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AN

E S S A Y

ON

Church Government.

By ALEXANDER MILLER, A. M.

ALBANY:

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1801.

ERRATA.

- Page 10, line 22, read *crucifixion*.
line 24, for *bear* read *bear*.
11, line 7, for *by* read *in*.
19, line 5, after *that* insert *it*.
23, line 9, read *ascension*.
26, line 2, read *leaven leaveneth*.
27, line 13, for *office* read *offence*.
30, line 9, for *numbers* read *members*.



P R E F A C E.

MANY valuable things have been written on church government in the two last centuries. These writings, however, are either so tedious in their manner, or so rarely to be met with in this country, that they are of little service to us. Yet the subject is no less interesting to us than it was to our fathers. It is not enough that they understood it : people of every age and nation should be acquainted with it. And what renders an attention to it the more necessary for us at the present time is, that our frontiers are rapidly filling with inhabitants brought up under different modes of church government ; who are now forming themselves into congregations. To people in such circumstances it may not be unprofitable to have presented, in a concise manner, what the scriptures teach us respecting the government of the church of God. These are the motives of the following essay. It is short, that it may be easily procured, and that it may not tire. If it may meet the approbation of him who is made head over all things to the church, and contribute something towards the edifying of his body, this will be the highest reward that can be received by

The AUTHOR.

Albany, 1st September, 1801.



AN ESSAY, &c.

IT is an obvious truth, that every community must have some government. This assures us that the Church of Christ, the most important community that was ever erected on earth, is not without one. And to imagine that he, whom God has set as king in Zion, on whose shoulders the government is laid, and who is faithful as a son in all his house, should not have prescribed to his church any particular form of government, but left it to the discretion of every religious society to frame one for itself, is a supposition too extravagant to be for a moment admitted. We may therefore expect to find in the writings of the apostles and prophets, full information respecting the government which Christ has instituted in his church. We are not indeed to look for a plan of government in all its parts drawn up in form. We must collect it, as we do every thing else relating to the kingdom of Christ, from various parts of the holy scriptures.

FROM these we learn, that Christ's kingdom is not of this world ;—that it is spiritual, designed to preserve purity of morals, and to promote the edification of the body ;—that its discipline consists in admonitions, censures, and at most, excommunication, or cutting off from the church ;—that the holy scriptures contain the laws by which it is to be governed ;—that the Lord Jesus is its only head and the source of all ecclesiastical au-

thority, and that the power of his servants is only dependent, subordinate and ministerial. These positions, I suppose, few will controvert, and shall therefore take them for granted. Two points, namely, to what description of persons the power of governing is committed; and how far their authority extends; whether to a single congregation only, or to more united under a common government, will be the principal subjects of the following investigation.

It is of importance here to consider, that the church under the Jewish, and the church under the christian dispensation, is one and the same. This appears, to look no farther, from the eleventh chapter to the Romans; where the former is represented as the good olive tree, and the latter as a branch of a wild olive tree, grafted on it, and partaking of its root and fatness; and when the Jews shall be restored, they are to be grafted again into their own olive tree; that is, received into the same church from which they had been excluded. Things, typical, ceremonial and local, have ceased since the coming of Christ; but the church being substantially the same, under both dispensations, things essential to its being, or its well-being, and things of moral and perpetual obligation, remain in full force. And we hold it as an indisputable maxim, that whatever has been instituted by divine authority, and has never been abrogated, continues still to be a divine institution. It is on this principle that the infants of believers are acknowledged as members of the church, and receive the seal of the covenant. This order of things God instituted in his covenant with Abraham, and has never ordained otherwise. We therefore rightly conclude, that this is still a divine institution.

ON the same principle, and with equal force, we argue, that as under the Jewish dispensation a form of government was instituted by divine authority, and has never been annulled; therefore it continues still. It is true, that by the coming of Christ the office of high priest is abolished, and that things pertaining to the ceremonial law, or peculiar to the state of the Jews in Canaan, do not apply to us; but we have no intimation, from precept or historical fact, that the principles of the government are changed. Founded in reason, and taught by the light of nature, as well as by the word of God, they must ever remain the same.

Now, it is a leading principle in this government, that it be administered, not by the body of the people, but by officers appointed to judge and decide in all matters of controversy and discipline.

THUS we are informed, that "Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people - - - - and they judged the people at all seasons."—*Exod.* xviii. 25, 26.

So it is said, "The priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near; and by their word shall every controversy and every stroke be tried." *Deut.* xxi. 5.

AND so we are told, that "Jehoshaphet set of the Levites, and of the priests, and of the chief of the fathers of Israel, for the judgment of the Lord, and for controversies."—*2 Chron.* xix. 8.

AGREEABLY to this principle, founded in reason, and sanctioned by divine authority, we find, that our Lord Jesus, the head and governor of his church, to whom "all power is given, in heaven and in earth," and from whom alone all authority must be derived,

has committed the whole ministerial government and discipline, as well as the administration of every ordinance in his church, to his apostles, and to those who succeed them as officers in his house, and to none else.

To these it was that he said, "As my father hath sent me, so send I you; whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."—*John* xx. 23. "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven."—*Matth.* xviii. 18. To these he gave commission, saying, "Go ye therefore, and disciple all nations, baptizing 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 always, even unto the end of the world."—*Matth.* xxviii. 19.

THIS commission is short, but comprehensive. It directs to teach the observance of all things, whatsoever Christ had commanded. The things which he had communicated to them before his crucifixion, were not few. He then told them, however, that he had many things to say unto them, which they could not yet hear. But while he continued with them, after his resurrection, "forty days, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God," he, doubtless, more fully taught them the nature of his kingdom; and certainly left them not without every necessary instruction on this head, when he sent the promised Spirit to "teach them all things, and to bring all things to their remembrance." In their writings and practice then, we may expect to

find all the information which we further need on this subject.

FROM these sources we learn, that the apostles were to ordain, and did ordain, elders, who were to take the oversight of the church, and to administer all its ordinances. Among these elders we find some who labour by word and doctrine, and others, clearly distinguished from these, whose authority and office are confined to government, and who are called *governments*, or *governors*, and *elders who rule well*.

THIS is perfectly consonant to the government of the Jewish church, in which we find among its rulers, not only priests and Levites, but chief of the fathers, who were not of the tribe of Levi. For *Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads of the people, to judge them at all seasons*. Just so the officers, whom the Lord Jesus, in consequence of his ascending up on high, gave for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of his body; officers, whom God hath set or appointed in his church, are, no doubt, in like manner to judge his people. There is no intimation in the New Testament, that the body of believers have any such power given them; or that they ever presumed to exercise such power. That they can have no such power is certain, because this was wholly committed to the apostles before any christian church was formed; and committed to them, apart, in a mountain in Galilee, where their Lord had appointed to meet them alone, as if of set purpose, to prevent the people from imagining that any such power was committed to them.

IN the writings of the apostles, nothing strikes us more forcibly than the distinction between *rulers* and

ruled. The names or titles by which church officers are designated, all import rule or authority. They are called *presbyters* or *elders*, *bishops* or *overseers*, *guides* or *leaders*, *stewards of the mysteries of God*—such as their Lord will make rulers over his household; *pastors* or *shepherds*, whose business is to govern as well as feed the flock; *rulers* or *elders, who rule well*—*governments* or *governors*.

ON the other hand, all the names by which the people are designated imply subordination and subjection; as *flock*, *body*, *kingdom*, *house* or *household*, &c. These never rule, but obey: and it is abundantly and strictly enjoined on them to *remember those who have the rule over them*; to *obey them—to submit to them*; to *esteem them highly for their work sake*, and to *account them worthy of double honor*. Can it be imagined then, that no distinction is to be made between rulers and ruled; but that all have equal authority in the church of Christ?

HEAR what Paul says, in his twelfth chapter to the Romans. He observes, that all have not the same office in the church. In enumerating the different offices he mentions *ruling* as one, and exhorts, that it be performed *with diligence*; plainly intimating, that ruling is a business appointed to some, in distinction from others. He at the same time clearly distinguishes him that *ruleth* from such rulers as likewise *teach* and *exhort*, who are mentioned besides in this enumeration.

AND in the twelfth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, the same apostle, speaking of the church as compared to a human body, consisting of various members, which have their several functions assigned them, shews how monstrous a figure it would present if it

were otherwise, when he asks, “If the whole body were an eye where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?” And so we may ask, If the whole church were rulers, where were the ruled? But to shew that the body of Christ is no such monster, he in the twenty-eighth verse enumerates the several officers which “*God hath set in the church*”; and among others he mentions *governments or governors*, as a distinct order, appointed by divine authority.

DOES not all this teach us, that some are to bear rule in the church, and not all? And do not reason and common sense teach the same? It is certainly more likely, that a case will be determined agreeably to truth and justice, by a select number of judges, than by the promiscuous multitude. What would we think of the prudence of the man, who, having an important cause to be tried, should choose to have it decided by all the men in a certain district, indiscriminately, rather than by a chosen number of the most upright, wise and well-informed? Or what opinion would we entertain of the wisdom of that government, or king, that should erect a court, consisting of such an indiscriminate multitude? And shall we venture to ascribe such management to the King of Zion? Has he appointed all the subjects in his kingdom to be rulers in it? Or shall they usurp the office without his appointment! If they lay claim to power in the church, let them shew us what it is; when they received it; and from whom they derived it. It certainly becomes those who undertake to bear rule in the kingdom of Christ, duly to consider what evidence there is of their having received authority for this purpose, from him to whom all power in Heaven and on earth is given.

HERE a passage of scripture presents itself for our examination. It is thought by some that *that*, in Matth. xviii. 17. which directs a complaint against an offending brother to be laid before *the church*, supposes the power of deciding in cases of discipline to be in the people, however they may become possessed of it.

LET US attend to this passage : If the offender hearken not to private admonition, the complainant is directed to *tell it unto the church*. Now, the single question to be decided is, what is here meant by *the church* ? That it cannot mean the whole body of the people in a congregation, is certain ; because this includes old and young, male and female ; which cannot be what is here intended, unless we suppose that Christ has appointed women and children to be rulers in his kingdom. Some therefore suppose, that it means the adult males. But are these ever called *the church* ? No. There cannot be a single instance produced, where the males, exclusive of women and children, are so called. To suppose them to be here meant, is to put a meaning on the word *church*, which it no where bears in the whole bible ; and therefore cannot be admitted here, unless the scope of the passage require it. But this is so far from being the case, that it absolutely forbids it. For it must be considered, that the form of government, subsisting at the time when this direction was given, was indisputably the Jewish, which determined all causes, not by the body of the people, nor by the brotherhood, but by rulers or judges appointed for that purpose. The disciples, therefore, could not possibly understand their Lord to mean any thing by *tell-*

ing to the church ; but that the matter was to be laid before the rulers or judges, appointed to decide in all such cases, agreeably to the only form of government known in the church of God.

BUT is this bench of rulers, or judges, ever called *the church* ? Yes : this is its usual style. The Hebrew words *gnedah* and *kahal*, translated in the English *congregation*, rendered in the Greek *ecclesia* which we translate *Church*, are used to express *the body of rulers*. A studied brevity will confine us to a few instances, out of many, in which these words were thus used.

IN 1st. Chron. xxviii. we are told, in verse 1st, that David assembled the princes and officers of Israel ; in verse 2d, that he gave a solemn charge to his *brethren* and his *people* ; in verse 8th, we are informed, before whom this charge was given ; “ In the sight of *Israel*, the congregation--the *ecclesia* of the Lord.” Here this *ecclesia* is clearly distinguished from David’s *brethren* and *people* ; and can mean no other than the chiefs or officers mentioned in the first verse, as being assembled at Jerusalem, on the occasion. And they are called *all Israel*, because they represented all Israel : just as we find by comparing Exod. xx. 18, 19, with Deut. v. 23, that what is called *all the people* in the former, is explained in the latter to mean the *heads of tribes* and the *elders*.

IN 1. Chron. xiii. the first verse informs us, that David consulted with the officers (called in the second verse all the congregation, *the ecclesia* of Israel) about calling all Israel together. The fourth verse informs, that *all the ecclesia* consented to the measure ; and the

fifth, that David accordingly called *all Israel* together. In this passage *all the ecclesia* and *all Israel* are clearly distinguished ; and who are meant by the *ecclesia*, appears plainly, from the first verse, to be *the officers*.

IN Deut. xxxi. 25, 28, we are informed, that Moses commanded the Levites to gather unto him all the elders of the tribes, and all the officers, that he might speak to them : and in verse 30, it is said, that “ Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation, *the ecclesia* of Israel.” Here the *ecclesia* evidently means the elders and officers, called together for the purpose of receiving this address of Moses. And this is, no doubt, the meaning of the expression which so frequently occurs, that *Moses spake to all the congregation*, or, *in the ears of all the congregation, the ecclesia, whatsoever the Lord command him*. For it cannot be supposed, that on those occasions, he called together six hundred thousand men, to speak in their ears.

FROM all this, it plainly appears, what our Lord meant by *tell it unto the ecclesia*, the church. He could not be understood to mean any thing else than what was well known to be signified by the word, the *rulers* or *elders* of the church, who alone had the power of judging and deciding, in all cases of government and discipline.

IT being ascertained that matters of government and discipline are to be managed, not by the people, but by the rulers of the church, a question arises, Whether such business lies before the rulers of a single congregation only, or sometimes also before the rulers of several congregations assembled together ?

It is true that the case of which Christ says, *Tell it unto the church*, is such, that if both the parties belong to the same congregation, and the difference cannot be settled in a more private way, it will naturally come, in the course of the proceedings, before the elders of that congregation. But nothing forbids to carry the matter farther, if necessary. For the Jewish government, to which our Lord alludes, did not confine the term *ecclesia* to the rulers of a single congregation or synagogue. It extended to the higher judicatory, the synhedrim. And indeed the mode of proceeding here prescribed, affords no inconsiderable argument for carrying the matter to a higher judicatory. For the direction is to proceed from the admonition of one, to that of two or three, whose influence may be supposed to be greater; and for the same reason, to proceed from that of two or three to the elders of the congregation. And by a parity of reason the cause may be removed still higher, and ought to be so if the offender submit not to his rulers; because here arises a new case, which properly belongs to a higher court. If indeed the local circumstances of the congregation be such that access cannot be had to a higher judicatory, the business must terminate with them; otherwise this is not necessary. Besides, there are cases to which the rulers of a single congregation are not competent: as when the parties are of different congregations; or when a dispute arises between different congregations; or when the people are at variance with their rulers. Such evils must be removed by the rulers of more congregations than one, or not removed at all. But it is not

to be supposed, that the head of the church has provided a remedy for the smaller offences only, and left the greater without remedy. He has doubtless made provision against all scandals and disorders that may arise in his church; which require the convention of sometimes a smaller and sometimes a larger body of its rulers, or the interposition of a lower or a higher authority.

THIS was the case under the Jewish dispensation. Thus we read in Exod. viii. 26, and in Deut. i. 17, that when the judges that were appointed in Israel found a case too hard for them, they were to bring it to Moses. So in Deut. xviii. 8 - 11. When any matter of controversy arose, too hard to be decided by the judges in any of their gates, they were directed to go up to the place which the Lord their God should choose, to the priests, the Levites, and the judge, that should be in those days. These were to shew them the sentence of judgment; to this they were strictly to conform, and not to turn aside from it, to the right hand, or to the left.

AND this we find to be the practice in the time of the apostles. When a case arose too hard to be decided by the church of Antioch, (of which we have an account in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts) it was referred to the synod at Jerusalem, and there determined.

HERE I am aware that it will be said, that the *whole church*, and the *brethren*, are represented as being joined with the apostles and elders in transacting this business.

To this I answer, that if the *church* here mentioned, took part in determining the question in debate, it must

be that church which had a right to judge in such cases; which we have before proved to be no other than the body of rulers; which was one well known acceptation of the word *ecclesia*, or church. Nothing, however, is here said of the church, but that joined with the apostles and elders in receiving the delegates from the other churches, and in sending messengers to them; things very different from deciding on the question laid before the synod. And that if the *brethren*, here spoken of, took part in the decision, they must be the commissioners who came from Antioch, and probably from Syria and Cicilia too; because these churches were equally interested in the business; as also the elders of the neighboring churches in Judea, whence the persons complained of had come; which were probably concerned.

BUT if by the *brethren*, in this place, be meant the private members of the church, it is impossible to shew that they had any voice in deciding the question. For when we are told, in the second verse, that it was determined that Paul and Barnabus, and certain others, should go up to Jerusalem, it is not said that they were to go to the *brethren*, but “unto the *apostles* and *elders* about this question.”—In the sixth verse it is said, not that the *brethren*, but “the *apostles* and *elders* came together to consider of this matter.” And in the fourth verse of the next chapter we are told, that as Paul and Silas went through the cities, “they delivered them the decrees to keep, that were ordained (not of the *brethren*, but) of the *apostles* and *elders*.” It does not appear then, from any thing here said, either that the brethren were ever consulted about the matter; or

that they ever deliberated upon it; or that the decrees were ordained by them; but all these are expressly attributed to the *apostles* and *elders*. So that unless the brethren here mentioned were the elders from other churches, we find no proof that they were concerned in deciding the question.

BUT it will be said, We are expressly told, that "they wrote letters after this manner: The apostles, and elders, and brethren, send greeting to the brethren which are at Antioch, Syria and Cilicia." This is true; but it does not prove that these brethren gave their voice in deciding the question laid before the apostles and elders; but only that they joined with them in christian salutation, or greeting to the other churches. When a man writes to his friend, if others be present, they often join in friendly salutations, while they have no other concern in the letter. These salutations we usually mention in the close of the letter; but it was customary, it seems, in the time of the apostles, for such salutations to be contained in the address at the beginning, without the most distant intimation that the letter was the production of the persons whose names were thus inserted. No less than eight of Paul's epistles begin in this manner—Paul and Sosthenes our brother—Paul and Timothy our brother—Paul, and Sylvanus, and Timotheus—Paul and *all the brethren which are with me* unto the church in such, or such a place. Now did any one ever suppose, that the brethren thus mentioned with Paul were joint authors with him of the epistles to which their names are prefixed? And what more reason is there to think that the brethren

ren named in the very same manner in the introduction of the letters under present consideration are to be accounted authors of those letters, or of the decrees contained in them? We still find it impossible to shew that these brethren took part in this decision, unless we suppose them to be church officers, who had a right to sit in judgment, and no doubt did so.

FROM this investigation, we have sufficiently ascertained these two essential points; 1. That the government of the church is lodged not in the body of the people, or the brotherhood, but in rulers invested with authority derived from the great head of the church; and 2. That this authority is exercised, sometimes by the rulers of a single congregation; and sometimes, by those of more congregations jointly: or in other words, that there are, by divine appointment, higher and lower indicators in the church, under the christian as well as under the Jewish dispensation.

SOME contend, that the word *church*, in the New-Testament, means a single congregation, and hence conclude that its government must be congregational; whether it be administered by the eldership, or by the brotherhood.

I ANSWER; if the word *church*, in the New Testament, ever signifies a single congregation, surely it will not be pretended that it always does so. It sometimes signifies the invisible church, consisting of all true believers, in Heaven and on earth; for which Christ gave himself—that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle. And sometimes it signifies the visible catholic body of Christ, compre-

hending all those throughout the world, who profess the true religion. This is that church which the apostle compares to an organical body, having eyes, ears, hands and feet. The members of which are to have the same care one of another, that there may be no schism in the body. This is the body on which the spirit of God has conferred diversity of gifts, wisdom, knowledge, &c. This is the church in which God hath set apostles, prophets, teachers, helps, governments, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Will any presume to say, that this body, or church, is a single congregation?

WE can, however, find yet another sense of the word *church*. That is, when it is used to signify a part of this universal visible body of Christ, containing a plurality of congregations; the government of which cannot be congregational, but presbyterial?

THAT the word *church* in the New-Testament is used to signify a plurality of congregations we may be easily convinced, by attending to the state of some of the chief cities in which the apostles planted churches. Each of these is called *the church*, in the singular number; and yet it is not difficult to shew, that each contained more than a single congregation, capable of convening in one place for attending public worship.

THAT the church of Jerusalem, for instance, contained more than one congregation is proved from the number of her officers—the number of her converts—the want of a building sufficient to contain them—and from the diversity of languages which prevailed among them.

1. BESIDES, the prophets and presbyters in that

church, and her seven deacons, we learn from the history of the Acts, that Jerusalem was the usual residence of the apostles themselves, for several years. Now that so many ministers should confine themselves so long to a single congregation, while so wide a field lay open for their labours elsewhere, is incredible. But,

2. THAT this church should make but one congregation, is rendered no less incredible by the vast multitude of its members. Our Lord before his ascension was seen of above five hundred at once ; 1 Cor. xv. 6. At Peter's first sermon, after the effusion of the Holy Ghost, there were added to the church about three thousand souls ; Acts ii. 41. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved ; v. 47. After this, it is said, many of them who heard the word believed ; and the number of men was about five thousand ; Acts iv. 4. After this we have an account of more believers being added to the Lord ; multitudes, both of men and women ; Acts v. 14. Again we are told, that the number of the disciples was multiplied ; Acts vi. 1. And again, that the word of the Lord increased ; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly ; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith ; v. 7. We read of yet more additions being made, when this church, as well as others in Judea, had rest, and were multiplied ; Acts ix. 31. And after Peter's miraculous deliverance from prison, the word of God still grew and multiplied ; Acts xii. 24. Now, can any one believe, that all these made only one congregation ? But what will he think when he reads in Acts xxi. 20, that when Paul went up to Jerusalem he was thus addressed by the elders, " Thou

feest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe?" How many *myriads* or *tens of thousands* it is in the Greek. Now surely *many* cannot mean less than three or four; that is to say, thirty or forty thousand. I ask, then, could thirty or forty thousand meet for public worship in one congregation? This is rendered the more incredible,

3. By their having no building capacious enough to hold so prodigious a multitude. It is true, the apostles went daily to the temple to preach to the Jews; and by this mean acquired great accessions to the church. But that those Jews should permit the hated and persecuted christians to make this the customary place of meeting for their worship; and for partaking of bread and wine not consecrated according to the Jewish ritual; and that in commemoration of that Jesus whom they had crucified; is utterly incredible. Instead of this, we are informed of their meeting in private houses; as in the house of Mary, and in an upper room; and of their breaking bread from house to house. And after the conversion of so many Jews, and when a great company of the priests had become obedient to the faith, probably they made use of some of the synagogues to meet in; which seems to be confirmed by Paul's saying, that *he punished them oft in every synagogue*. But could they have found a building capable of containing, and a human voice able to reach so vast a multitude. Yet,

4. THEY could not have been edified, because of the diversity of languages that prevailed among them. From the second chapter of the Acts we learn, that there were (not visiting, but) *dwelling* at Jerusalem,

devout men out of every nation under Heaven ; that for their sakes the apostles were endowed with the gift of tongues, that they might address them in their several languages ; and that out of these many of the church of Jerusalem were collected. For the edification of these then, it was necessary that they should meet in separate assemblies.

WHEN we lay all these things together, can we doubt whether the church of Jerusalem comprehended more than one congregation ? Yet this was but *one church*, and consequently subject to one government.

IN nearly the same manner it can be proved that the churches of Antioch, Corinth and Ephesus, contained each a plurality of congregations. Yet each is called *the church*, in the singular number, and must therefore have been under one common government.

INDEED it is not easy to prove, that the word *church* is ever used in the New-Testament to signify a single independent congregation of christians. The church at Cenchrea might possibly consist of but one congregation, because the place is supposed to have been small. But it was probably under the jurisdiction of the presbytery of Corinth ; Cenchrea being a port town in its vicinity.

THAT there was a plurality of congregations in the church of Corinth we are plainly taught, by the apostle's saying, " let *your* women, the Corinthian women, keep silence in *the churches*." Here we find churches in the church of Corinth. Not independent churches, surely, but separate congregations.

THE same apostle, writing to the *churches* of Galatia,

speaks of them as one body. He tells them, that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump—corrupts the whole body ; directs the spiritual, among them, to restore in the spirit of meekness, such as might be overtaken in a fault ; to bear one anothers burdens ; and to cut off, by wholesome discipline, those who troubled them. All this would lead us to think that those *churches* of Galatia were under one government. And we are sure that this was the case of those to whom Peter addressed his first epistle. They were *scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia*. Yet the apostle calls them expressly *the flock of God* ; and exhorts the elders, conjointly, to *feed*, or as the word signifies, to *rule or govern this one flock which was among them, not by constraint but willingly*. Will any man say that this people, so widely dispersed, through so many countries, was *one flock*, because it was but one single congregation, meeting in one place ? Doubtless they were one flock because they were united under one common presbyterial government.

BUT does not the presbyterial government take away all the rights of the people ? No : It takes away no right. It refuses them the right of governing, which they never possessed, and therefore cannot loose. But they still retain the right of choosing their officers. This is not denied them. Yet to qualify men for entering into office, in the church, they must be set apart by those to whom Christ has committed the power of ordination. When the deacons were to be set apart, the direction of the apostles to the people was, “ *look ye out seven men, whom we may appoint over this business.*” And when the people had chosen them, we are told,

that “ *they set them before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.*” The choice is in the people, but the investiture is in the officers whom God *hath set in the church.* And no man may exercise any ecclesiastical authority, unless he be vested with it in the manner which Christ has prescribed. The exercising of such authority is not a natural right which we possess, either as men or as christians : And therefore to refuse us this right is not to take it away.

It appears then that the presbyterial government is founded in reason as well as scripture ; and it is proved, by experience, to have the most salutary effects. Its discipline is not confined to the office of a private individual, in a single congregation, but reaches every scandal, and every disorder, whether arising in one congregation or in more. None govern but such as are esteemed wise and good ; and if they err, as the best may do, the aggrieved may find relief by applying to a higher tribunal, unprejudiced and disinterested.

It is not one of the smallest evils attending the congregational mode of government, that when a dispute arises between church members, each has his friends or partizans, some way or other prepossessed in his favor, and prejudiced against the opposite party. When, therefore, they come together, to deliberate on the case, they are divided ; and it frequently happens, that the oftener they meet upon the subject, the more they become exasperated against each other, and the business is still unfinished. Or, if a decision is made, justice too often suffers in the conflict of passion. When this happens, the injured has no redress ; an evil which finds a happy remedy in the presbyterial government.

THE benefit of this kind of government the Jews enjoyed. And shall we not avail ourselves of it? Or has our benevolent Lord and master prohibited this? Whence does this appear? We must have strong evidence indeed, before we can believe, that he has rendered the state of his church less favourable in this advanced period of it, than it was under the more imperfect economy of the Jews; or that they possessed advantages of which we are deprived. But have we not abundant evidence of the contrary? A little of this evidence and but a little, of what might be adduced, has been brought to view in this short essay.

NOW, though I firmly believe the presbyterial form of church government to be what is most conformable to reason and scripture; and do not hesitate to say, that I consider that which is purely independent as repugnant to both; yet I do not view the congregational government of the churches in Connecticut as deviating so widely from what I conceive to be right.— Many of those who are called congregationalists are really presbyterians; though not strictly such. I apprehend, however, that they differ from other presbyterians, not so much in practice as in theory; and not so much in theory as in words.

Is the presbyterial a representative government? So is the congregational. If the pastor and elders are not so properly the church, as its representatives; so neither can the pastor and the male communicants be said to be more than representatives. One difference however is, that in the one case the representatives are chosen by the people, and set apart to their office by authority derived from the the head of the church; in the

other case the representatives are neither chosen nor set apart! Another difference is, that in the one case there is a larger, but less judicious representation than in the other.

THIS latter difference, however, would be lessened if the presbyterians should enlarge their representation. A congregation may choose ten or more elders; and then, I apprehend, they would have all that, in most congregations, can be found fit to be employed in the government of the church. Indeed it is questionable, whether, in most congregational meetings, there be more than half a dozen free and independent voices; and some times, perhaps not more than half that number. A few principle men express their opinion, which is usually followed by the rest; or, if they have different sentiments, they have their followers, who give their votes, not so much from their own judgment, as from the influence of their respective leaders.

As in point of representation the congregationalists do not differ from other presbyterians so much as some of them imagine; so, upon examination, perhaps it may be found, that they do not differ from them greatly in the higher judicatories.

GREAT part of the business transacted in presbyteries and synods, is done in the associations, confociations and councils. The chief difference is, that the sentence of the former is mostly authoritative and decisive; that of the latter, for the most part, only advisory. It is not, however, always so: in the licensing of candidates for the gospel ministry; in the ordination of ministers; in the excommunication of congregations or parts of congregations, become corrupt, and walking disorderly; in the restoration of persons supposed to

be unjustly excommunicated, and in the determination of cases submitted to them, the sentence of a council is not advisory, but judicial.

ANOTHER difference is, that presbyteries and synods are standing bodies; but councils, among the congregationalists, are chosen, occasionally, by the contending parties. Here, I should think, the preference is clearly to be given to the former. They are perfectly disinterested and unbiassed: whereas the numbers of the latter, being chosen by the parties, are in danger of being unduly influenced to advocate the cause of the parties by which they are respectively chosen.

ANOTHER difference is, that the associations consist frequently of ministers only, without any other representatives of the people; whereas the presbyteries and synods are always composed of ministers and elders. So that in this respect the presbyterial is a more popular government than the congregational. The Say-Brook Platform, indeed, recognizes ruling elders; and I am informed, that some of the associations in Connecticut have introduced them, and that others have it in contemplation to do so; which makes them what we call presbyteries.

I hope therefore, the congregationalists and other presbyterians will not consider their difference to be such as ought to prevent their uniting under the form of government adopted by either, when all have not an opportunity of connecting themselves with congregations, formed on the plan which they would prefer. This would greatly facilitate the settlement of the gospel in places inhabited by people accustomed to these different forms of church government.





