracy* it becomes a *monarchy*. Inherent advantages are on the side of the one scheme, which has also divine sanction; while the other has inherent disadvantages, being also a deviation from the primitive model. If it be still pleaded that the arrangement may be properly abandoned, a plurality of deacons may be also rejected. Like reasons may be urged for *one deacon*.

The early origin of episcopacy confirms the fact of a plurality of elders in the New Testament churches, for no rational account of the rise of that institute can be given

on any other supposition. It originated in the bosom of a council of elders.

With regard to the rise of the episcopate we may be allowed to make a few remarks, since it is so closely connected with the subject before us. Here we seek in vain for definite historical information. In what particular way, or at what precise time, episcopacy originated, must be, to a large extent, matter of conjecture. A mystery hangs over it which will never be cleared away. All past researches have brought forth little that can be called tangible or certain; and *we* may not hope to dispel the obscurity by any new investigations, however extended or minute. That it was developed out of the college of elders in one church, is evident; but *how* and *when* it arose, cannot be ascertained. We shall state the results of our reading and thinking very briefly.

It does not seem probable that the presidency was invested in some one of the elders more eminent than the rest, in the time of the apostles, and with their approbation. This hypothesis does not commend itself to general acceptance, even should it be conceded that none except the larger churches had adopted the arrangement before the apostles died. Rothe has signally failed in his endeavour to prove that the apostles instituted episcopacy immediately before their death,* so that nothing could be more successful than Baur's refutation of his four leading arguments. Archbishop Whately attributes it to them without any attempt to prove his position. He has assumed the very point which ought to have been established. "It seems plainly," says he, "to have been at least the general, if not the universal practice of the apostles, to appoint over each separate *church* a *single* individual as a chief governor, under the title of '*angel*,' (*i.e.*, *messenger* or *legate* from [the

* Anfänge der christlichen Kirche, § 40.

apostles,) or 'BISHOP,' *i.e.*, *superintendent* or overseer."* But the New Testament affords no evidence of this plan having been pursued by the apostles. If it is made to rest on the obscure title "*angel* of the church" employed in the Apocalypse, the basis is altogether inadequate to support the superstructure. It is evident from the New Testament that communities or churches were governed by a number of presbyters associated together: but that each of them had *one individual* appointed over it as chief governor by the apostles, is an assertion entirely unsupported by the inspired record. And even should it be narrowed to the time when John, the sole survivor of the apostles, witnessed its origin in proconsular Asia, and gave it his sanction as a plan fitted to prevent disorder, according to Dr. Pye Smith,† it is liable to several objections. The expression, *angel of the church*, on which Mosheim and others rely, is too doubtful to impart any degree of probability to the opinion in question. We are inclined to date the rise of the institute after the death of the apostles, for it is not likely that they created the order, or lived to see its rise. As far as the time is concerned, Mosheim,‡ Gieseler,§ Rothe, and Smith, in their different hypotheses, do not seem to have been successful. The apostles were removed before the arrangement was entered into, and nothing approaching the nature of *proof* has ever been advanced to invalidate this statement.

Soon after their decease, the presbyters of one church—that of Jerusalem for example—found it necessary or desirable to appoint one of their number as perpetual presi-

* The Kingdom of Christ Delineated, p. 165. 8vo. London: 1842. See Note LXXII.

† The Protestant Dissent Vindicated, in a Letter to the Rev. Dr. Lee, pp. 24, 25. Second Edition. London: 1835.

‡ De Rebus Christianorum ante Constant. Mag. Commentarii, § 41, and notes, p. 132, &c., or Vidal's Translation, vol. i. p. 224, *et seq.*

§ Manual of Ecclesiastical History, vol. i. § 34.

dent, to whom the rest should be subordinate, and by whom the general body should be controlled. This arrangement arose out of the necessities of the society itself, and the condition of humanity, even in its renewed form. Discord had broken out. Schisms had arisen. Ambition had appeared among the presbyters. Those who possessed greater talents and energy, were not contented with being merely *primi inter pares*, or presidents of the council of elders in their turn. They aspired to *the lordship* of those who stood on equal terms with themselves and possessed equal authority by virtue of office. Thus we must look for the origin of the episcopate in the time immediately succeeding the apostles, and the symptoms which manifested themselves more palpably when the apostles were no longer on earth to control the presbyteries. Fellow-labourers of the apostles and evangelists there were; but they perhaps could not rule the presbyteries, even if they possessed legitimate power over them; and we cannot suppose that they should discountenance a plan likely to prove so beneficial. The arrangement having been tried in one or two churches, and found to be salutary, was gradually adopted in others, till it became general. Jerusalem has the best claim to be reckoned the birthplace of it.

The power of the elder thus raised by his fellow-elders was not so far superior to theirs as it came to be in the course of events. The workings of ambition gradually elevated him to a higher position century after century; though even the title bishop, in distinction from that of elder, was not *exclusively* attached to him for several centuries. But his authority was always increasing. The advice of the elders was less and less regarded. *Usurped* authority gave place to prudent and wise control. And when at length he was supported by the civil power, it was difficult if not impossible for the elders and church to depose him, notwithstanding flagrant acts of domination.

Doubtless the arrangement was a wise and beneficial one in a majority of instances. When the councils selected one of their number, in whose prudence and wisdom they had confidence, and when the president chosen paid due deference to the elders, it is easy to perceive the great advantages that might accrue to the church over which they watched. The origin of the episcopate may be best deduced from the writings of Jerome. His account of it, *fairly interpreted*, coincides with the view which has now been presented.* It is adopted by Stillingfleet as the most rational, and has commended itself to many impartial inquirers. As it may be profitable to see the opinions of the eminent Latin father expounded by a liberal bishop, we shall quote the words: "After this, when the apostles were taken out of the way, who kept the main power in their own hands of ruling the several presbyteries, or delegated some to do it, (who had a main hand in the planting churches with the apostles, and thence are called in Scripture sometimes fellow-labourers in the Lord, and sometimes evangelists, and by *Theodoret*, apostles, but of a second order,) after, I say, these were deceased, and the main power left in the presbyteries, the several presbyters enjoying an equal power among themselves, especially being many in one city, thereby great occasion was given to many schisms, partly by the bandying of the presbyters one against another, partly by the sidings of the people with some against the rest, partly by the too common use of the power of ordinations in presbyters, by which they were more able to increase their own party by ordaining those who would join with them, and by this means to perpetuate schisms in the church; upon this, when the wiser and graver sort considered the abuses following the promiscuous use of this power of ordination, and withal having in their minds the excellent frame of the government of the church under the apostles and their deputies,

* See Note LXXIII.

and for preventing of future schisms and divisions among themselves, they unanimously agreed to choose one out of their number who was best qualified for the management of so great a trust, and to devolve the exercise of the power of ordination and jurisdiction to him; yet so as that he act nothing of importance without the consent and concurrence of the presbyters, who were still to be as the common council to the bishop. This I take to be the true and just account of the original episcopacy in the primitive church according to *Jerome*; which model of government, thus contrived and framed, sets forth to us a most lively character of that great wisdom and moderation which then ruled the heads and hearts of the primitive Christians; and which, when men have searched and studied all other ways (the abuses incident to this government through the corruptions of men and times, being retrenched) will be found the most agreeable to the primitive form, both as asserting the due interest of the presbyteries, and allowing the due honour of episcopacy, and by the joint harmony of both carrying on the affairs of the church with the greatest unity, concord, and peace."*

Should it be thought that a plurality of elders could not be maintained in churches at the present day without schisms and envyings, it becomes a matter for serious consideration whether a prudential arrangement, similar to that which we have been considering, might not be adopted. There are, doubtless, serious difficulties in the way of prosperous unity, as long as the perfect equality of elders be urged. We fear that it could not be preserved inviolate. Envyings and discords would arise. Ambitious designs would be cherished. Feuds would disturb the peace of the society, as was the case very early in the church of Corinth, when *Clement* wrote his *Epistle*. Human nature, in its best state, is imperfect. *Mr. Ewing* has adduced ten arguments to prove that there ought to

* *Irenicum*, pp. 281, 282.

be but one elder in one church. Most of them however are weak, and have been ably demolished by Carson. Several which he has drawn from the maxims and artificial habits of modern society can scarcely furnish cause for abandoning arrangements made under the sanction of Heaven. It is not *necessary*, for instance, that the several elders of a church should receive all their temporal support from it; and even if it were, it is not necessary to have churches so small or feeble as to be incapable of maintaining several, and so preventing them from secularizing their talents. As to the probability of *disagreement*, there is weight in that objection. Although it is *the duty* of the several elders to be united in heart and soul, in honour preferring one another; and although they *will* manifest such a temper if they have been called to office by the Holy Spirit; yet *perfection* cannot be expected. It is wrong to use the low standard of piety in modern pastors as a weapon for cutting down apostolic usages; but it is Utopian to argue on the assumption of a holiness which they very seldom exhibit, and are not likely to present, till brighter days dawn on the churches than have yet appeared.

Might not then the incipient episcopal institute be resumed with advantage? In this way we should reap all the benefits of a plurality of elders without the disadvantageous consequences. Unity and condensation of effort would be attained. A powerful organization, under the wise subordination of one standing at the head of a college of elders, would work with well-directed efforts in the accomplishment of important objects. Here would be found the best elements of Congregationalism, Episcopacy, and Presbyterianism, without infringing any fundamental principle, for there would still be ministerial parity *essentially*, subjection to a president being a *voluntary* arrangement on the part of the elders, and ambition being kept in check by such means as might be agreed on at the election of the bishop. The measure could be laid aside

at any time should the church and elders see fit. It should have nothing compulsory about it. It should be nothing more than a *voluntary* submission of the elders belonging to a church to a perpetual presidency on the part of one among them, elevated on account of superior qualifications, or of age, or both. At the same time, his power must be confined within certain limits sufficient to counteract *the usurpation* of undue authority, or the manifestations of unholy ambition. The sphere of its operation should be expressly limited to the church and elders over whom he presides in the Lord. He must not have spiritual government over other churches, or over the Christians of districts in which they are planted. The society which first elected him to be their elder is the only one of which he is ruler; and *that* should never be larger than may conveniently assemble in one place. Portions of it may occasionally meet in various places, or in private houses; but they are not *the church*. Such small assemblies constitute parts of one church,—of one Christian body stately meeting together for observing the ordinances and obeying the commands enjoined by Christ on his followers in their social capacity.

Secondly. The exact number of deacons in a church is left indeterminate like that of the elders. There should be a plurality; but of how many it ought to consist, there is no mention in Scripture. The number must be regulated by circumstances. Seven were originally appointed; but there is no intimation that seven was intended to be the exact amount of these officers in every case.

LECTURE IX.

THE CONGREGATIONAL SYSTEM REVIEWED AND DEFENDED.

“But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing.”—GAL. iv. 18.

IN reviewing the course taken in the preceding Lectures, it will not be unprofitable to consider the main points which have been elicited in the inquiry, and the advantages of the system whose body they may be said to constitute, Having been educed and defended successively, they remain to be considered together. Hitherto they have appeared as the separate parts of a building, single and disjointed; but now we mean to place and fit them compactly, that their due proportions may be properly contemplated.

The principles we have attempted to establish are these :

First. That those who profess to believe the gospel should associate in obedience to Christ's commands, for the promotion of their mutual edification by the use of the means pointed out in the New Testament.

Secondly. That a company of such persons, or in other words *a church*, consists of those only who give credible evidence of piety, and may conveniently assemble in one place.

Thirdly. That every church should have office-bearers for the right and orderly management of its affairs, viz., elders or bishops and deacons; the former to teach and govern the flock, the latter to manage the temporalities of it.

Fourthly. That every Christian church is subject to

Christ alone, no external power whatever, whether civil or sacred, having ecclesiastical jurisdiction over it.

Fifthly. That it is fully competent to transact its own affairs, being complete within itself.

Sixthly. That it is the duty of every such society to maintain and propagate the truth.

Such are the principles developed with more or less fulness in the preceding discussion; and they are none other than the leading features of modern Congregationalism. They constitute *the essentials* of the system so called. We believe, it, therefore, to be a good form of polity. Among the various ecclesiastical polities that prevail, Congregationalism commends itself to our best judgment as the form which comes nearer the spirit of the apostolic churches than any other. Regarding these principles as *the system essentially*, other features being merely *accessory*, we shall now contemplate the advantages it possesses as a compact model of church government.

The first of these we reckon its *scripturality*. To us this is the main excellence, without which all others would be of questionable character. Those, indeed, who think that all forms of government are indifferent, the Scriptures never having been designed to propose any as obligatory on succeeding times, will make light of this recommendation; but such as exalt the New Testament, looking on it as profitable to direct not only in doctrine but in ecclesiastical practice, will incline to think otherwise. And yet the persons who consider church polity as a matter of expediency, are seldom indifferent to the voice of Scripture on the subject, or averse to invoke it on behalf of their own sentiments. They respect primitive institutions as far as possible, being anxious, as opportunity may occur, to prove the consistency of their system with the free spirit of early times.

With our views of the supremacy of Scripture on this

as on every subject, the analogy of a modern system of church government to the apostolic is decisive in its favour. The nearer its substantial assimilation to the divine model, the more does it commend itself to our judgment and conscience. An obligation rests on Christians to imitate apostolic antiquity. They are not abandoned to their own inclinations, or at liberty to act in the matter just as they please.

We believe then that the scripturality of our system is its chief recommendation. It rests on the immovable basis of the divine word. It challenges inquiry because of its sacred foundation. Whoever undertakes to overthrow it, must assail it chiefly with weapons drawn from the Bible.

Its *simplicity* is another excellence of the system. This feature characterizes all the institutions and works of God. Here too we discover it. The brethren composing a particular church choose their office-bearers, and manage all the affairs belonging to the associated body. There is nothing complicated. They settle their differences and transact their ecclesiastical business among themselves, without the interference of an external court or the control of a foreign body. They have no necessity to go beyond themselves in any case that may arise. Thus there is a machinery at once simple and complete, fitted to perform anything which may properly come within its sphere, without a circuitous process. In the accomplishment of its objects, nothing is so complicated in its nature as to bewilder the judgment of the members. All is plain and intelligible, because of its simplicity. The brethren know immediately how to proceed in the adjustment of a matter when it arises. There are no secret wheels and springs concealed from their view by a cumbrous machinery against which they cannot provide; all is patent to observation.

Its *efficiency for the maintenance and diffusion of truth* may be also specified. The members of the churches

being spiritual men, having their senses exercised to discern good and evil, will naturally look for evangelical truth in those whom they choose to be their instructors and guides. Having felt the power of it themselves, they know something of its value and preciousness. They are concerned for it as the life of true religion. An obligation rests on them to do all they can for their reciprocal edification. They teach and admonish one another. They exhort one another daily while it is called to-day, lest any should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. They consider one another to provoke unto love and good works. They shine as lights in the world. Most of the sacred duties which ministers of religion are required by their office to perform, are incumbent on the members of the church *individually*. Having learned that the truth of the gospel is the appointed means of sanctification, and that their actions as members of a spiritual society must spring from a love of that truth which alone confers true freedom and peace, a regard to their own welfare will prompt them to select such instructors as think and act in religion like themselves. Every Congregational church is a pillar to uphold the temple of evangelical truth. When heresy arises in any of the members or officers, the existence of it is soon detected, and immediate measures taken for its removal, lest its pernicious influence be allowed to spread. One society does not affect other churches. It has no power to injure them by drawing them also away from the faith. It is not so closely identified with them as to corrupt them, otherwise than by example. One Independent church may preserve its purity, though all the churches around be unsound or dead, for it is not linked with them so intimately. It has a self-balancing, self-sustaining power within itself. But the case of congregations so associated as to be under one prelatie or presbyterial government is different. Defection from the faith in one cannot be long confined to that one community. It must

necessarily diffuse its corrupting influence through the body of the worshipping societies indissolubly connected with one another. Thus the system presents an effectual barrier against the spreading of corruption in doctrine, or apostasy from the faith. It has a proper remedy within itself for healing or eradicating the disease after it has appeared: and especially has it the means of rejecting a teacher or teachers who may be sent to it by some external authority. The men whom it freely chooses it can procure without let or hindrance from presbytery or synod; and the men whom it is unwilling to receive as teachers and governors, it cannot be compelled to admit. The society has not to wait for external courts of appeal or review, whose tardy operations allow space for the growth of the obnoxious sentiments in question, as well as for the nursing of party strife. Measures may be taken for the suppression of the mischief as soon as it is known. Nor can we doubt of the competence of a church, as long as it consists of true members, to take cognizance of doctrinal matters. They are endowed with wisdom from above. They judge by a spiritual perception of spiritual things. They know the danger of error in religion, connected as it is with errors in conduct; and therefore they value every means by which they may attain to greater steadfastness and purity. They buy the truth and sell it not. The treasure is too sacred to part with.

It is superfluous to remark that such as are solicitous to preserve and defend, are also solicitous to diffuse the truth, so that others may be brought to adopt it. Those who *hold fast*, are the very persons who *hold forth* the word of life. A Congregational church, therefore, is not only a pillar to uphold, but a lamp to diffuse, evangelical truth. It is a centre from which the tidings of salvation are to sound forth in every direction. In this respect it can move freely and efficiently. It has not to make formal application to other churches or their governors, for per-

mission to erect its standard where opportunity presents itself; nor must the pastors consult with the elders of other congregations, and obtain leave from a church court to take formal possession of the field. The operations of it are free and unimpeded. They do not fear ecclesiastical discipline from superiors. They are not embarrassed by the lordship of others who may think fit to check them, in the exercise of a disposing and restraining power.

In preserving the inalienable liberties of Christian men, it is of pre-eminent importance. Here the natural freedom of none is infringed. Congregational churches consist of such as spontaneously unite together in solemn covenant for certain defined purposes. They choose the required officers, they transact their own affairs. None is excluded from a voice in the common concerns of the society. All is done openly. All is done by themselves, or by their officers on their behalf, and in their presence. The concurrence of the people in every part of the church's proceedings affords a powerful barrier against despotism. Compulsion is unknown. Moral motives are the only weapons employed. There is no resort to physical force, or approach to persecution. Every man must be fully persuaded in his mind. The utmost to which the society can proceed is to expel from its communion those who will not conform to the common rules. But this is a different thing from persecution. It is quite compatible with individual liberty to think and act.

The dogmas of an external council or conclave, whether composed of ministers alone, or of ministers and ruling elders, and the absolute will of a diocesan bishop, have no place in the system, so as to overrule the sentiments of a single church, or to bind it at all hazards to a bundle of theological opinions expressed in fixed language. External control never crosses the path of a Congregational church, whether from the civil power, in a country where all religions are tolerated and Christianity has her secure

asylum, as in our own; or from the ecclesiastical powers. In short, the liberties of Christians are sacredly guarded and jealously watched by the genius of this system. Every one is free to follow the convictions of conscience in an Independent society. He judges for himself; for he belongs to a voluntary association subject to Christ alone.

The system has a remarkable adaptation to prevent clerical pride and ambition. It is manifest from the gospels, that Christ frequently rebuked these feelings in his immediate followers. They are sentiments inherent in depraved humanity. The possession of authority in things civil or sacred, tends to beget and to foster them, even in pious bosoms. As soon as a church ruler is elevated above his brethren, he begins to feel the impulse of such motives. Although the feelings in question are explicitly discountenanced in the Bible, they are still manifested in positions of influence. But the Congregational form of government affords little fuel to kindle them. It is a soil ungenial to their growth. The elder of the church is not independent of the church, or absolute governor of an inert and passive mass. He wields none other than a moral influence over the members. His power is *declarative* not *judicial*. He has been selected, and may also be displaced by them. They obey him only so far as they find him following the New Testament. When he forsakes the clear course marked out in the divine directory; when his doctrines or practices deviate from the word of God; they are free to call his attention to the matter, and to exhort him to take heed to his ministry, or, if necessary, to remove him from office. He must therefore feel perpetually the influence of a safe and salutary check, which may at any time be put on his erratic proceedings by the voice of the church. He cannot lose sight of the truth long, that he is not a "lord over God's heritage, but an ensample to the flock." Compare this with Wesley's proceedings, of whom we are informed, that "as the venerable

founder (under God) of the whole Methodist society, he governed without any responsibility whatever. . . . He was the patron of all the Methodist pulpits in Great Britain and Ireland for life; the sole right of nomination being invested in him by all the deeds of settlement; which gave him exceeding great power." *

Nor have Congregationalists forensic courts in which men may aspire to make a figure as the leaders of parties. In such assemblies, belonging as they do to the essence of some systems, and meeting at the stated seasons, pride is easily fostered in the bosoms of clever, ambitious, and skilful tacticians, who wish to become popular and influential. How few, too, are the attractions of the system to men desirous of *worldly* as well as of ecclesiastical power! Its spiritual nature has no alliance with the world. He who belongs to it cannot obtain temporal power by means of it. He will not be made rich in this world's goods; or exalted in the estimation of worldly men.

It stimulates the activity of pastors. This is implied in the preceding remarks. The position in which the teachers of religion stand with regard to the people secure this result. Set over the people by themselves for their instruction and edification, their energies are kept on the alert. Having to do in the first instance, and chiefly, with spiritual men, slothfulness in the work must be prevented; the necessities and wants of the spiritual demanding a perpetual supply of heavenly aliment. The souls of the disciples who are advancing in the divine life, must not be starved. They will call for a supply to satisfy their desires. Thus in consequence of the intimate relation subsisting between the pastor voluntarily chosen by a people, and depending for his subsistence on their free-will offerings, he must minister to the necessities of those whom he has been appointed to instruct and edify.

We are aware that many are very fearful of a system

* These are the words of Coke and Asbury.

which has any tendency to give a church a control over the minister; but there is a *salutary* stimulus imparted to a right-hearted pastor by an enlightened and right-hearted people which cannot be condemned. "It is certain," says Dr. Campbell, "that when authority of any kind is unattended with what are commonly called coercive measures or the power of the sword, and unsupported by temporal splendour or worldly sanctions, it is impossible to preserve it otherwise amongst an enlightened people, than by purity of character in those vested with it, and by diligence in the discharge of the duties of their station. In such cases this is the only foundation on which the respect, obedience, and submission of others can be raised. It was, therefore, a pertinent advice that Paul gave to Timothy, however oddly it may appear at first, 'Let no man despise thee.' For we may justly say that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, if a pastor is despised, he has himself to blame."*

Its tendency to promote general intelligence may also be noticed. This arises from the principle of *self-government* which forms the soul of the system; for the duty of self-government requires a considerable amount of knowledge and prudence. The society ruled by an authority external to itself may be well managed in consequence of the wisdom residing in the governing power; but where it is left to guide its own affairs, even self-interest will lead to an increase of knowledge. And as the principles of government are contained in the Bible alone, that book will be studied by the members that they may know how to proceed. Hence the perusal of God's word will create a desire for general knowledge and improvement. Every one belonging to a Congregational church feels, or ought to feel, the solemn accountability belonging to him in having to do with the business of that church. As he has a personal interest in the transaction of all its affairs, so

* Lectures on Ecclesiastical History, Lecture IV. p. 100.

will he consider it necessary to prepare himself for the important work. To act his part well he knows that the mind must be enlightened. Hence he will aim at that right culture of intellect and heart which has respect to the true welfare of his fellow-men and the glory of God.

These then are the principal excellences of our system. They do not belong in a like degree to any other ecclesiastical polity. Some of them, indeed, form a part of the *prelatical* system, others of the *Presbyterian*; but the *measure* in which *all* are inherent in the Congregational polity, is not exhibited by either. It were an invidious task, however, to compare it with rival systems; because there is extreme danger of presenting some of their *abuses* along with their genuine tendencies. So difficult is it to separate the two, that we should despair of doing full justice to the advantages *properly* belonging to the prelatial and Presbyterian systems; advantages which should always be estimated at their full value by a candid opponent.

Without therefore contrasting our system in regard to its essential features with the outlines of other polities, we must be allowed to object to *prelacy* generally on the ground of its secular conformity to the world; and to Presbyterianism, theoretically beautiful as it is, on the ground of its stiff and law-like canons, among which the *spiritual rights of the people* are virtually lost. In both, there is the absence of that simplicity, purity, and individual liberty, exemplified in the apostolic churches. Far be it from us to depreciate their excellences, or to deny that godly pastors and pious individuals sincerely attached to them are growing in grace beneath their shadow. But men are often better than the principles of the denomination to which they belong. They may flourish in spite of the discouraging influences under which they place themselves. They may be largely ignorant of the genius of the system to which they cleave. Attentive to their own spiritual state, and advancing in the divine life under the

ministrations of one or more faithful preachers, they may be comparatively indifferent or inattentive to the inconsistency of the polity they prefer with the character of apostolic churches.

It is of great importance that ourselves, as well as our opponents, should separate *the essentials* from the *circumstances*. The former are such as we believe to be required of God, and acceptable in his sight; while the latter, though generally inseparable from a church, are *indifferent* in their nature, because their particular modifications are not determined. *These* are left to human discretion to be regulated by each society of Christians in the way they reckon most subservient to order and edification. The light of nature, assisted by the general rules of the gospel, may settle them with sufficient accuracy; but *those* are expressly determined, either by precept or example, in the divine word. In this way, our system has a flexibility, adapting it to all times and circumstances, latitude being allowed particular churches in those minor features which vary with tastes and circumstances. No form of civil government is so simple, none so complex, as to be inconsistent with it; for it rests on the fundamental principle that Christ's kingdom is not of this world. As long as it obeys the state in things civil, it may be freely left to pursue its course in things religious. The essential advantage of it is, that it secures unity among the churches of Christ in all ages, along with freedom of action; so that all the resources of these churches may be developed agreeably to the spirit of Christianity and the existing state of society. It provides for substantial likeness to the apostolic model, amid considerable diversities in things of minor significance. In a word, it secures both unity and variety—unity in matters determined by the word of God—variety in subordinate matters left to the prudence of Christians themselves.

If our system be better adapted to any state of society more than another, it is to an enlightened one. In it, in-

dividual responsibility is more jealously preserved than in prelacy or presbytery, where important matters affecting the highest interests of Christians are managed by an *imperfect representation*. Here men are required to govern themselves. They are thrown on their own intelligence and piety, instead of being told, in reality or in effect, that they are unfit to govern themselves, their contentment in ignorance being thus perpetuated. This fact naturally increases their sense of responsibility, stirring them up to the vigorous exercise of the mental powers which God has bestowed. Hence we are prepared to expect, that those belonging to Independent churches, being accustomed to self-government, will sympathize in a liberal and popular form of civil administration, where the people are fairly and fully represented. If they perceive that the interests of a spiritual society are best promoted by encouraging all the members to understand and feel their personal responsibility in the transaction of ecclesiastical business, they will be led to infer, that the form of civil government which provides for a like sense of responsibility, by allowing the people generally to exercise the rights of freemen, cannot be wrong. Habituated to self-government in the one department, they will desire the same principles in another. Such as live under the prelatie system, where the clergy are sent to them without their wishes being consulted, or the nature of their wants studied, and where they are exempted, to a large extent, from the exercise of independent thought, will more readily acquiesce in a constitution under which they possess a like exemption. But men who are intrusted with a weighty commission in things spiritual, will not be so easily satisfied with the passiveness of a condition where the few shut them out from the exercise of rights belonging to every subject of a free government. They will carry the same principles of liberty into the one department which they cherish in the other; believing them to be sanctioned of Heaven for the promo-

tion, not less of the temporal, than of the spiritual well-being of mankind. Hence, those who are averse to a popular form of church government, are usually unfavourable to a like form of civil government. If, however, men be taught by the light of nature, as well as by revelation, that they cannot delegate their responsibility in religion to others, or serve God by *representation*; if each is bound to act and judge for himself in choosing the church to which he attaches himself, and preserving in it those rights of conscience which belong equally to all; then can no government be more essentially popular than the government of churches. Here there is a perfect equality. All are subject to God and his revealed will. None has authority to prescribe to another. None has any greater power over his brother, than has his brother over him. Hence the sentiments of Richard Watson—that “a popular form of church government. . . . could only be tolerated in very small, isolated societies, and that in times of their greatest simplicity and love”—are as unscriptural as they are prejudicial to the true advancement of men in an intelligent piety. There is no necessary connexion between the isolation or smallness of societies and a popular government. The latter may exist and flourish in large societies as well as in small—in churches consisting of thousands, maintaining a sisterly relation to one another, as well as in the least assemblies. And if simplicity, joined to love, be requisites of a popular government, it needs no higher recommendation. What Christian does not long for simplicity in all the arrangements of a society whose members should be actuated by godly sincerity? Where is the man of genuine piety who does not sigh for the heavenly spirit of love in all the meetings of the saints; or despair of having it now, as well as in the infancy of Christianity? The church of Jerusalem was neither a small nor isolated society; and yet, though governed by apostles and apostolic men, though emerging from the

comparative darkness and corruptions of Judaism, it possessed all the freedom belonging to every voluntary community. But it may be said that those were the times of great simplicity and love. Such, indeed, they were; and such *should be* the present times also. The influence of true Christianity should *always* make its disciples simple-minded and kindly affectioned one to another. That they have imbibed, to a great extent, the artificial and selfish spirit of the world, is not the fault of religion, but *the evidence of its degeneracy* in the churches. It is most illogical, therefore, to make the coldness of Christians—alas! so common—as well as their partial conformity to the world, a ground for applying to them a mode of government suited to their degenerate condition, in which they shall be ruled with absolute sway. Even the apostles were exceedingly slow to assume ecclesiastical authority over the churches. On one remarkable occasion they called a meeting for consultation; they suggested; they proposed, in the presence of the whole body of disciples who acted in the matter; the final decision going forth in the name of the apostles, elders, and *brethren*. Simplicity is the very token of high intelligence and civilization in all polities, sacred and civil. God does nothing in vain. If therefore any form of church government be more agreeable to his will than another, it is that in which all the ends of government are secured with an expenditure of means the least possible. And although society may be artificial, its distinctions numerous and refined, that fact forms no cause for imagining that the government of churches must keep pace with those arrangements, by introducing similar ones into itself, except churches were meant to be conformable to the world. On the contrary, the very circumstance that simplicity in ecclesiastical polity is more agreeable to the analogy of the divine works, affords a strong presumption in favour of the fact, that civil government, in becoming complicated, is so much the more in danger of losing sight of the great end for which

it exists, the common good of mankind; and instead of preserving the lives, liberties, and estates of all, of neglecting the interests of the many for the sake of a few ambitious or designing individuals to whom power has been intrusted for the welfare of an entire community. The history of nations contradicts the idea of a popular form of government being tolerable only in times of the greatest simplicity. The arts and sciences flourished in ancient Greece and Rome, when the spirit of freedom animated their respective constitutions. Under its benign influence learning advanced. But in proportion as the people were deprived of their natural rights by arbitrary power, ignorance prevailed:—the useful and ornamental gave way before the effeminacy of luxury; and an advanced civilization yielded to barbarism. In proportion as the government of a nation is popular, will be the manly energy of the people. In like manner, the history of every religious denomination demonstrates, that habits of intelligence thrive the most vigorously when all feel a personal interest in the business of the church to which they belong, and a great responsibility clinging to them in the matter of social religion. “Do not ye,” says the apostle to the Corinthian Christians, “judge them that are within?” Will not those who are concerned with this judging process seek to prepare themselves for it by studying the principles of the great statute-book; while those who devolve it entirely on their rulers will be content with a less frequent perusal of the Bible. Without an acquaintance indeed with the Bible, church members and their office-bearers cannot proceed in transacting the business that comes before them; and therefore they have continually to refer to it as containing their code of laws. And surely the habit of studying the Bible expands the mind. In proportion as our acquaintance with it becomes broader and deeper, will the mental powers be stimulated. Reflection will be awakened on many subjects. The energies will receive an impulse by

means of which they may go forth in other directions. Burke* has remarked, that the bulk of mankind are very indifferent about theories of government while they are really happy. This may be the case in regard to such as live under a government which is *practically* worked so as to promote the general benefit. But the reverse is the case with Congregationalists who know and appreciate their principles. The system under which they live as professors of religion, is fitted to create and cherish mental activity. This, at least, is its genuine tendency. Its legitimate influence is to prepare the heart and mind for the responsible duties of self-government, in the performance of which the highest wisdom is needful. In a word, it teaches a manly self-reliance on the inherent vigour of religious principle.

A due attention to the distinction between *the system* and *its accidents* will serve to moderate the excessive zeal of *indiscreet* friends on the one hand, and of opponents on the other. Thus some lay great stress on extemporaneous prayer, as though it were a part of Congregationalism, declaiming against liturgies and all prescribed forms as unscriptural or prelatie. But should a particular church think it right to adopt occasionally written forms of prayer, judging them most conducive to devotional feeling, nothing in the system is opposed to that arrangement. The worshippers may agree to do so, or they may not, according to their ideas or experience of subserviency to edification, since the sacred Scriptures determine nothing absolutely on the point. They may use pre-composed forms, believing them to be lawful and expedient, though not to be *enforced* on the conscience, or to be absolutely binding, to *the utter exclusion* of extemporaneous prayer. So also in relation to postures in worship, which, as matters of indifference, may be regulated in any mode a society may determine for itself. The same remark may

* Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol.

be applied to the meetings of churches together for the purpose of mutual counsel and encouragement. Communities may agree to send a certain number of deputies to form an association for promoting the principles they hold in common, or for advancing the welfare of society generally. The persons assembled may advise, consult, and act together, in any way consistent with the inherent liberties of the individual societies to which they respectively belong. The light of nature itself would teach them to do so, if not habitually, at least occasionally, when circumstances urgently demand their assembling. Acting on this principle, churches of the same order may become more closely associated, so as to aid and strengthen one another. They may give a friendly attention to their mutual welfare, and fraternally co-operate in promoting the cause of the gospel. The confederated societies, maintaining a correspondence by letter or otherwise, and coming together from time to time in any mode they may think best for the object contemplated, might present a formidable aspect to prevailing evils, no less than an encouraging voice and helping hand to suffering or sorely tried brethren. Consociations of this nature, formed in accordance with the inviolable liberties of the churches, might tell powerfully on the surrounding population in favour of evangelical truth, were they wisely managed and not too frequently held. The Congregational system, so far from being averse to them, has generally encouraged their existence as eminently favourable to the consolidation of a denominational body. They are things which the churches may approve, without the least approach to the infringement of any essential principle; and may be useful or injurious, just as they are regulated. If characterized by a calm seriousness and prayerful deliberation, they may be hallowed to the individuals composing them, and become eminently auxiliary to the prosperity of the churches; but should coarseness and clamour occupy the

place of dignity and mildness, or a dictatorial spirit be assumed by petty officials, they become ecclesiastical nuisances. In proportion as they present an oracular self-importance are they to be avoided. When they usurp power, acquire riches, or manifest the spirit of councils and synods where the clergy have ever managed all things for their own interests, neglectful of the rights of the laity, they must be reprobated as alien to the genius of our system.

Such are a few examples of the variable features of an ecclesiastical polity—things that may be wisely accommodated to the state of society, according as it is enlightened or otherwise, artificial or simple. They are a specimen of the circumstantials of our system, not the essential principles of it. Along with other particulars they may be absent or present, in one modification or another, just as the members of particular churches determine, in the exercise of their christian prudence. They will appear or not, as they commend themselves to the view of Christians alive to their responsibilities and acting accordingly. In them the system exhibits its freedom of movement, uncramped by prescribed or coercive enactments. They are its outer garments, which it may wear or not according to the surrounding temperature. Every church has a discretionary power. It must arrange the circumstances of its worship. Like all other voluntary societies, it must adopt by-laws for the regulation of its affairs; for it need scarcely be said that the minor details of a church's organization and discipline are not set down in Scripture, though they must be managed in a particular method for the sake of order in the house of God. The only rule given concerning them is, that they be done decently, in order, and to edification. Whenever that rule is violated they cease to be indifferent; they become unlawful. They must be matters of mutual agreement among the members themselves of a particular church, who have nothing to do

with the spiritual jurisdiction of other churches, nor power to impose anything that is indifferent in its nature on the conscience of others. Here a community is free to act as it pleases, to enact, abrogate, alter, or suspend, according to its sense of propriety.

A church has no power to decree rites and ceremonies, though they be not contrary to the written word of God. It has been alleged indeed, that they may minister to the solemnity or decency of worship; and that, if not imposed on the conscience by arbitrary authority, they are clearly allowable. But to add any new ceremony must be unlawful, because men are incapable of discerning what is an acceptable part of divine worship. To God alone it belongs to appoint whatever is to be done in the assemblies of Christians; for He alone knows what is worthy of Himself and proper to be presented by His creatures. No man has authority, because none has skill, to prescribe what is befitting the worship of the Supreme. Here human invention has no place. All must be made known by Heaven itself. Imperfect and erring man cannot determine what things, indifferent in themselves, are fit to be made use of in religion. Hence the Deity has revealed, with sufficient fulness, all necessary parts of religious worship. To institute additional ceremonies—still more, to impose them on others, is totally unwarrantable on the part of man, whatever pretence of decency or solemnity may be offered in favour of them. They may be indifferent in their own nature; but when annexed to the services of God without his express sanction, they cease to be indifferent, and become positively objectionable. It is beyond men's province to introduce into divine worship whatever they may think decent or devout. In the exercise of their discretion they judge *in what manner* the different parts of worship should be best conducted; but the acts of worship themselves have been revealed, so that the rule of order or edification does not apply to the multiplication of them.

It extends no farther than *the mode*. Simplicity characterizes the service of the Deity, which is a reasonable service. But the introduction of new rites and ceremonies changes its simplicity, puts a stumbling-block in the way of weak consciences, and distracts the mind of the worshipper. It is an intrusion on the part of men into the province of God himself. It is an insolent attempt to offer to the Divine Majesty, without his permission, things trifling and mean—an attempt to supply what He alone is judge of. No pretext of solemnity or edification can justify it. It is, therefore, idle to insist on the use of these “sundry sensible means” as fitted to make a deep and strong impression, or to stir up reverence, devotion, or attention; the Almighty having precluded his creatures’ invention in this respect by enjoining all needful rites, so that none others are either necessary or desirable in the devout observance of his worship.

It is scarcely worth while to allude to the objections made to our system by those who do not understand it, or who confound its accidents with its essentials. Thus it has been pronounced *impracticable* in some respects. When “difficult cases arise, or such as interest the whole community, it becomes necessary to consult the rulers of other churches by letter or deputation. If what seems good to the majority determine the cause, it is in fact a judicial decision, for giving which these rulers might as well have assembled in a general council.”* We know of no such cases. They are purely imaginary. It is never *necessary* to consult the rulers of other churches. If a common danger threaten, it may be desirable for the ministers and members of churches to meet together to determine what is best to be done in the emergency; but whether all be of one mind or not, the decision is by no means *judicial*. It binds none. It goes forth simply in

* Testimony of the United Associate Synod of the Secession Church, p. 156. 8vo. Edinburgh: 1831.

the form of a recommendation. It obliges neither those who are present at the meeting, nor those who are absent, to adopt a particular course. Such as come to the decision act for themselves alone, not for the absent, over whom they have no control farther than *the moral influence* attaching to practical wisdom may reach.

“If even those who are cast out by a particular church cannot be received or recognized as members by other churches, the sentence of that church controls the whole community.”* It is a mistake to assert that the excommunicated cannot be received or recognized by other churches. Churches, confiding in the wisdom of one another and maintaining a careful watch over their reciprocal interests, do not generally receive the ejected, because there is a strong presumption that he is guilty; but they may reinvestigate the case, as far as they are able, and admit to their fellowship the person so expelled. Thus the sentence of one church controls the whole community no farther than the community reposes confidence in the intelligence, purity, and wisdom of a particular society. We do not see the propriety of the privilege of appeal. If spiritual men are unfit to examine and satisfactorily dispose of any case that arises, an external tribunal will not add light or certainty to it. The New Testament knows of no such appeals from a Christian church; because when a sentence is passed, the authority of the Lord Jesus has virtually determined the case. The church pronounces in accordance to His will. They bring the matter to the New Testament, and having seen what is there written, decide accordingly. It is not therefore *their* opinion so much as the will of Christ that finally disposes of the case. We allow that the believers may be occasionally mistaken in interpreting the mind of Christ, or in referring a particular thing to the general principle under which it falls; but this is only tantamount to the

* Ibid.

affirmation that men are fallible, even in their best state. Councils too are fallible, and have done immense injury to the cause of religion, as history abundantly demonstrates. We know that in cases of dispute between pastor and people, it is common among American Congregationalists to summon *mutual* or *ex parte* councils to examine, hear evidence, and vote accordingly; but although their decision be obligatory on the parties no farther than the parties themselves consent, the propriety of the step is exceedingly questionable. To say the least, it is wholly unnecessary. A church has power, according to the general principles on which it is organized, to adjust and perform every act of discipline, whether it concerns pastors or members, as American Congregationalists themselves freely admit. To erect therefore any other tribunal for the occasion is perfectly arbitrary and useless, virtually implying, on the part of those who summon it, a distrust in the sufficiency or defect in the luminousness of the comprehensive code by which all the affairs of Christian men must be ultimately determined. We disapprove of such councils. It is better to keep the institutions of Christ simple, as they appear in the New Testament. Better is it to allow a church the exercise of its own rights *fully*, without sanctioning so much as the appearance of incompleteness. The utility of the proceeding in question is not clear; while the superfluosness of it is apparent. Hence it should not be resorted to.

Again, our form of government is declared to be unsuited "to the unity of the church as a visible body, the full and proper manifestation of which it precludes, with the many peculiar advantages which such unity affords for the conjunct confession and defence of the Christian religion."* Nothing seems to us more unfounded than this oft-repeated objection. For in what does unity consist? Is it not in holding one Lord, one faith, one baptism?

* *Ibid.* page 156.

Here alone is the true unity of Christians. As to external, visible unity, it is doubtless desirable; though of immensely inferior moment to communion of heart and soul. Whenever it is deemed expedient to meet in one place to confess the Christian religion, there is nothing in the way of Congregational churches associating together for the purpose; although they may not assemble *in the same manner* or with *assumption of the same power* which Presbyterian churches exhibit. The meeting together of a number of ministers and ruling elders for the transaction of church business at regular intervals of time does not exhibit the true unity of Christians, because the majority legislate for the minority. But when the ministers and members of Congregational churches *spontaneously* assemble at any time to testify of religious truth, they present a better type of unity; since none has judicial authority over another, and evil passions are less excited. And then we should wish to know in what respect a society of Christians with a plurality of elders, comprehending it may be the population of a district, though often meeting in small *congregations* for worship, differs from a modern presbytery in regard to external unity. Are not all the Christians composing it united in defence of the gospel, and perpetual witnesses for Christ? Does not every church-meeting present a miniature image of the church universal? In short, we are at a loss to perceive how Presbyterianism exhibits the unity of the true church better than Congregationalism *does in fact*, or may at least freely do by virtue of its constitutional principles. So far from this being true, the purity of her communion raises her far above those denominations which, though outwardly compacted, are deficient in the vital essence of the unity demanded of God. All genuine Christians must be united. They must manifest their union to Christ and to one another; although believers worshipping in the Congregational way may not exhibit it in the forensic

forms of Presbyterianism. They may judge other modes of showing it, especially such as resemble the fresh-springing developments of the love and orthodoxy of primitive Christians, better adapted to promote the interests of a cause so dear to them, and to affect the worldly masses of mankind among whom they dwell.

Let all objectors to our form of government attend particularly to one feature of it, viz., that a church consists only of those who give credible evidence of true piety, and many of their adverse remarks will be withheld, or lose their point. We as Congregationalists endeavour with all carefulness, that none others should belong to the spiritual society. Those on whom has descended the sanctifying influence of the Spirit, are the only acknowledged subjects of our communion. In such persons power is vested by the Head of the church catholic; and if they do not use it well in all cases, the remaining corruption of humanity must be charged with the fault. That in many instances they do not exercise it in the best mode must be conceded. But the same error is committed in other forms of government. Where the clergy are *an absolute* aristocracy, power is oftener abused than where they act simply as the executive, carrying the decisions of the brethren into effect. We think it not only unscriptural, but dangerous to intrust them with all judicial functions, or to constitute them irresponsible agents possessing *independent* rights. Their best interests have been provided for, as humble followers of the Lamb, by lawfully assigning them a *moral* and *declarative* power. Congregationalists themselves should never lose sight of the materials of which a church consists, else their system is irretrievably ruined. Real as well as visible saintship, is the chief corner-stone of the building, cementing and consolidating the whole. Whenever it is broken or removed, the goodly temple totters and falls. Spiritual men alone are the members of the church. Other materials intro-

duce confusion and disorder. They are the blight of its prosperity—the seed of its decay. All our strength lies here. And the glory of our system is identical with its strength. Break down the fence of Christian principle which keeps out the unworthy from the sacred fold, and adieu to peace. Then does the system become the worst of all. It is a rude and lawless democracy. The check which the pastors had over the excesses of the people is gone; for that check was none other than their piety. Thus the tranquillity and the purity of our churches are bound up together; while both are essential to the very existence of them.

Much idle declamation has been employed on the anomaly of “referring every decision to numbers and suffrages, and placing all that is good and venerable and influential among the members themselves, at the feet of a *democracy*.”* This objection to Congregationalism is virtually based on the assumption of the system being a *pure democracy*. But it is a mistake to think so. The highest or legislative power is not vested in the people. They are not the rulers. Christ alone properly governs, inasmuch as He alone is lawgiver. The judicial and executive powers are originally vested in the church, which transfers the latter to overseers or pastors who carry the laws into effect. The aggregate assembly retains the judicial functions with which it has been intrusted by Jesus Christ; while a council, composed of select members, are empowered to execute the decisions made in accordance with the sovereign laws. Thus a church has all the functions necessary to a *well-balanced constitution*, distributed too in such a manner as to secure general liberty. If the judicial power belonged to the clergy alone, or if they were constituted governors irrespectively of the people, the freedom of the society would be infringed. But they possess the executive functions in con-

* Watson's Theological Institutes.

sequence of being elected by the people, and are thereby prevented from exercising oppression or tyranny.* Carson long ago termed the government of an Independent church a *Christocracy*, an expression far more indicative of its nature than a *democracy*.

We have said that the people devolve on a few persons, *i.e.*, the elders, the execution of the laws which Christ has given for the conduct of all. It is the duty of such governors under Christ to expound the principles of the New Testament, to uphold them in their paramount claims over the members of the society, to point out the particular application of them as occasion may require, and to be the organ of the people's decisions in every matter which comes before them. They direct the proceedings; declare and carry out the laws by which the people have voluntarily bound themselves. In choosing these office-bearers, the members promised obedience to them in the Lord. Thus they govern only by means of those set over them, to whose just decisions they are bound to bow.

It will be seen from this exposition that every thing good and venerable is laid at the feet of *Christ* rather than at those of a *democracy*. Nothing is transacted which the brethren are afraid or ashamed to bring plainly before all, because nothing is done in which their own welfare or the interests of religion generally are not involved. The New Testament is the only book to which implicit deference is paid, apart from all human codes and canons.

It is not surprising that "the ignorance and youth and inexperience of the mass of every religious community" should afford a fertile theme for the adherents of systems where the people are denuded of their legitimate rights. "As long as I live," said Wesley, "the people shall have no share in choosing either stewards or leaders among the Methodists." But this feeling derives no small part of its force from misapprehension of the genius of our system,

* See Note LXXIV.

as though it were a simple democracy, as well as from the state of the one denomination to which the writers belong. It is not taken from their experience of churches where purity of communion is preserved. The youth and inexperience of some are balanced by the knowledge and prudence of others, to whom the young disciple will naturally look, and by whose counsel he will be benefited. And then there are pastors, whose duty it is to explain the bearing of scriptural principles on every particular case, who are *over* the people in the Lord, and whose authority the latter are taught not to despise. In reference also to the choice of teachers, it is the dictate of reason as well as revelation, that a community should elect its own officers; for, after all exceptions, they are the best judges of what promotes their growth in grace. Unlettered though they be, their character implies that they have a spiritual sense by which they discern spiritual food, and are capable of trying the spirits whether they be of God, since many false teachers are gone out into the world. "And however it may so happen, that sometimes inconveniences (real or imaginary) may attend the scheme I have maintained; yet I think they are in no measure equal to the manifest conveniences and happy tendencies of it, or to the palpable inconveniences and pernicious consequences of the other.*

We hesitate not to avow our attachment to Congregational principles, because of their eminent tendency to promote the intelligence and purity of society generally. Wherever they have free scope, they have exalted the people by teaching them to take an interest in the rights belonging to them as men, and thus calling forth the energies of their nature in the promotion of the general good. They have diffused light and knowledge around. Priestcraft and superstition have fled before them. They

* Jonathan Edwards, Qualifications for Full Communion. Works, in four volumes 8vo. Vol. i. p. 189. New York: 1843.

have freed the understanding from arbitrary impositions. It is because of this tendency that we are anxious for their universal diffusion. Nor have we any fear of their ultimate triumph. Believing them to be of heaven and founded on the constitution of man, we look on them as pregnant with the seeds of future success. As reason prevails, and the world becomes wiser, they will assuredly be exalted in the estimation of thinking men. Every advance in the state of society—every step it takes in enlightenment, is conducive to their growth. In proportion as sound sense, freedom of thought, unfettered commerce, and the study of the Bible prevail, so do we expect the essential advancement of them among men. That they are the best vehicle for the conservation and spread of undefiled religion will be admitted by the philosophical observer who looks abroad on nations with the eye of a genuine philanthropist. True it is that appearances have not justified the sanguine expectations entertained of their success. But the system has never had full room for its inherent strength to move in. Oppressive influences in this land have cramped it. A dominant hierarchical system, with its wide mouth of exaction, has been ready to swallow it up. Its own friends have proved themselves but children in managing its movements. Instead of being eminently wise, they have handled it with foolish rashness. Ignorant to a great extent of its philosophical symmetry, and unacquainted with the rudiments of government, they have exposed the heavenly machinery to the scorn of men. Injudicious advocates have marred it in the full view of enemies. And yet it is the very system with which the ignorant and unskilful should not actively intermeddle. To be administered rightly, the wisdom from above is pre-eminently required in the people, especially in the office-bearers, who profess adherence to it. But it has often met with other advocates, to the secret satisfaction of our foes. Let us hope that a better state of things will

speedily arise, after a calm survey of the influences which have retarded our denominational progress. It were a delicate undertaking for us to point out these adverse influences in detail; since most of them spring up among ourselves. Convinced as we are, that our principles have not been followed out to their legitimate consequences, it would be no enviable task to attempt an exposition of the manner in which this fact is exemplified, and the disastrous fruits of its existence. If however the system has the elements of a vigorous vitality within itself, and is adapted to the increasing intelligence of the age, reform must be speedily applied to make it all that it ought to be, in circumstances similar to those we live in. Its essential features must be educed freely and fully, that they may be surrounded with such accidents as shall invest them with the highest amount of capacity for action. This step seems to us absolutely necessary to real progress. Resisted it may be, but it will come in another age, when the interests of self shall be entirely subordinated to the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom. We want an educated people who will demand an educated ministry; and an educated ministry who will create an educated people. Our ministry is deficient in men who have that "large, sound, round-about sense" which can take a full view of questions connected with the high destinies of man, in lovers of truth *wherever* it is found, rational assertors of liberty, who, instead of "cantoning out to themselves a little Goshen"* in the ecclesiastical world, where the light of day shines as they imagine, will look abroad on others' territories, and be contented to borrow from them some of the beams still playing on their surface in the judgment of bigotry itself, however far that surface is supposed to have waded into an eclipse. If we will not learn of other systems what may be prudently adopted in purifying and brightening our own, or move on in the

* Locke.

beaten track of usage* afraid of innovation, our half-hearted timidity must keep us in the rear of the march of intelligence. God forbid that our churches should ever be compared to "torches in the dark, which appear greatest afar off," † but feeble and flickering at hand. If we be clear-sighted enough to understand the comprehensive principles of Scripture, and faithful to apply them; if we be not too wise to learn, or too slow to read the signs of the times, we shall be among the foremost to strengthen our position as evangelical Dissenters by true watchmen and right-minded people on the walls and within the habitations of our Zion. "What," asks Hooker, "shall become of that commonwealth or church in the end, which hath not the eye of learning to beautify, guide, and direct it?" The eye of learning has cast its beautiful, brightening glances but niggardly through the ranks of our ministry. Were we possessed of it, the narrow sphere of our vision would be much enlarged. Our ideas of things ecclesiastical would be formed, not so much from direct antagonism to the National Establishment, as from the genius of Christianity itself illustrated by the history of the church. We must build up our own system with all the materials that knowledge and experience can supply, intent on the prosecution of our own interests, rather than on doing battle against the corrupt things of other Christian bodies. *The word of life* must be on our tongues and in our hearts, instead of the language of contention. In fine, our mission should be regarded pre-eminently as a mission of pure benevolence on earth seeking to deposit her blessings in the homes of the population. With the resolute calmness of men in earnest for their divine Master let us go forward, disowning the empty blustering indicative of a little-minded attachment to Dissent, appearing less as *sectaries* than as *Christians*, and becoming *thinkers* instead of *sciolists*. Anti-christianism, in its ma-

* See Note LXXV.

† Lord Bacon.

nifold forms, will be overthrown by the weapons of truth and reason in the hands of pure churches advancing together, when the weapons of noisy and nominal christians shall have proved their impotence.

NOTES.

I. (page 5.)

IRENICUM, p, 10. 4to. London: 1662. Here it is right to observe, that Stillingfleet is commonly thought to have departed from the principles of the Irenicum. Whether he went so far as to retract its main sentiments is not certain. In the preface to his work, "The Unreasonableness of Separation from the Communion of the Church of England," he says, "Will you not allow one single person, who happened to write about these matters when he was very young, in twenty years' time of the most busy and thoughtful part of his life, to see reason to alter his judgment?"

II. (page 42.)

* "Multa ibi offenderis vestigia cœrimoniæ Synagogæ; item libertas docendi, prophetandi, interpretandi, sed quæ tamen prorsus accommodatæ fuerunt ad conditionem Fidelium Novi Testamenti, quæ ab eâ veteris multum variavit."—De Synagoga, p. 718, 4to. Francuæræ: 1696.

III. (page 47.)

"According to the phraseology of the apostolic age," says Neander, "the word *ἐκκλησία* signifies either the whole Christian church, the total number of believers forming one body under one head, or a single church or Christian society." In the same passage he speaks of it as arbitrary to take *ἐκκλησία* to signify several churches or congregations collectively, and avers that it is quite contrary to the phraseology of the apostolic age. See "History of the Planting and Training of the Christian Church by the Apostles," translated

by Ryland. Vol. i. p. 169 (note); or vol. i. p. 253 (note) in the original. 4th edition: 1847.

IV. (page 63.)

“Verbum κατοικεῖν Wolfius, Michaelis, Rosenmüllerus, præeunte Lightfoot, explicant: *habitare*, cum de commoratione ad tempus adhibeantur verba παροικεῖν et παρεπιδημεῖν. Monent, multos Judæos externos religiosos tunc temporis sedem suam fixisse Hierosolymis, quod hoc modo facultatem haberent, perpetuo sacrificia Deo offerendi, quod alibi non liceret, festa solenniora celebrandi, et quod tunc Messiae adventus exspectaretur; οἱ κατοικοῦντες v. 9 explanant: *qui olim habitavimus*. Sed verbum κατοικεῖν generatim notat *habitare*, nec tantum de iis usurpatur, *qui sedem fixam aliquo loco habent*, ut infra v. 9, sed etiam de iis, *qui ad tempus aliquo loco commorantur, versantur*, ita ut sit idem quod ἐπιδημεῖν, ut in versione Alexandrina, 1 Regg. xvii. 20. Jerem. xlii. 15; xlix. 18. . . . Sic etiam hoc loco verbum κατοικεῖν adhibitum comparet, ut infra v. 14, et commutatur cum verbo ἐπιδημεῖν quod v. 10 positum deprehenditur.”—*Kuinoel*.

V. (page 64.)

Neander says, that in the ninth verse “those are spoken of who had their residence elsewhere, and were only sojourning for a short time in Jerusalem. And if we grant that the persons spoken of belonged to the number of the Jews who formerly dwelt in other lands, but for a long time past had settled in Jerusalem as the capital of the theocracy, then it is clear that by the ἐπιδημοῦντες Ἕρωμαῖοι we must understand such as for some special cause were just come to Jerusalem. Further, there were also those called proselytes, who were found in great numbers at Jerusalem, for some special occasion, and this could be no other than the Feast of Pentecost. Doubtless, by ‘all the dwellers at Jerusalem,’ v. 14, who are distinguished from the Jews, are meant all who were then living at Jerusalem, without determining whether they had resided there always, or only for a short time. The whole narrative, too, gives the impression that a greater multitude of persons than usual were then assembled at Jerusalem.”—“Planting and Training,” by Ryland. Vol. i. p. 5; or page 11 in the original.

VI. (page 64.)

“Plerique interpretes rectissime, opinor, statuunt, hoc numero comprehendi etiam tria millia c. ii. 41 memorata, cum parum probabile sit porticum Salomonis, vid. iii. 11, plus quam quinque millia hominum cepisse, et haud dubie etiam plures ex illis prius ad religionem Christianam adductis adfuerint; cum Lucas non scripserit, προσετέθησαν accesserunt quinque millia ut ii. 41; coll. v. 14, et usus sit verbo ἐγενήθη factus est, non ἦν, quod extat i. 15.”—*Kuinoel.*

VII. (page 65.)

In the present case Mr. Brown is not alone in restricting it to the males. Meyer and Olshausen limit it in the same way. But De Wette justly observes, that Luke’s reckoning in the forty-first verse of the second chapter, to which the enumeration before us refers, does not exclude the females, though the evangelist mentions men and women separately in the fourteenth verse of the fifth chapter. In Luke’s Gospel, xi. 31, the same word manifestly includes females.

VIII. (page 67.)

* “Ut Lat. sexcenti pro: *immensus et infinitus*, Luc. xii. 1; Act. xxi. 20; Heb. xii. 22; Jud. ver. 14; Apoc. v. 11, ix. 16.”—*Wahl*, *Clavis*. s. v.

IX. (page 67.)

“But we suppose our brethren know it’s controverted, whether Paul were at Jerusalem at this feast or no? and denied by some; and if we also should deny it, it will be hard for them to demonstrate it, till they can manifest how long after the days of unleavened bread Paul’s journey began, chap. xx. 6; how long he was going on foot to Assos, verse 13; and from thence to Mitylene, verse 14; how long he tarried at Trogyllium, verse 15; how long at Miletus before he sent for the elders at Ephesus, (some say of Asia,) verse 17; how long it was before they could come, verse 18; how long he continued there before he departed, verse 38; how long in passing thence to Coos, chap. xxi. 1; and from Rhodes to Patara, in the same verse; and how long he stayed there; and then how long from his setting forth from thence, till leaving Cyprus he sailed to Syria and landed

at Tyre, verses 2, 3; how long in passing from thence to Ptolemais, ver. 7; and how many those many days were that he stayed at Philip's house, ver. 10; and how long he was going thence to Jerusalem; and the very day he arrived there; none of which are in the story particularly expressed; and then adding the many days besides which are set down, chap. xx. 6, 7, 15; chap. xxi. 1, 4, 7, 8, show that all these amount not to above 42 days, for Paul had no more to finish his course in from Philippi to Jerusalem. However, the Brethren to make it probable he was there at Pentecost, lengthen the time and shorten the way, for these 42 days they make eight weeks, and make it about 40 miles from Tyre to Jerusalem; whereas, measuring in a direct line, it was 90; but that way which Paul went, coasting by Ptolemais and Cæsarea, it was very near 120."—The Answer of the Assembly of Divines to the Reasons of the Dissenting Brethren, p. 34. The above is a good specimen of the mode in which these divines raised difficulties in the way of any sentiment deemed unfavourable to their system.

X. (page 70.)

The phrase ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ, translated in our version *together*, occurs in Acts i. 15; ii. 1; ii. 44; iii. 1; iv. 26; Matt. xxii. 34; 1 Cor. xi. 20. In the last two places it unquestionably relates to *place*, in *unum eundemque locum*, says Wahl. In regard to the first four passages, the Westminster divines and others have contended that it does not necessarily relate to a convention of persons in one place. The reason adduced by them, is founded on Acts iv. 26, 27, "where ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ signifies not a convention of persons in one place (who can make it appear that ever Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were so assembled against Christ?) but only a consent of minds in one thing." Here the language of the verse, οἱ ἄρχοντες συνήχθησαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ is misunderstood or misrepresented. The ἄρχοντες, or rulers, are the members of the Sanhedrim, who literally met for consultation in the same place. It is not said in the passage, as these divines erroneously intimate, that Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were assembled against Christ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό. Hence their ingenuity has failed. We are inclined to explain the phrase in disputed passages by its obvious sense in the undisputed ones. In Acts i. 15, it appears to us to denote *in the same place, in the same house*, as it is understood by Rosenmüller, Kuinoel, and others. In Acts ii. 1, it must refer to *the same place*, else it were superfluous, *δμοθυμαδὸν* being joined with it.

“They were all with one accord in the same place.” In ii. 44 it appears to have no other meaning, although Kuinoel refers it here to *consent of minds*. The context expressly mentions the place where they met, *in the temple*, and Luther rightly translates it *bey einander*. The passage in iii. 1 has nothing to do with the present argument; and in iv. 26, it has been already shown that it denotes *one and the same place*. Thus the expression has one uniform sense in all the places where it appears.

XI. (page 72.)

“Και ἦσαν κ. τ. λ. not the apostles alone but all the Christians. This explanation is necessary on account of the word *ἅπαντες*, of ii. 1, 44, and of the antithesis to *λοιποί*, ver. 13. But by an usual negligence of style *αὐτοῖς* as well as *αὐτούς*, ver. 13, refers to the apostles. From this time the hall of Solomon (iii. 11) seems to have served them for a place of assembling.”—*De Wette: Exegetisches Handbuch*. “In verse 12, by the term *ἅπαντες* nothing else can be understood than the collective body of the believers as distinguished from the apostles. The *λοιποί*, distinguished from the *ἅπαντες*, must have been the persons who were not Christians, those subsequently designated as the *λαός*, who,” &c.—*Neander: “Planting and Training,”* vol. i. p. 43 (note).

XII. (page 72.)

“The entire multitude of the Christians, not the 120, chap. i. 5. That the Christian community in Jerusalem was divided into seven distinct churches, each of which assembled by itself and chose a deacon (Mosheim, Kuinoel), is untenable and improbable. The difficulty of apprehending how many thousand Christians could have assembled in one place is lessened by the probability of the fact that many of them had left Jerusalem, where they were present merely on account of the feast.”—*De Wette*.

XIII. (page 75.)

“Be that as it will, the matter of fact which they [the inspired penmen] tell us commands our faith; and if common sense and reason can contract such numbers into a single congregation, all their other writings, I am afraid, will feel the dangerous effect of

such an extraordinary sort of commenting upon them.”—*Sclater*: An Original Draught of the Primitive Church. Reprinted at Oxford, 1840. 12mo. p. 39.

XIV. (page 85.)

“The church of Ephesus is called *one flock*, in relation to those elders which were at *Ephesus*, *Acts* xx. 28, which were willed by *Paul* to feed that flock by doctrine, as he had done.”—Reasons against, and Answers to the Proofs from the instance of the Church of Ephesus, alleged by the Reverend Assembly; by the Dissenting Brethren, p. 84.

XV. (page 85.)

“There is no sufficient reason why our Brethren should restrain that feeding which the apostle there gives in charge, to feeding by doctrine only, which yet they do when they say that *they were willed by Paul* to feed that flock by doctrine as he had done. For, 1. It is well known that as in Homer’s, so in Scripture language, ποιμήν and ποιμαίνειν hold forth feeding by ruling, as well as teaching, *Matt.* ii. 6. 2. *Paul* fed them by ruling as well as teaching, and so must they, if they must do as he had done. 3. Some expressions, both in *Acts* xx. and *Rev.* ii., concern government as well as doctrine. And if our brethren cannot deny but both belonged to those elders which the apostle there spake to, what reason is there, that when he exhorted them to their duty, he should be thought to exhort them to one part of it, and say nothing to the other, especially when the word and expression he useth do, in their true signification, reach both?”—The Answer of the Assembly of Divines unto the Reasons of the Dissenting Brethren against the Instance of the Church of Ephesus, p. 96.

XVI. (page 86.)

“Whatever the sense is, or the thing was, yet consider whether the words in the place of the *Acts*, which our Brethren insist upon, do necessarily hold forth the relation of the whole flock, and that equally carried to all these elders as our Brethren affirm, for the word is not ὅλω τῷ ποιμνίῳ, which answers to our Brethren’s translation of it, *the whole flock*; which, to lay more weight on it, they repeat the

second time, and put in a parenthesis, the more to be taken notice of, but it's παντι τῷ ποιμνίῳ, and that word παντι, we doubt not but that they know doth not always necessarily infer a collective sense, that it must needs be read, ALL the flock, as our translators render it; or, the whole flock, as our Brethren would. But that it's taken oft-times distributively, as πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν, Matt. iv. 23; ix. 35; and πᾶσαν ἡμέραν, Acts v. 42; 1 Thessal. v. 18; and so if it be read, to every flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, it's taken *partitive*, and so all of them spoken together to feed their several flocks in their several divisions. And where's then that collective whole that our Brethren make account must necessarily be hence inferred? Suppose this should have been the meaning of Paul, to have said, I charge you all that you take heed to every flock, which severally God hath given you the oversight thereof: we ask whether that very sense might not have been expressed in these very words, προσέχετε παντι ποιμνίῳ ἐν ᾧ τὸ πνεῦμα ἅγιον ὑμᾶς ἔθετο ἐπισκόπους?

“Or, if it be said, it should then have been παντὶ ποιμνίῳ, without the article τῷ, which makes it *collective*, and not *distributive*, we say, it's not so necessary, nor always, especially when this τῷ is answered by the relative ἐν ᾧ following: the article is without this observation sometimes left out, when the sense is collective, as 1 Peter i. 24. Nay, in one clause left out, and in another taken in in the same sentence, and when spoken in the same sense, πάση τῇ μνείᾳ, καὶ πάση δεήσει, Philipp. i. 3.”—The Answer of the Assembly of Divines unto the Reasons of the Dissenting Brethren, &c. pp. 109, 110.

Bishop Middleton has laid down the following proposition respecting πᾶς.

“When πᾶς or ἅπας in the singular number is used to signify that the whole of the thing implied by the substantive with which it is joined is intended, the substantive has the article; but when it is employed to denote that every individual of that species is spoken of, then the substantive is anarthrous.”

So also Krüger, in his Griechische Sprachlehre (p. 105), “Wenn zu πᾶς, ἅπας in der Bedeutung jeder (ein singular) ein Substantiv hinzutritt, so wird der Artikel in der Regel nicht hinzugefügt.”

No valid instance of the violation of this rule has been discovered in the New Testament. The examples given by the Westminster divines are not exceptions to its operation. In 1 Peter i. 24, πάσα σὰρξ means every mortal, every human being, in respect of his perishable part. πάσα δόξα is distributive, to correspond with πάσα σὰρξ, every excellency belonging to πάσα σὰρξ. In Philipp. i. 3, we

have an instance in which the distributive and collective meanings coincide, ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ μνείᾳ ὑμῶν, in all the remembrance of you, in every act of remembering you. Here the insertion or omission of the article is a matter of indifference, as far as the sense is concerned.

In conformity with this rule πᾶν ποίμνιον denotes *every flock*, but πᾶν τὸ ποίμνιον, *the whole of the flock*. In Acts xx. 28, Luke uses the latter.

XVII. (page 91.)

“The place (1 Cor. xiv. 23) that speaks of the whole church coming together into one place, doth unavoidably prove (for aught we can discern) that Corinth had their meetings, and not by way of distribution into several congregations, but altogether in one congregation: and doth also answer your reason drawn from the variety of teachers and prophets in that church; for it is plain from that very chapter, that the church of Corinth had many prophets: *Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the rest judge*, verse 39; and many that spake with tongues, who must speak by course two or three, and one interpret, verse 27; yea every one generally had a psalm, or a doctrine, or a revelation, or an interpretation, verse 26; as indeed they came behind in no gift, 1 Cor. i.; and yet for all their variety of gifts and gifted men, prophets, interpreters, speakers with tongues, and the like, both they and the whole church also, even women and all, used to come together into one place.”—A modest and brotherly Answer to Mr. Charles Herie his Book against the Independency of Churches; by *Richard Mather*, teacher of the church at Dorchester; and *William Tompson*, pastor of the church at Braintree, in New England, p. 37. 8vo. London: 1644.

XVIII. (page 103.)

“To apply interchangeably, or as if they were convertible, to the true church what is spoken of the visible, or to the visible church what belongs only to the true, is a vice in exposition fraught with the gravest ill consequences. To what an extent of illogical reasoning, and of despotic interpretation, this fault has been carried by Romanist divines, is notorious. The sacred language of our blessed Lord, in addressing his true disciples, has been constantly outraged by popes and their sycophants, in justification of the last enormities of tyrannical pride and rage. The very same fault, though not

carried to the same excesses, has been fallen into by the intolerant of all communions—by high churchmen, of all creeds; and it is an error that appears in all the practical applications that are made of ‘church principles’ to Christian communities.”—*Taylor: Ancient Christianity, and the Doctrines of the Oxford Tracts for the Times*, p. 485, vol. i. 8vo. London: 1844.

XIX. (page 105.)

This is clearly and correctly laid down by John Locke. “A church then I take to be a voluntary society of men joining themselves together of their own accord, in order to the public worshipping of God in such a manner as they judge acceptable to him, and effectual to the salvation of their souls.

“I say it is a free and voluntary society. Nobody is born a member of any church; otherwise the religion of parents would descend unto children by the same right of inheritance as their temporal estates, and every one would hold his faith by the same tenure he does his lands; than which nothing can be imagined more absurd. Thus therefore that matter stands. No man, by nature, is bound unto any particular church or sect; but every one joins himself voluntarily to that society in which he believes he has found that profession and worship which is truly acceptable to God. The hope of salvation, as it was the only cause of his entrance into that communion, so it can be the only reason of his stay there. For if, afterwards, he discover anything either erroneous in the doctrine, or incongruous in the worship of that society to which he has joined himself, why should it not be as free for him to go out as it was to enter? No member of a religious society can be tied with any other bonds but what proceed from the certain expectation of eternal life. A church then is a society of members voluntarily uniting to this end.”—*A Letter concerning Toleration*, p. 13, vol. vi. of *Works* in ten volumes, 8vo. London: 1812.

XX. (page 113.)

“A true church destitute of elders is lacking in a circumstance most important for the edification of the body; and is called to humble and earnest waiting on the Lord to supply that which is lacking in them.”—*Essays and Correspondence, chiefly on Scriptural Subjects*. By the late John Walker. Works in 2 vols. 8vo. London: 1838. Vol. i. p. 243.

XXI. (page 115.)

Much confusion has been introduced into the subject of *προφητεία* and *προφήται* by Dr. Henderson and others, who arbitrarily and unphilosophically assign to the former one acceptation in 1 Cor. xi. 4, 5; xiv. 1, 3, 4, 5, 22, 24, 31, 32, 37, 39; and another signification in 1 Cor. xii. 10. Nice and definite distinctions such as these expositors seek after, were unknown during the earliest development of Christianity. The manifestations of *προφητεία* were various; and it is necessary to consult various passages for the purpose of obtaining a comprehensive and just view of the proper signification of the term. A correct idea of it may be gathered from the following places, which should be consulted at the same time, and compared: 1 Cor. xi. 4, 5; xii. 10, 11; xiv. 1, 3, 4, 5, 22, 24, 30, 31, 32, 37, 39; Ephes. iv. 11.—See *Rückert's* II. Beilage über die Charismen der Prophetie und des Glossenredens, appended to his Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, pp. 448, 449.

XXII. (page 118.)

“Apud Græc. fuerunt *ἐπίσκοποι* (*ἐπιμελεταί*) v. c. *ἀγώνων*, moderators certaminum, Pollux.—et apud Athenienses *ἐπισκόπων* nomine etiam ii veniebant, qui quotannis in urbes ipsorum civitati subjectas mittebantur, ut quid a quoque ageretur, inviserent. Suid.”—*Wilke*: Clavis, s. v.

XXIII. (page 123.)

“Tales vero qui sibi mente fingit *episcopos* hac prima ætate, quales hodierni volunt videri, homines opulentos, quibus multi cœtus in ampliori tractu subjecti sunt, foro quodam ei jurisdictione insignes, leges de sacris rebus libere, nulla populi et seniorum ratione habita, rogantes, variis juribus singularibus a ceteris doctoribus divinitus secretos, illi faciunt intelligendo, ut nihil intelligant, temereque miscent inter se, quæ maximopere distant.”—*Mosheim*: Institutiones Historiæ Christianæ Majores. Seculum I. p. 180. 4to. Helmstadi: 1739.

XXIV. (page 127.)

“If we make ‘Jezebel’ a literal woman, by making her the wife of the prelate of *Thyatira*, the symbolical or figurative sense of the

text is gone. And in order to be consistent, the crimes charged upon her must also be literal. Thus we shall not only have my lady of *Thyatira* an open adulteress, but the diocese a huge brothel under her inspection; where, by example and by precept, she initiates her husband's flock in the mysteries of lewdness and idolatry. A godly occupation for the spouse of a diocesan! Bad times, one would think, for an angel-bishop; and not the most flattering compliment to episcopal discipline."—Mason's *Essays on Episcopacy*, Works, vol. iii. p. 140.

XXV. (page 130.)

"Ye cannot compare an ordinary bishop with Timothy, who was an extraordinary man, foretold and promised to the church by many prophecies; and his name joined as collateral with St. Paul, in most of his apostolic epistles, even where he writes to the bishops of other churches, as those in Philippi. Nor can you prove out of the Scripture that Timothy was bishop of any particular place; so that wherein it is said in the third verse of the first Epistle, *As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus*, will be such a gloss to prove the constitution of a bishop by, as would not only not be so good as a Bourdeaux gloss, but scarce be received to varnish a vizard of Modena. All that can be gathered out of Holy Writ concerning Timothy is, that he was either an apostle or an apostle's extraordinary vicegerent, not confined to the charge of any place. The like may be said of Titus (as those words import in the fifth verse), that he was for that cause left in Crete, that he might supply, or proceed to set in order that which Saint Paul, in apostolic manner, had begun; for which he had his particular commission, as those words sound (*as I had appointed thee*). So that what he did in Crete cannot so much be thought the exercise of an ordinary function as the direction of an inspired mouth."—*Milton: Animadversions on the Remonstrant's Defence*.

XXVI. (page 131.)

"The function of an apostle differed widely from that of a bishop; and I therefore do not think that James, who was an apostle, was ever appointed to, or discharged, the episcopal office at Jerusalem. The government of the church in that city, it rather appears to me, was placed in the hands of its presbyters, but so as that nothing of moment could be done without the advice and authority of James;

the same sort of respectful deference being paid to his will as had formerly been manifested for that of the apostles at large.”—*Mosheim*: Commentaries on the Affairs of the Christians before the time of Constantine the Great. Translated by Vidal. Vol. i. p. 231 (note).

XXVII. (page 138.)

“Primum enim omnes docebant, et omnes baptizabant, quibuscumque diebus vel temporibus fuisset occasio; nec enim Philippus tempus quæsiuit, aut diem quo eunuchum baptizaret, neque jejunium, interposuit,” etc.—[Pseudo] Ambrosii (or Hilary of Rome) *Opp. in Ephes. iv. Tom. ii. col. 241.*

XXVIII. (page 140.)

Calvin explains it, *non parvo honore digni sunt*. So also Luther. See De Wette's note on the passage in his *Exegetisches Handbuch*.

XXIX. (page 140.)

“Ex omnibus autem iis rebus, quarum cura diaconis in quovis cœtu demandaretur, satis luculenter apparet, eos hujus saltem memoriæ non tam *religionis* quam *ecclesiæ* ministros fuisse, ideoque multum abhoruisse ab isto diaconorum genere, quale posthac in ecclesia institutum est. Verum quidem est, non nullos eorum et populum religionem docuisse, v. c. Stephanum, Philippum. Act. vi. 5, cfr. xvi. 8 seq. ex his iisdem locis facile perspicias, eos non tam diaconorum, quam *εὐαγγελιστῶν* nomine id fecisse. In quo nihil est, in quo offendas. Nempe in istis rerum Chr. initiis nondum tanta in ecclesia munerum secretio facta fuerat, ut nemini liceret utriusque, diaconi et evangelistæ, muneribus simul fungi. Apostoli tantum, quorum erat populum docere et instituere, religionisque præconium in longinquas terras suscipere, in ipsa jam diaconorum institutione id rogarunt, ut diaconi *τῶν τραπεζῶν* se jungerentur a diaconis *τοῦ λόγου*, quales se esse ipsi profitebantur. Ex quo simul patet, diaconos, quatenus hoc munere fungerentur, neutiquam religionis fuisse ministros, et, quod in hac re ne amittas, apostolorum in ecclesia auctoritatem illo ipso diaconorum munere valde auctam esse atque firmatam.”—*Lücke*: Commentatio de Ecclesia Christianorum Apostolica, p. 101. 4to. Göttingæ: 1813.

XXX. (page 143.)

“Touching widows, of whom some men are persuaded, that if such as St. Paul describeth may be gotten, we ought to retain them in the church for ever; certain mean services there were of attendance, as about women at the time of their baptism, about the bodies of the sick and dead, about the necessities of travellers, wayfaring men, and such like, wherein the church did commonly use them when need required, because they lived of the alms of the church, and were fittest for such purposes. St. Paul doth therefore, to avoid scandal, require that none but women well experienced and virtuously given, neither any under threescore years of age, should be admitted of that number. Widows were never in the church so highly esteemed as virgins. But seeing neither of them did or could receive ordination, to make them ecclesiastical persons were absurd.”—*Hooker: Eccles. Polit. Book v.*

XXXI. (page 148.)

Κλῆρος (τοῦ θεοῦ) κληρικοί, in opposition to the λαός, λαϊκοί. See Gieseler's Manual of Ecclesiastical History, § 53. 4th edition.

“And this all Christians ought to know, that the title of *clergy* St. Peter gave to all God's people, till Pope Higinus and the succeeding prelates took it from them, appropriating that name to themselves and their priests only; and condemning the rest of God's inheritance to an injurious and alienate condition of laity, they separated from them by local partitions in churches, through their gross ingorance and pride imitating the old temple, and excluded the members of Christ from the property of being members, the bearing of orderly and fit offices in the ecclesiastical body, as if they had meant to sew up that Jewish veil which Christ, by his death on the cross, rent in sunder.”—*Milton: The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelaty.*

“Ecclesiasticorum duntaxat bona fuere, qui hoc maxime sensu clerici, vel etiam holoclerici, ut qui sortem totam invasissent, rectius nominari poterant.”—*Defensio Secunda pro Populo Anglicano.*

XXXII. (page 149.)

“Fuerunt, qui in duas potissimum classes presbyteros primævæ ecclesiæ digererent, quarum altera *regentium* sive *laicorum*; *docentium* altera sive *clericorum* esset. Quorum sententia, quum jam dudum explosa sit VITRINGÆ, HUGONIS GROTII, BLONDELI, aliorum

hac de re inquisitionibus,—decies repetita haud placebunt.”—*Lücke: Commentatio, &c. p. 103.*

XXXIII. (page 150.)

“Repetam, quod jam sæpius dixi, me non negare, inter Presbyteros Ecclesiæ hos magis ac alios *ad Ecclesiam gubernandam* aptos fuisse, atque ideo curam Regiminis Ecclesiæ in se magis suscepisse ac institutionis; negare tamen, inde sequi, quod in primævâ Ecclesiâ quidam fuerit *ordo Presbyterorum Regentium*, ab eo *Docentium* distinctus.”—*Vitringa: De Synagoga, p. 510.*

XXXIV. (page 152.)

Neander’s History of the Planting and Training of the Christian Church, vol. i. p. 175; or p. 261 of the original.

“*Κυβερνήσεις*, gubernationes, the gift of government, in the plural number, because Paul, though employing the abstract term, has in his mind the different persons to whom it was imparted. Little as we are able to say with certainty respecting this gift, it is nevertheless always the most probable view that the writer intends to express the ability to rule the church as *πρεσβύτερος* or *ἐπίσκοπος*; and the hypothesis which regards him as speaking merely of the administration of the church’s temporalities (Theophyl. Lap. Calov. Semler) must be rejected as too narrow, as well as Mosheim’s opinion, that the word denotes the *διακρίσεις πνευμάτων* (v. 10) and other similar things.”—*Rückert.*

XXXV. (page 160.)

Bretschneider explains the verb thus: “absque notione suffragiorum: *eligo, constituo, creo*; Acts xiv. 23; 2 Cor. viii. 19.” He then refers to Philo, Josephus, and Ignatius ad Polyc. § 7. See his *Lexicon Manuale*, 3rd edition, s. v.

“I know the original word, here used for this apostolical ordination, is with great assurance insisted upon by the advocates for popular election, as including in it the votes or suffrages of the people, because it signifies ‘the stretching out, or holding up of the hand;’ which ceremony was commonly used by the ancient Greeks, to express such an action of the people in giving their voice or suffrage, either in courts of judicature, or at the choice of magistrates

amongst them. This is the main stress of all the glosses I meet with, to evade the clear evidence of this text for the apostles ordaining those elders by their own free 'choice' and authority alone. 'The clear evidence of the text,' I call it; for if there be any regular and grammatical construction of the holy penmen's words to be allowed at all, it must necessarily be this; that the same persons who held forth their hands for the act of ordination here, did, in the words immediately following, 'commend the people, then present, to the Lord, in whom they believed.' The word 'commended,' in the latter clause, and the persons who ordained, or stretched out their hands for orders, if we had rather translate it so, in the former, having as direct a reference to, and connexion with, one another, and appropriating the action of the one to the persons of the other, as entirely as it is possible for true syntax to do in any sentence whatsoever; and therefore unless the people 'commended themselves to the Lord,' in the latter clause, they could not be included amongst the persons that stretched out their hands for ordination in the former; for they that did one, as clearly as language can make it, did the other also."—*Sclater*, pp. 118, 119.

XXXVI. (page 165.)

"Ab ecclesia electionem recte fieri probatur ex Jure naturali. Nam naturaliter Cœtui unicuique permittitur ea procurare quæ ad conservationem sui sunt necessaria; in quo numero est functionum applicatio. Ita vectores multi jus habent eligendi gubernatorem navis suæ, viatores itineris ducem, populus liber regem."—*Grotius*: De Imp. sum. potest, p. 258.

XXXVII. (page 173.)

Milton's view of ordination is the same as that of Congregationalists. "As for ordination, what is it but the laying on of hands, an outward sign or symbol of admission? It creates nothing, it confers nothing; it is the inward calling of God that makes a minister, and his own painful study and diligence that manures and improves his ministerial gifts. In the primitive times, many, before ever they had received ordination from the apostles, had done the church noble service, as Apollos and others."—*Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence*.

XXXVIII. (page 175.)

“The main weight of the work lies in the solemnity of prayer.”—*Hooker*: Survey of the Sum of Church Discipline, Part ii. p. 74; 4to. London: 1648.

“Manus impositio, quid est aliud juxta canonem, nisi oratio super hominem?”—*Bucer* (Gersom) De Gubernatione Ecclesiæ, p. 337. 4to. Middleburgi Zelandorum: 1618.

XXXIX. (page 182.)

The controversy respecting this transaction, whether it was an *ordination* or not, is substantially a dispute about the meaning of the word. We are inclined to believe that it was not an *ordination*, in the usual ecclesiastical sense of the term, for the following reasons.

(a) Paul had been recognized as a Christian brother and an apostle before. On his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, “Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.” (Acts ix. 27, 28.) The commencement of his apostolic career, and the date of his apostolic commission, can only be referred to the transactions connected with the journey to Damascus. Thus in the first verse of the Epistle to the Galatians, where he asserts that his apostolic commission was given him by Christ, like that of the other apostles, the allusion is to the narrative in the ninth chapter of the Acts.

I am aware that a very different representation is given by Barrington and Benson, based, to a large extent, on arbitrary distinctions. But surely the words of Barnabas imply Paul’s apostleship. *Seeing the Lord*, and being addressed by him, explained in the light of Gal. i. 1, are true marks of an apostle; while the words, “he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem,” show the confidence reposed in his Christian character, and the intimacy to which he was admitted. It is not true, as some have said, that the brethren, on his second visit to the metropolis, still regarded him with suspicion and distrust, *in consequence of which* he was directed to depart quickly. *The hostility of the Jews* gave rise to this merciful interposition of the Lord on his behalf. Some perhaps may suppose, that the circumstances narrated respecting his third visit to Jerusalem are inconsistent with our opinion (Gal. ii. 9); but they

are quite in harmony with it. Peter, James, and John were in doubts as to the perfect propriety of preaching the gospel fully and freely to the Gentiles; not as to the general commission of Paul. Now, however, they were induced, by the accounts of the success which had attended the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles, to give him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, as labourers in the great Gentile field; while *they* continued to preach to the Jews.

(b) He had preached for some time to the Gentiles. (Acts ix. 30, 31.) He was at Tarsus, and probably other parts of Cilicia, for two years at least. These years, says Neander, were not spent "in inactivity; for by his labours the gospel was spread among both Jews and Gentiles in Tarsus and throughout Cilicia. There is good reason for believing that to him the Gentile churches, which in a short time we find in Cilicia, owed their origin." After this he had been taken by Barnabas to Antioch, where he laboured for a year, chiefly among the Gentiles. (Acts xi. 26.)

(c) He had the extraordinary qualifications of an apostle from the time of his conversion. That he received at his ordination, "for the first time, those additional gifts and miraculous powers by which he was fully prepared for his high and holy calling,"* is undoubtedly incorrect. None but apostles could impart extraordinary gifts. Prophets and teachers were unable to do so; nor is it even hinted that the Holy Ghost conferred on him at the time additional gifts. Equally unfounded is Benson's hypothesis, that the apostle received additional spiritual gifts, *such as constituted him an apostle*, for the first time, *at his second visit to Jerusalem*, after his conversion, when he saw the Lord in a vision, Acts xxii. 17, and 2 Cor. xii. 1, 2. Granting the identity of the times and visions in these two passages, there is nothing favourable to the supposition of his then receiving additional extraordinary gifts relating chiefly to the idolatrous Gentiles.

Those who labour to prove that the transaction was a proper ordination, or that Paul now entered for the first time on his apostolic work, having been publicly set apart to it by men, endeavour to depreciate his previous labours in the interval between his conversion and first missionary journey. Benson calls him *a superior prophet* up to the time in question. He asserts also, that Paul had previously preached to the Jews and proselyted Gentiles alone. But this is contradicted by facts; for both at Tarsus and Antioch he

* Presbytery and not Prelacy the Scriptural and Primitive Polity. By Thomas Smyth, p. 144. 8vo. Glasgow: 1844.

must have preached to the heathen. That he taught on Gentile ground for nearly ten years, confining himself wholly to *the Jews and devout Gentiles*, is an assumption equally gratuitous and improbable. Then, again, we are gravely informed that he did not baptize, or administer the Lord's supper, or engage in any other ecclesiastical function besides preaching!* We grant Dr. Smyth that this is probable enough, because Paul had more important work to perform. Christ sent him not to baptize, but to preach the gospel. Men, far inferior, could baptize, and preside at the Lord's supper. If the insinuation however be, that he was not *qualified* to baptize and administer the supper, the idea is most anti-scriptural. Still farther; Paul did not previously "exercise official power" in ordaining elders in every city, till after ordination at Antioch. Here again, the *argumentum a silentio* is employed. Though the fact be admitted as true, it has not the least bearing on the point before us. He was more profitably employed in preaching than in ordaining elders. The one is a small matter in which we utterly deny "the exercise of official power;" the other was a high and paramount duty. "But Saul is not called an apostle till after the transaction which we are considering." This proves nothing. He may *have been* an apostle without being denominated so. We are seeking after *things*, not *names*.

The puerility of the considerations now glanced at is apparent. In fact they do not deserve mention, much less refutation. We had thought Benson and Barrington's lucubrations on the subject were long since forgotten, till they were found, revived, and repeated in the book of this American Presbyterian, with a few additional particulars. We affirm that Paul was an apostle before this solemn separation to a peculiar sphere of labour, but that his apostolic pre-eminence had till then developed itself imperfectly. He *had been* endowed with all the supernatural gifts belonging to an apostle, receiving no additional charisms at that time. He had preached at Tarsus and Antioch to the Gentiles, unfolding those peculiar excellences which raised him soon after above all the apostles. He was a prophet and teacher; but he was an apostle too.

Presbyterians who contend that this was an *ordination* should, in my opinion, rather term it an *installation*, a designation applied by them to the entrance of a minister on a new charge. Why they dispense with *imposition of hands* on such occasions we are unable to explain. Is it because *the indelible character* has been received before?

The sacred narrative itself intimates that Paul and Barnabas were

* Presbytery and not Prelacy, p. 143.

set apart to a particular work, when in noticing their return we find the words, "they sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled." (Acts xiv. 26.) The work was now completed. *They had accomplished or fulfilled it.* The verb *πληρώω* means nothing else, even in the Epistle to the Romans, xv. 19, a passage in which we are gravely told the verb does not signify to *finish*. What it *does* mean, if not to *complete* or *fulfil*, it is impossible to say. Prof. Stuart explains it and the parallel in Coloss. i. 25, *to accomplish or complete the declaration of the divine doctrine*, which agrees with Wahl's exposition, *perago, ad finem perduco*.

XL. (page 185.)

The interpretation of the word *χάρισμα*, *gift* or *charism*, given in the text, is the only one that appears to us tenable. It may be desirable, however, to allude to another for the sake of the argument respecting the nature of ordination, built on it. The ministers of the Provincial Assembly of London interpret it, "*office of the ministry.*" Ordination, in their view, is that which gives the ministerial office. "That this is so, appears from 2 Tim. i. 6: *Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands*; and by 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.* By laying on [of hands] is meant the whole work of ordination. And by *gift* is meant *docendi officium*, the office of the ministry, and the power and authority conferred thereby upon him. The Greek word *χάρισμα* is often taken, not only for the grace by which we are fitted for an office, but for an office unto which men are, through grace, fitted. Thus it is taken, Ephes. iv. 8, Rom. xii. 6. And thus it is here to be taken. Paul, by ordination, did not only declare Timothy to be an officer, and confirm him in that office which he had before collated upon him by the choice of the people; but he, together with the presbytery, gave him the gift or office of the ministry."

Theodoret and Theophylact seem to assign the same signification to *χάρισμα*. There can be little doubt however of its incorrectness. "Neglect not the office of the ministry which is in thee," would be a most awkward mode of expression, unworthy of an apostle. But if the gift mean a peculiar qualification he possessed for teaching and ruling, the language is natural. We believe that it was one of those charisms bestowed by the apostle, which were confined to the

primitive age. The sense is well given by De Wette.—*Die Gabe für des Lehr—und vorsteher—Amt, nicht das Lehramt selbst, the gift for the office of instructor and presidency, not the office of instruction itself.* In like manner Luther translates it *Die Gabe, the gift, not das Amt, the office.*

The two passages, so far from being friendly, are fatal to the opinion of those who hold that *the essence* of the ministerial appointment consists in ordination; for in their view ordinary officers make an extraordinary officer—the presbytery communicates something which was to extend its influence beyond the sphere of that presbytery itself—which is contrary to sound reason.

XLI. (page 187.)

“The church of Antioch was not yet arrived at that maturity, that it should produce teachers that were not endowed with the Holy Ghost and the gift of prophecy; and the phrase *κατὰ τὴν ὁρσάν ἐκκλησίαν* seems to intimate some such thing,—viz. that, according to the state of the church then being in that place, there were, nay it was necessary there should be, prophetic teachers,—because there was not any, who, by the study of the Scriptures, was become fit for that office.”—*Lightfoot* on Acts xiii. 1.

XLII. (page 187.)

“It is neither said nor implied that Lucius, or Simeon, or Manaen, were presbyters. They are not called so; there is not a hint in the history to lead us to form even a conjecture that they were so. All that the narrative records is, that ‘there were in the church certain prophets and teachers.’ The latter of these terms proves nothing as to the rank of the persons to whom it is applied, for it is given to Christ, to the apostles, to all ministers; and as to the former, we know, from other portions of the New Testament, that the prophets of the early church were a class of individuals endowed with supernatural gifts, and, in the enumeration of church offices, holding a place second to the apostles themselves. And this office is admitted by the Presbyterian standards to have been ‘extraordinary, and to have ceased,’ and in those standards is distinguished from pastors, who are styled ‘the ordinary and perpetual church officers.’ So that we have upon the face of the narrative evidence that the ordainers in this instance were ministers of a class extraordinary

and transient; and we have no evidence that they were mere presbyters. Until that point, which as yet rests upon unsustained assertion, be supported, yea established by undeniable proof, we cannot admit this to be a presbyterial ordination, for we know not that the ordainers were presbyters.”—*Boyd*: Episcopacy and Presbytery, p. 170.

XLIII. (page 191.)

“For that there were no church ministers of any denomination at that time settled there, is highly agreeable to the sacred account of it; and then, it is clear, he must have ordained in that island, without any such presbytery to assist in it; for to that very purpose was he left there.”—*Sclater*, p. 247.

XLIV. (page 191.)

“Nihil refert sive ab omnibus præsentibus ministris, sive ab uno, omnium nomine, imponatur manus.”—*Zanchius*: De Stat. Pec. et Legal. in 4. precept.

XLV. (page 195.)

“The principle, that it is the right and duty of the church which elects a minister, to ordain him, is thought to hold good, or, in other words, to be generally admitted at the present day.”—*Upham's Ratio Disciplinæ*, p. 114.

XLVI. (page 195.)

“The [Congregational] churches, at the present time, do not ordain directly of themselves, but indirectly through the agency of the pastors and delegates of the neighbouring churches. The practice [in America] is settled; and a deviation from it, by recurring to the ancient method, which evidently originated in part, in the peculiar circumstances of the times, would be considered highly objectionable.”—*Upham's Ratio Disciplinæ*, p. 114.

In the early New England churches, the act of ordination was performed by two or more brethren in the name of the church, laying their hands on the head of the pastor elect, after which, prayer was offered by one of the elders present. “Can any authen-

tic instance," asks Leonard Bacon, "be found, of a primitive New England ordination performed by the officers of neighbouring churches?" See "Thirteen Historical Discourses," &c. by L. Bacon. Appendix ii. 8vo. New Haven: 1839.

XLVII. (page 196.)

"Since there are some texts in the New Testament, wherein single persons, either as apostles, as Paul and Barnabas, ordained ministers in the churches; or evangelists, as Timothy and Titus; and since the other missions or ordinations are intimated to be performed by several persons, viz. prophets, teachers, elders, or a presbytery, as in Acts xiii. 1, and 1 Tim. iv. 14; since there is sometimes mention made of the imposition of hands in the mission of a minister, and sometimes no mention of it; and since it is evident that in some cases popular ordinations are and must be valid, without any bishop or elder; I think none of these differences should be made a matter of violent contest among Christians; nor ought any hard words to be pronounced against each other by those of the Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Independent way."—*Watts: The Rational Foundation of a Christian Church. Works, vol. v. pp. 688, 9. 4to. London: 1810.*

XLVIII. (page 196.)

"*Ordination therefore presupposeth an officer constituted, doth not constitute; therefore it's not an act of power but order: therefore those who have not the power of office may put it forth; therefore though it be most comely that those of the same congregations should exercise it, yet the elders also of other congregations may be invited hereunto and interested in the exercise of it in another church, where they have no power, and upon a person who hath more power in the place than themselves.*"—*Thomas Hooker, p. 59, part ii.*

"I would inquire," says *Samuel Mather*, "of the patrons of ordination by officers whether even good and meet officers belonging to other churches may claim the power of ordaining elders over churches to which they are not related? Though there may be very desirable officers, and in every respect well qualified, near at hand; nevertheless it does not appear, that even these have authority or may assume to themselves the power of ordaining elders to other churches, of which they are neither members nor officers; unless

those particular churches, in which the elders are to be ordained, request their presence and assistance. For ordinary officers are not like the apostles, who might feed all the flock of our SAVIOUR; but there is one particular flock of which, and of which alone, they are to take the oversight."—Apology for the Liberties of the Churches in New England, pp. 59, 60. 8vo. Boston: 1738.

XLIX. (page 198.)

"Ubi est vera ecclesia, ibi esse necesse est jus eligendi et ordinandi ministros."—*Melancthon*.

"That which is not an act of *power* but *order*, the church may do in an orderly way."—*Hooker*, (Thomas,) p. 78, part ii.

L. (page 202.)

This is happily expressed by Dr. *Ames*: "Electionis adjunctum consequens et consummans est ordinatio, quæ nihil aliud est, quam solemnis quædam introductio ministri jam electi in ipsius functionis liberam executionem."

LI. (page 204.)

The ministers of the Provincial Assembly of London have confidently applied a passage to *ordination*, which we have not ventured to introduce into our list, viz. Epistle to Romans x. 15. As we despair of doing justice to the ratiocination by which the words in question are shown to refer specifically to *ordination*, we shall allow them to speak in their own language: "This sending is an authoritative mission to preach the word as criers and heralds, (for so *κηρύσσειν* signifies,) and also as ambassadors, sent forth by their prince with their letters missive, and credentials, which appears by the words immediately following, 'As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!' Hence it is that some divines do very well define ordination to be *missio potestativa*, a sending of a man forth with power and authority to preach and administer the sacraments. It is not an installing of a man into an office to which he hath right before, but it is a giving of him his commission and authority. And of this kind of sending is this text to be understood. That it cannot be understood of providential sending we have formerly proved; nor

of a sending by the election of the people, for the people cannot be said to be sent to themselves, but ministers are said to be sent to them. And we now further add, that it cannot be understood only of an extraordinary mission by God, such as the apostles had, which was to cease with the apostles, but it must be understood of such an authoritative sending which was to continue to the end of the world. For the apostle in that climax of his, makes it as necessary and perpetual as calling upon the name of the Lord, as believing and hearing the word. For thus the apostle affirmeth, That as calling upon the name of the Lord is perpetually necessary to salvation, so is the calling upon the name of the Lord, and so is hearing of the word necessary to believing, so is preaching of the word to hearing, and so is ordination and mission necessary to the orderly preaching of the word. And therefore we conclude that by sending is meant sending by *ordination*, and that this ordination is a deputation of a man to an ecclesiastical function with power and authority to perform the same, and that it is to last as long as preaching, believing, and prayer, which is to the end of the world." In refutation of this elaborate argument, we appeal to the common sense of the honest reader. The verb *send*, which is of general signification, is forced to speak of nothing else than *the technical act* which these interpreters mean by *ordination*. It is exceedingly probable that the apostle Paul, when writing the passage, was not half so clear-headed in his notion of *the precise* meaning belonging to it, as these *logical* divines.

LII. (page 211.)

"They who will take the title of God's ambassadors to themselves, will as little scruple, as we see in fact they do not, to apply those texts to themselves which belong only to Christ and the apostles. And one would think that in a Protestant country, where none has any authority to impose his dictates on another, it had not been in the least criminal to own so much reverence for Christ and his apostles, as to make their being God's ambassadors a distinguishing character between them and our ordinary preachers. They who would have this thought criminal, can with very little grace object to the popish priests their claiming more power and authority than belongs to their share: who indeed say, That if the persons of the ambassadors of earthly kings are so sacred as to be exempt from the laws of the country where they reside; with how much more reason ought the ambassadors of the great King of heaven and earth to have those privileges, as well as infinitely greater honour, than the

representatives of an earthly prince? And I do not see how this can be deny'd 'em, if they are ambassadors in the proper and real sense of the word."—Defence of the Rights of the Christian Church, (by Dr. *Tindal*,) pp. 97, 98. 8vo. London: 1709.

"A clergyman, 'tis said, is God's ambassador, therefore the people neither collective nor representative can make me, because they have no power to send ambassadors for heaven. But taking ambassadors in that sense, it will, I'm afraid, prove there are now no clergymen; since they who pretend to the sole power of making 'em, can as little send an ambassador from God, who alone chooses his own ambassadors.

"Christ and his apostles, as they were commissioned by God, so they brought their credentials with 'em, visible to mankind, viz., the power of working miracles: But what credential or what mission can these gentlemen pretend to? or what gospel never before known to the world, are they to discover? Are they not, at the best, only commentators, note-makers, or sermon-makers on those doctrines which the ambassadors of God *once delivered to the saints*? which many of 'em have rendered by their absurd glosses, and false comments, so perplexed and intricate, that only a new commission from heaven seems able to set 'em in their due light; yet they do not scruple to call their pulpit-speeches, *the word of God*, and apply those texts to themselves, which belong only to the ambassadors of God."—The Rights of the Christian Church asserted, p. 78, chap. ii. § 14. 8vo. London: 1706.

LIII. (page 212.)

See the seventeenth chapter of his treatise *De Baptismo*, of which these words are a condensation and paraphrase made by Neander, rather than a literal translation.—Comp. *Neander's Kirchengesch.* vol. i. pp. 301, 302. First edition. Hamburg: 1825.

LIV. (page 224.)

"The same clerical leaven, under another name, appears in the churches alluded to, from their notion that while a church, destitute of elders, is precluded from observing the Lord's supper, yet—if visited by the elders of another church—they may partake of it. Herein they forget what I believe in most other cases they assert, that scriptural elders have no such travelling character brought with

them wherever they go, as the *clergy* arrogate: but the elders of one church, coming to another, appear in the latter—not as any elders of it, but simply brethren.”—*Walker*: Remains, vol. i. p. 344.

LV. (page 225.)

“When a pastor died, or was removed, the church was not obliged to desist from commemorating the Lord’s death any more than from receiving or excluding members; and that it was as lawful for them to appoint a deacon, or any senior member, to preside in the one case, as in the other.”—*Andrew Fuller*: Works, vol. v. p. 285.

LVI. (page 225.)

Dr. M’Kerrow thinks that the Corinthian church had elders at the time, who are addressed as well as the members, because it is stated in the Acts of the Apostles, that Paul and Barnabas “ordained them elders in every church.” But the words quoted imply no more than that they provided for the appointment of elders in the different churches which they gathered or visited on their first missionary journey; whereas Corinth was not visited till afterwards. It is straining the terms too far, to suppose that Paul ordained elders over the churches under all the circumstances belonging to them. No hint is given of the existence of elders in the Corinthian church, where spiritual gifts were so abundant. Even were it granted that there were elders in that church when Paul wrote the first epistle, the writer alluded to has given a notable specimen of one-sided interpretation which would be highly amusing, were it not an exhibition of the partisan perverting the sacred word: after quoting the words of the apostle, “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 the Lord Jesus,” he asks, “By whom are we to suppose this sentence to be carried into effect, in the presence of the congregation? By none other than the office-bearers of the church. Some one or other of those who were over them in the Lord, would publicly intimate the sentence in the midst of the assembled people—and would declare the offending individual cut off from the communion of the church, agreeably to the command given by the apostle.” “There is certainly,” continues the writer, “nothing that can be regarded as furnishing a precedent

for acts of government being performed by the people. For the members of the church of Corinth bore no further part in the administration of the discipline that is here described than is borne by the members of any Presbyterian congregation, when they are assembled to witness the administration of a public rebuke to an offending individual, who has been previously dealt with by the session, and who has been suspended by them from the enjoyment of his privileges, as a member of the church. In the one case as well as in the other, the people are assembled to witness the sentence being carried into effect, agreeably to the apostolic injunction—‘Them that sin rebuke before all, that others may fear.’ The people further are to be considered as acquiescing in the sentence pronounced upon their offending brother, and as giving him their sympathy and their prayers, &c.”—The Office of the Ruling Elder in the Christian Church, by the Rev. John M’Kerrow, D.D., pp. 34, 35. 12mo. Edinburgh: 1846. All comment on this sort of interpretation is superfluous.

LVII. (page 226.)

“What they conceive to be in that ordinance especially—either in the blessing and giving thanks which accompanies it, or in the distribution of the bread and wine among the disciples, which makes the presence of elders more necessary in it, than in praise, or prayer, or reading, or mutual exhortation, &c., it is hard to say. But this is certain, that one of the main pillars of *clerical* assumption is the idea that men—possessing a certain function, distinct from the mass of the disciples—are necessary to *administer* the supper of the Lord.”—*Walker*: Remains, vol. i. p. 343.

LVIII. (page 226.)

“Neither did I recollect that any minister is said to have administered the Lord’s supper, unless we consider our Saviour as sustaining that character at the time of its institution; and this silence of the Scriptures concerning the administrator, appeared to me to prove that it was a matter of indifference.”—*Andrew Fuller*: Works, vol. v. p. 285.

“We nowhere read in Scripture of the Lord’s supper being distributed to the first Christians by an appointed minister; we are only told that they partook of it in common, and that frequently, and in private houses. Acts ii. 42. I know no reason, therefore, why

ministers refuse to permit the celebration of the Lord's supper, except where they themselves are allowed to administer it; for if it be alleged that Christ gave the bread and wine to his disciples, it may be replied, first, that we nowhere read of his giving them to each individually—and, secondly, that he was then acting in the character, not of a minister, but of the founder of a new institution."—*John Milton: Treatise on Christian Doctrine*, translated by Sumner, pp. 445, 6. 4to. Cambridge: 1825.

LIX. (page 227.)

“It is the opinion of some that our Saviour's rule in Matthew is to be followed *in all cases*, public as well as private; and this is the practice of some churches. But in the view of others, this is a misapplication of the rule. For, 1. It does not appear to consist with the obvious sense of the passage. The offence there contemplated is a personal one: ‘If thy brother trespass *against thee*.’ If it be said that every offence may be assumed and treated as a personal one, inasmuch as it is a breach of a mutual and common covenant, then it is personal to all the members, and all ought to take the steps required; which is nowhere practised, and would be absurd. 2. The rule, literally followed, does not appear to be adapted to satisfy the ends of discipline, in public cases. Take, for example, such as are mentioned by Paul: ‘If any man that is called a brother be a *fornicator, a railer, a drunkard*,’ &c. A member goes to such an one and tells him his fault in private, following the rule of Christ. And suppose he confesses and repents. Is the wounded honour of religion healed in this private way? Is there a salutary impression made upon the church? Is the offender himself deterred, by such easy terms, from a repetition of his sin? No, not at all. An open, scandalous iniquity, blown far and wide by fame, calls for something more than private auricular confession. ‘Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear.’ I am aware that it is said that the visiting brother may require a public confession, as the satisfaction he seeks; and so the public ends of discipline will be secured. But still this is not the rule. It does not say, you shall go to your brother in private and require a public confession; but it says, if he hear you in private, you are to regard the thing as settled.

Our Saviour evidently refers to a strictly personal and private affair, such as is often occurring between man and man, and of which the world takes no notice.”—*Mitchell: Guide to the Principles*

and Practice of the Congregational Churches of New England, pp. 108, 9. 18mo. Northampton: 1838.*

LX. (page 233.)

“Is it likely Christ would send his lambs and sheep for right and healing unto wolves and tigers? Both their Sanhedrim and most of their synagogues were no better. And if here and there some elders of their synagogues were better affected, yet how may it appear that so it was where any of themselves dwelt? And if that might appear too, yet had not the Jews already agreed, ‘That if any man did confess Christ, he should be cast out of the synagogues?’ John ix. 22.”
—Cotton on the Keyes, p. 40.

LXI. (page 234.)

“Concio, *i. e.* corpus Christianorum in certo loco congregatorum, Matt. xviii. 17. (Ex h. l. patet, primum non cogitandum esse de Judæorum cœtu. Sermo enim est de litibus inter τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ortis, quas Judæi non curarint, et Matthæus respexit ad rationes Christianorum, quæ condita jam ecclesia et introducto Christianorum baptismo, c. xxviii. 19, esse cœperant. . . . Deinde non intelligi nominis delationem speciatim ad collegium presbyterorum puniendi causa factam, sed eam, quæ adversario quærat *publicam* reprehensionem et *admonitionem*. Denique cum publica admonitio, h. l. distinguatur a *privata*, sequitur ecclesiam eo commemorari quia congregatio sit plurium, adeo, ut, si illa admonitio vel maxime per presbyteros facta fuerit, tamen ecclesiæ nomine non significatur collegium presbyterorum, per se spectatum, sed presbyteri simul cum reliquis in loco sacro congregati.”)—*Wilke*. See *Clavis*, s. v.

LXII. (page 235.)

“Some would understand the presbytery by the expression ὑπὸ τῶν πλειόνων, but they have been long ago confronted with the fact that this meaning neither belongs to the word nor agrees with the constitution of the primitive church. It must therefore always mean *the majority*, and nothing else.”—*Rückert*.

LXIII. (page 238.)

The reader may compare with this interpretation of the phrase that which is given by Dr. Arnold.

“The complete and proper notion of the kingdom of God is a state in which God is owned as king, and obeyed by his people. Heaven, therefore, is the kingdom of God in the fullest sense; for there God reigns over willing subjects, and his will is theirs also. In the heart of every good Christian, again, the kingdom of God exists, truly, though imperfectly; for a good Christian not only calls, but really feels Christ to be his master;—the purpose of his heart is to offer him an entire and willing obedience;—and whatever of rebellion there may be in his thoughts, words, and actions, is earnestly repented of, and gradually more and more subdued. In a third sense, but a far lower one, and greatly corrupted from the gracious design of its Heavenly Founder, the whole company of professing Christians is called in Scripture the kingdom of Heaven, or of God. It is called so because every Christian nominally acknowledges God to be his King, and has promised to render him true obedience. It is called so further, because God promised to be present with the church of Christ, in an especial manner, to the end of the world; that they should be his people, and he would be their God, inasmuch as he would dwell in them by his Spirit, enlightening their minds and purifying their hearts into a resemblance to himself. But this kingdom of God on earth, which was proclaimed after the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, and which should have been as truly deserving of the name of the kingdom of God in heaven, has from its first beginning to this very hour belied its title by its practice.*

The accomplished author appears to me to be somewhat confused in regard to the third sense given. The assertion, that Scripture, *i. e.* the Holy Spirit, calls the whole company of professing Christians, of whom a large proportion are mere nominal professors, the kingdom of heaven, *in a sense greatly corrupted from the gracious design of its Heavenly Founder*, is singularly hazardous. The Holy Spirit does not thus lower his phraseology to suit the sinful imperfections of those living under the gospel. In fact, the third sense has no existence in the New Testament. It is simply what has been called *the visible church*, but improperly so called. All the parables where it is thought to be so employed admit of another interpretation. None belong to *the kingdom of God* but *true Christians*, although in the world they are externally mixed with nominal professors.

* Sermon xvi. vol. i. pp. 184, 5. Fifth edition. London: 1845.

LXIV. (page 240.)

When men began to identify *their* church—the visible church to which they belonged—with the true, invisible church, they lost sight of the real sense. They committed an error which did incalculable injury to the truth.

LXV. (page 242.)

“In an organic church and right administration all church acts proceed after the manner of a mixed administration, so as no church act can be consummated or perfected without the consent of both.”
—Cambridge Platform, chapter x. § 11.

LXVI. (page 247.)

Dr. Dick, anxious to keep the brethren composing the church in their proper place, supposes the determination in question to have proceeded from the *prophets and teachers* at Antioch. “Zeal for the pretended authority of the church in its collective capacity is carried to excess, when an apostle and a prophet are represented as receiving and executing its commands. We know that there were in Antioch prophets and teachers, with whom Paul and Barnabas associated in their ordinary ministrations: and it is consonant to all our (*i. e.* Presbyterian) ideas of propriety and order, to conceive the determination to have been their deed. They alone were concerned by the express command of the Spirit, in the separation of Paul and Barnabas to the work of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, and no satisfactory reason can be given for imagining that their authority was inadequate to the present purpose, or that it was suspended to make way for the interference of the people.”* How unfortunate is it to be haunted with the idea of *commands, authority, &c.*! The writer of the Acts, however, who has simply put the verb *ἐταξάν* without a nominative, does not seem to have been so jealous of popular interference in ecclesiastical affairs. It is of no consequence to inquire who made the determination, whether the church of Antioch generally, including the prophets and teachers of whom Dick speaks, *provided they superintended the church at that place at the time in question*, or the prophets and teachers alone.

* Lectures on the Acts of the Apostles, pp. 363, 4. 8vo. London: 1805.

LXVII. (page 256.)

The reading adopted by Lachmann, viz., οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἀδελφοί, (verse 23,) has some bearing on the point before us. Meyer thinks that the omission of καὶ arose from a hierarchical tendency to exclude laymen from the meeting. Neander however remarks: "We can hardly deduce its origin from hierarchical influences which would have excluded the church from such consultations and decisions; its antiquity is too great, for we find it in Irenæus iii. 12, 14. It is also equally against the hierarchical spirit for the apostles and presbyters to write to the brethren as brethren. And it may be easily explained how it happened that since, from the introductory words of Luke, they expected an epistle from the whole church, it seemed necessary to distinguish the brethren from the apostles and presbyters, and hence probably the words καὶ οἱ were inserted. Yet since in Acts xv. 22, the whole church is mentioned in connexion with the apostles and presbyters, we might expect in the epistle itself a distinct reference to the church; the ἐξ ἡμῶν also of verse 24, (for these anonymous complainers could hardly belong to the presbyters of the church,) appears to assume this. The first καὶ οἱ, verse 23, must have occasioned the omission of the second."* On the whole, there is not sufficient proof of the originality of the adopted reading, though it is received into the text by Tischendorf also. De Wette and Scholz reject it.

LXVIII. (page 263.)

"Of councils, properly so called," says *John Milton*, "I find no trace in Scripture; for the decision recorded Acts xv. 2, &c., is rather to be considered as an oracular declaration obtained from the inspired apostles, to whom recourse was had in a doubtful matter as to the supreme authority on controverted points, while there was as yet no written word. This was very different from a modern council composed of bishops or elders, who have no gift of inspiration more than other men; whose authority is not, like that of the apostles, co-ordinate with the Scriptures; who are equally liable to error with their brethren, insomuch that they cannot pronounce with certainty, like the apostles, Acts xv. 28, *it hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us*; who nevertheless assume the right of imposing laws on the churches, and require the rest of mankind to obey their mandates; forgetting that at the assembly in Jerusalem

the whole multitude of believers were present, and gave their voices : Acts xxii. 23."—Treatise on Christian Doctrine translated by Sumner, pp. 493, 4.

LXIX. (page 271.)

Consociations, which are chiefly confined to Connecticut, have given rise to much difference of opinion among American Congregationalists. Those who wish to see the arguments advanced in their favour may consult *Mitchell's* note in his Guide to the Principles and Practice of the Congregational Churches of New England. (p. 229, &c.) The principal objections to them are found in *Upham's* Ratio Disciplinæ, § 162 ; and in *Punchard*, p. 107, etc.

LXX. (page 275.)

Perpetual Government of Christ's Church, pp. 131, 2.

"Amongst all the different passages," says *Mosheim*, "which *Bilson* cites to prove this, (that deacons are included under the denomination of presbyters,) there is not a single one that can be said to yield him even a moderate degree of support."—Commentaries, translated by *Vidal*. Vol. i. p. 209, note.

LXXI. (page 278.)

If *Baur's* explanation were correct, the original in Titus i. 5, should have been *καταστήσης κατὰ πόλιν πρεσβύτερον*, instead of *πρεσβυτέρους* ; and in Acts xiv. 23, we should have found *πρεσβύτερον κατ' ἐκκλησίαν*, instead of *πρεσβυτέρους* ; for *κατὰ πόλιν* cannot be equivalent to *κατὰ πόλεις* as *Salmasius* supposes ; nor *κατ' ἐκκλησίαν* to *κατ' ἐκκλησίας*. *Κατὰ πόλιν* must mean *oppidatim* not *per oppida* ; and *κατ' ἐκκλησίαν* in each church singly, not in the churches.—See *Rothe's* Anfänge, pp. 182, 3.

LXXII. (page 293.)

"That the apostles committed their power over these presbyters, whom they set over particular churches, to one single person, is utterly untrue, and contrary to plain matter of fact. . . . And if we look over the churches they planted, we find no single person vested with any stated authority over the presbyters they had settled. There appears no such single person as a stated governor

over the presbyter-bishops of Ephesus. Nor over the bishops settled with the deacons at Philippi. Nor over the presbyters whom St. Peter urges to feed the flock of God. And therefore St. Jerome justly makes it the character of the apostolic age, that the churches were then governed by the common council of presbyters. So does St. Clement."—*Boyse*: A Clear Account of the Ancient Episcopacy, etc. p. 304. 8vo. London: 1712.

LXXIII. (page 295.)

"Apostolus perspicue docet eosdem esse presbyteros, quos episcopos.—Quæris auctoritatem? Audi testimonium. (Phil. i. 1; Acts xx. 28, &c., are quoted.) Quod autem postea unus electus est qui cæteris præponetur, in schismatis remedium factum est, ne unusquisque ad se trahens Christi ecclesiam rumperet. Nam et Alexandriæ a Marco evangelista usque ad Heraclam et Dionysium episcopos presbyteri semper unum ex se selectum, in excelsiori gradu collocatum, episcopum nominabant. Quomodi si exercitus imperatorem faciat, aut diaconi eligant de se, quem industrium noverint, et archidiaconum vocent."—*Hieronym.* Ep. 101, ad Evangelium. See Gieseler's Note in his Compendium of Ecclesiastical History, vol. i. p. 106, Davidson's translation.

LXXIV. (page 324.)

"It is to this transference of the executive government, (for the phrase is hardly too strong,) from the crown to the two houses of parliament, and especially the commons, that we owe the proud attitude which England has maintained since the revolution, so extraordinarily dissimilar, in the eyes of Europe, to her condition under the Stuarts. The supplies meted with niggardly caution by former parliaments to sovereigns whom they could not trust, have flowed with redundant profuseness, when they could judge of their necessity and direct their application. Doubtless the demand has always been fixed by the ministers of the crown, and its influence has retrieved in some degree the loss of authority; but it is still true that no small portion of the executive power, according to the established laws and customs of our government, has passed into the hands of that body, which prescribes the application of the revenue, as well as investigates at its pleasure every act of the administration."—*Hallam*: Constitutional History of England. Third edition. Vol. iii. p. 160. 8vo. London: 1832.

LXXV. (page 328.)

“Who knoweth not that time is truly compared to a stream, that carrieth down fresh and pure waters into that salt sea of corruption which environeth all human actions? And therefore, if man shall not by his industry, virtue, and policy as it were with the oar, row against the stream and inclination of time; all institutions and ordinances, be they never so pure, will corrupt and degenerate.”—*Bacon: Of the Pacification of the Church, Works, vol. iii. p. 148. 4to. London: 1778.*

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