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THE
RULING ELDERSHIP
OF THE
CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

BY THE
REV. DAVID KING, LL.D.,
GLASGOW.

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P R E F A C E.

At a meeting of the United Associate Presbytery of Glasgow, held in June last, I delivered an Address on the Duties and Encouragements of Elders. The office-bearers then assembled, consisting of the Members of Presbytery and of the Elders within its bounds, requested me to publish the Address, and a wish at the same time was pretty generally expressed, that I would extend my remarks, and discuss the subject of the Ruling Eldership in all its more important relations and bearings. With this latter suggestion I have in some measure complied—whether wisely or not, it remains for others to determine.

I have been indebted both to friends and books for directing me to sources of information; but I have gone to these sources to draw for myself, and have, in no case, quoted at second-hand without acknowledging my obligations. If there be any instance to the contrary, it is an oversight.

In defending an important constituent of Presbyterian church government, I have avoided, as much as possible, the questions now agitated among Presbyterians themselves; and if all who acknowledge the Divine warrant of the elder's office would unite in elevating its character and efficiency, they would perform an invaluable service to the interests of religion.

Some may object strongly, and especially our Congregational brethren, to any assembly of Christians being represented as a judicatory, or *court*. I have so expressed myself for the sake of brevity; but, to remove causeless offence, let it be clearly understood, that 'the word *court*, as used here, and throughout these pages, simply denotes ministers and elders regularly met for the discharge of their deliberative duties in Session, Presbytery, or Synod; and that it conveys no idea of authority beyond that of spiritual administration.'*

It may be thought that, in some instances, I have fixed the standard of an elder's duties too low—in proposing, for example, that he visit his district once in the half year, when it is known that the elders of the National Church were expected, in former times, to visit their quarters once every month. But, in such cases, I have stated what I considered the minimum

* Rules, &c., of the United Secession Church.

of duty, and spoken of what elders should at the least perform, without meaning to discourage more abundant labours where they are practicable. Besides, I have thought it better to err on the side of caution than of excess, as I have never found that exaggerated representations of duty were productive of much good. My aim has been to give such a moderate estimate of an elder's obligations, that no reasonable objection can be taken to its requirements.

I would willingly have deferred the publication, and used farther exertions to render it more worthy of the reader's attention, had it not been strongly represented to me, that a degree of interest is now felt on the subject which may not be easily revived if it be permitted to languish. A conviction of this truth has disposed me to sow the seed while the spring lasts; but I have bestowed on the duty assigned me all the pains and care which circumstances permitted. It is my humble hope, that the manual, with all its defects and faults, may be blessed of God to promote its object; and, if only a single elder were stirred up, by a perusal of its pages, to execute more faithfully the duties of his office, I would deem myself amply rewarded for any labour it has cost me.

D. K.

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THE RULING ELDERSHIP.

INTRODUCTION.

SCOTLAND is deeply indebted to the Ruling Elders of its Presbyterian denominations. A large portion of them have sustained a character becoming their office, and by their disinterested labours have done unspeakably much to build up the congregations with which they were more immediately connected, and to promote, in a wider range, the general interests of a common Christianity. Their lives, if intimately known and faithfully recorded, would furnish, in many instances, most genuine additions to Christian biography. It would be found that numbers of them were led in early life to consider the things which belonged to their peace. Possibly they were distracted for a season by doubts and fears, and much occupied in anxious reading, reflection, and prayer; but ultimately they were rescued from these perplexities, and 'being justified by faith, had peace with God

through our Lord Jesus Christ.' Their personal piety commended itself in its fruits, and more and more developed itself in a diffusive usefulness. Yet their attainments and services becoming so appreciable by others, may have been very lowly esteemed by themselves. The consciousness of much deficiency and sinfulness may have often distressed them almost to despair—often clouded their interest in Christ, and, to their own view, brought its very existence under suspicion. So that, when they were chosen by the church to take an oversight of its interests, they may have shrunk from the proffered appointment, as only rebuking the defects and faults which unfitted them for its duties. Pressed, however, by influences which they were bound to respect, they did enter, possibly with trembling step, into sacred office. Its duties, even at the first, did not prove to a willing mind so formidable as had been dreaded. Ere long they became congenial and pleasing to beneficent habits, and thus the faithful servant grew in affection and adaptation for his calling, till he who assigned the service exchanged it for rest, and 'an abundant entrance was administered into the heavenly kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' Such, with due allowance for that diversity which prevails in the spiritual, as well as natural creation—such is an epitome of the career, steadfastly prosecuted and triumphantly concluded, by many who have held in our churches that honourable trust of which I have to treat. And we might lament that so little justice is done to their memory, were we not assured that their works, and labours, and patience

are fully and ineffaceably written in the 'Lamb's book of life.'

The usefulness of our elders has often been prolonged in their families. Many of their children, enjoying the best of examples and training, have done credit to their parentage in their own good behaviour and success. As respects the church more especially, it might create surprise to learn how many of its elders are the sons of elders, and to what a large extent the roll of our ministry has derived its supplies from the same source. Such remarks dispose for commendation rather than for counsel, and fill with gratitude to Him who hath so cared for his church, in providing it with office-bearers after his own heart.

We must not, however, extend our eulogies beyond due limits. So far they may have the sanction of the King and Head of the church, while he has too abundant cause for subjoining the complaint, 'Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee.' There are few sessions in which some members are not comparatively inefficient—even the best have need of improvement: and the instances are not rare where the eldership of a congregation are generally remiss in the discharge of important obligations, to be afterwards considered. Happily these evils are nowhere more felt and lamented than among the class to whom they attach: and a movement has lately commenced among themselves to elevate the standard of their own proficiency. This spontaneous effort at reform is of very high consequence. Any amelioration appearing in our churches

would be questionable in its character, and ephemeral in its duration, if it did not include the session; and if it should originate in the session, and there strike deep its roots, and fortify its upright stem with goodly branches, the consequent benefit would be illimitable—the leaves of such a tree would be for ‘the healing of the nations.’ The ministry would be stimulated on the one hand, and the people on the other; classes, schools, missionary societies, all beneficent institutions, would feel the impress of a new energy, the glow of a new life, and many a tongue would uplift the ejaculation, ‘The time to favour Zion is come; the time which God hath set.’

Even a single elder may be greatly influential. The statement has two aspects; for he may do great harm, or great good. One elder may do much injury. It is not necessary to this that he be a liar, or swearer, or drunkard; for such a man would bring himself under discipline, and could neither become nor remain an elder in any of our churches. It is enough to make him worse than useless, that he be an impracticable and troublesome individual. If such a character is rarely to be found, yet, to complete a sketch, he may at least be supposed. We naturally depict a person of this sort as possessing a very good opinion of himself. The like favourable estimate he may not entertain in relation to others, or his very respect for them may secure them a measure of his jealousy and ill-will. Being of a soured disposition, he may have a morbid discontent with existing arrangements and regulations, and speak as if all things

were amiss for want of his mending. In sessional deliberations he may have many cases to bring forward, and motions to submit, and speeches to make, and become very wrathful and intractable if any impatience be manifested under his inflictions. In forwarding his views, he may communicate much with elders whom he is most likely to influence; and thus form something like a party in the session, and then talk of opposite sides. If poorly supported by his brethren in the eldership, he may set to work in the congregation, and by *ex parte* representations of what is passing, stir up dissatisfaction there, and then plead a 'pressure from without' in apology for his earnestness. By no means deficient in the love of power, he may feel as if power were most expressively shown in opposition. To aid another, might rather seem to him to be weakness. When good proposals, therefore, are made, and do not emanate from himself, it may be his frequent course first to doubt of them, and then labour to defeat them. He may be commendably devoted to the cause of civil liberty; and, transferring his notions of political abuses to ecclesiastical administration, and thinking that the extravagances of the state have all crept into a Presbyterian church, however spare may be its finances and economical its outlay, he may suppose that he acts the patriot and reformer, in calling for indiscriminate retrenchment, and frowning on every kind and generous suggestion. Yet this elder may not be without traits of excellence; or, as some would say, redeeming qualities. He may be versed in scripture—he may be diligent in a good

work when it meets his mind; and no one would feel entitled to pronounce him positively a bad man. But, if an office-bearer in the church have the cast of mind which has just been indicated, or anything resembling and approaching it, he may not only be prevented by his temper from accomplishing much in Christ's cause himself, but become a fearful hindrance alike to sessional and congregational reformation.

On the other hand, a single elder may do great good. It is not necessary to this that he be a man of extraordinary powers, or of immense wealth; nor must we depict him, to account for his successful services, as a paragon of moral excellence. He has his failings, but he knows them himself, and an humbling consciousness of them sheds a sobriety over his bearing, and inclines him to be respectful in his communications with others. That abuses exist, he sees and deplures; and he applies himself, but with the meekness of wisdom, to effect the correction of them, and reckons it better, in accomplishing his object, to avoid a battle than to gain a victory. He throws his soul into beneficent enterprises, and it takes the mould of them, expands to their capaciousness, rises to their altitude, and recedes to their immeasurable distance from meanness and vice. In prosecuting the cause of Christ, he is drawn more into fellowship with Christ, imbibes more of the spirit of Christ, and hence becomes more thoroughly Christian in all his views, feelings, and engagements. One can mark a discernible progress in his piety. There is a ripening aversion to evil, a deepening delight in true goodness wherever found,

and a growing readiness for every good work. Even his friendship, always sincere and trustworthy, evinces more of a mellowing kindness, a purer tone of sacredness in its sympathy, more of that exquisite tenderheartedness which 'rejoices with them that rejoice, and weeps with them that weep.' How valuable is such a man to all with whom the providence of God allies him! What a treasure is he to a minister!—what a treasure to a session!—what a treasure to a congregation! While he lives, he does far more good than is ever suspected by himself, or shall be known to others, till 'the day shall declare it;' and when he dies, good men carry him to his grave, and make great lamentation over him. If, then, a single elder may be so influential, so perniciously or profitably influential, what importance should we not attach to a movement beginning with elders themselves to advance the well-working of their entire order!

My aim, in what follows, is humbly to contribute to this result; and happy shall I esteem myself if I am enabled in any measure, however small, to facilitate and expedite so desirable a consummation.

The design of this treatise is wholly practical. It may be proper, however, to begin with a statement of proof, since appeals have little force when they are not based on conviction. The main position to be established is, that the office of Ruling Elder is a Divine institution: but as justice could not be done to the argument if the subject were not viewed somewhat more generally, I shall endeavour to show,—

I. That the primitive churches received from their

Divine Head a constitution which was intended to be permanent.

II. That each of the primitive churches had a company of elders for its spiritual office-bearers.

III. That while all these office-bearers ruled, only some of them taught, so that a distinction subsisted among them—of teaching and ruling elders.

IV. That while this system has the sanction of scripture, it is most reasonable in itself.

I shall then view the office of Ruling Elder relatively to that of Deacon, and inquire how far the arrangement founded by some churches on the difference of these offices, is substantiated by proof, and conducive to edification.

All these topics are important in themselves; they have been all made the subject of voluminous discussion: and though some of them may appear more pertinent than others to the present undertaking, they will be found unitedly conspiring to corroborate our conclusions.

THE
R U L I N G E L D E R S H I P .

P A R T I .

CHAPTER I.

THE PRIMITIVE CHURCHES RECEIVED FROM THEIR DIVINE HEAD A CONSTITUTION WHICH WAS INTENDED TO BE PERMANENT.

SOME tell us that no scheme of church government is laid down in the New Testament. We readily acknowledge, that no denomination of Christians is entitled, on the ground of its ecclesiastical polity, to regard itself as exclusively the Christian Church. That blessed society comprises all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity. We admit, also, that no perfection of external order can rank in importance with soundness in the faith; and that a great historian warrantably rebukes those theologians 'who are burning with zeal for the letter and forms, as if on these depended the essence of religion, whose life and spirit are rooted in

facts.* But when it is said that no government has been appointed for the New Testament Church, and that fallible men may give it one constitution or another, just as their convenience or caprice may dictate, we are disposed to dispute, we are prepared to deny, the allegation. Even though all governments were equally good, we may believe that the Prince of Peace would have selected one out of the number, and given it his special sanction, had it only been to exclude causeless contentions. But all governments are not equally good. Few things are precisely equal in value, and it would be absurd to assert this of kinds of rule, which may so evidently incline to one extreme or another. If, then, different church polities have their degrees of excellence, is it not probable, is it not certain, that He who so 'loved the church as to give himself for it,' must have favoured it with the best? It is vain to say that the differences are immaterial. It can never be proved to be of no consequence whether government be such as to preserve rights or to destroy them, and whether the members of the church be treated by its rulers as citizens or serfs. The greatest freedom consistent with perfect order, is a precious boon in itself; and this is what a good government secures. It establishes presidency without oppression, and liberty without licentiousness. But though all these considerations were set aside as frivolous or inapplicable, we would still contend

* Dr Neander—History of the Planting and Training of the Christian Churches by the Apostles; Preface, vol. i.—Biblical Cabinet.

that government is of moment, if anything be of moment, in the Christian church, inasmuch as all things else are affected by its influence. A tyranny, for example, is imperilled by truth, and therefore it perverts sound doctrine; a tyranny is in danger from pure administration, and therefore neglects or corrupts discipline. The influence of government is thus most extensive, not to say all-comprehensive, for good or evil; and surely the importance of a cause must be estimated by its effects.

But in all this line of remark, we are reasoning, it may be said, from mere probability, stating what we might expect, and not what we actually find. To come to facts, then, ascertained and undoubted facts, we know that the primitive church had a constitution. Who can deny that its affairs were regulated in a definite and orderly manner? 'For God,' says the apostle of the Gentiles, 'is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.'* If, then, a certain order was instituted in the primitive church, by which confusion was excluded, why should not this 'church order' be retained? Although the apostles had said nothing about retaining it, yet as they set it up, and acted on it themselves, should we not recognise, in their example, an imperative precept? 'Those things,' says one of their number, 'which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do, and the God of peace shall be with you.'† It may be objected, that a retention of

* 1 Cor. xiv. 33.

† Phil. iv. 9.

the primitive system is impracticable—that it was adapted for its own day, and no other; and now, when it is gone, admits not of recal. But let this ground be considered, before it is occupied. What does it suppose? That Christ appointed a government for his church which could not be perpetuated,—that he nurtured habits and attachments in favour of a certain system, to be ruptured almost as soon as formed! What does it suppose? That the church had a constitution by which to guide itself under the apostles, and was then cast on a sea of change, just when apostolic pilotage was withdrawn! It is surely more credible that the apostles set in operation a plan which the churches would do well, after their decease, to have always in remembrance.

Still it may be objected that much of the apostolic administration was manifestly extraordinary, and therefore cannot be upheld in ordinary times. The reply is obvious, that what was manifestly extraordinary can give us no perplexity, as on that very account it is manifestly not binding. The apostolic office itself is of this character. Scripture has told us with sufficient clearness the peculiar and indispensable qualifications of the apostles. They were to be eye-witnesses of Christ's resurrection, and therefore they required to have seen him alive after his decease. Their proclamation was, 'This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.*' That Paul might be qualified to join in this testimony, he was favoured

* Acts ii. 32.

with a sight of the risen and ascended Saviour : ‘ Last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time; for I am the least of the apostles.’* The apostles also received their commission directly from Christ himself. That the twelve did so is sufficiently obvious from the evangelical history; and it is no less evident that Paul had this high appointment, for Christ said to him, ‘ I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of those things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee.’ The apostles were farther instructed by immediate inspiration in the whole will of God. This was emphatically the promise of the Father; and in fulfilment of it they were baptized on the day of Pentecost with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Paul was not then of their number, and was accused, on that account, of a deficiency in his credentials. But this want was made up to him; and he could say, in vindication of his apostleship, ‘ I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man; for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.’ The apostles, in a word, had the power, not only of working miracles, but of conferring miraculous gifts on others. When the covetous Simon saw that ‘ through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.†

* 1 Cór. xv. 8 9.

† Acts viii. 18, &c.

Paul had this qualification; and having, in virtue of it, communicated preternatural gifts to the Christians at Corinth, he could say to them, 'I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me; for I ought to have been commended of you; for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you, in all patience, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds.'

From all this it appears that the apostles had distinctive seals of office; and the possession of certain qualifications by all of them is the more remarkable, that one of their number did not obtain these in the same manner as the rest, and yet was provided with them in a way suitable to his circumstances.* If I have said more than enough on this point, I may find an excuse for the too lengthened illustration in the necessity which a great crisis is laying upon us, of proving, and urging the proof, that the apostolic office was extraordinary—that, being extraordinary, it was temporary—and that the apostles neither have, nor can have, any successors.

The same doctrine could be established as to the evangelists, who performed like work as the apostles, under their direction; and no demonstration is needed, that miracles, and gifts of healing, and diversities of tongues, belonged exclusively to the age of supernatural endowments.

* See this subject satisfactorily handled in the fifth of Principal Campbell's Lectures on Ecclesiastical History.

If, then, all the offices in the primitive church had borne the impress of this uncommon and transient character, there would have been no ground for pleading their permanency. But if some were different in their nature—if some had duties attached to them which may still be performed, and qualifications required for them which may still be possessed—if these were instituted universally in the primitive churches; and if the discharge of their functions would secure, at all times, the maintenance and extension of the Redeemer's kingdom—then, are we not equally bound to hold such offices inviolate, as if they alone had subsisted from the beginning? If ever they could have been readily dispensed with, it was surely in the apostolic age, when inspiration and miracles might have accomplished their objects; and why should they, even at that time, have been assigned to the churches, if not to mark the more emphatically their indispensable and ever-enduring character? Thus far the case has been stated hypothetically, that the nature of the argument might be better apprehended. But I now state positively, that there were such offices; and that we have no right whatever to abolish or alter them. Whenever a number of persons were converted under the preaching of the apostles or their fellow-labourers, these converts were formed into a society, and obtained for their stated and proper officers, bishops and deacons. Only some churches were favoured with the ministrations of apostles and evangelists, and these churches enjoyed that distinction only for limited periods, and at remote intervals; but every church—

no matter when planted, or by whom watered, or to what country belonging—had bishops and deacons for its fixed and abiding office-bearers. The epistle to the Philippians is addressed to ‘all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:’ no mention is made of other office-bearers. In the first epistle to Timothy, Paul gives directions about the necessary qualifications of the same office-bearers, and he speaks of no others. The Rev. Herbert Thorndike, a divine of the Church of England, who flourished in the reign of Charles I., says of the apostle Paul, that ‘neither in the relation of his planting and ordering the churches, nor in the style of his epistles, nor in his instructions concerning ministers of these churches, is there any remembrance or respect to be found but of presbyters and deacons.’*

Here, then, is a great and palpable fact: the primitive churches had stated functionaries; and if they allowed no diversities, and no casualties, to molest this associating and assimilating feature of identity, we shall do well to hold that in common with them, which they held in common with one another. Here we take our stand; here we construct our defences; and here we consent and insist that the war of ecclesiastical systems be decided.

* Government of Churches. Cambridge, 1641.

CHAPTER II.

EACH OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCHES HAD A COMPANY OF ELDERS FOR ITS SPIRITUAL OFFICE-BEARERS.

It has already appeared, that the functionaries of the primitive churches were bishops and deacons. The standing of deacons shall be afterwards considered, and for the present, therefore, it need not be discussed. This only may be stated respecting them, that they were specially put in charge with pecuniary affairs; and this renders it the less necessary to speak of their duties in directing attention to the spiritual superintendence of the churches. Deacons, then, being omitted meanwhile from the list of officers, there remain—bishops.

The word 'bishop' signifies an overseer. It was applied by the government of Athens to those magistrates who were engaged in organising its dependent states; and being transferred from these political to ecclesiastical relations, came to denote among Christians their spiritual superintendents. But the heading of this chapter alleges that elders were the spiritual office-bearers of the primitive churches. How, then, were they bishops? There is no discordance between the statements.

The same persons who were called bishops were also called presbyters, or elders. The word which in our version of the Bible is translated elder, and which would be more literally rendered presbyter, was ex-

pressive originally of age, denoting a man advanced in years. But as such elderly individuals had the benefit of experience and of mature judgment, as well as the influence of established character, they were naturally elevated to a presidency over the more youthful portion of society. Hence the name elder passed from expressing age, to denote the station or trust for which it qualified. 'Days,' said Elihu, 'should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.'* These words embody the principle now remarked upon, that the elder members of society are its natural counsellors: and it is curious to find this principle infixing itself in the languages of all nations. In Latin, 'senior' means an elder person; and hence 'senator' among the Romans, 'signore' among the Italians, and 'seigneur' among the French. Our own term 'alderman' is just elder man, with a difference of one letter in the spelling. The primitive churches, then, had for their spiritual office-bearers a class of men who were sometimes called bishops or overseers, and sometimes presbyters or elders. That the same office-bearer was called indifferently a 'bishop' and an 'elder,' is perfectly obvious in reading the New Testament.

The importance of this fact will be afterwards more apparent; at present I remark upon it simply as a fact, and as clearly established by the New Testament scriptures. Paul, in journeying to Jerusalem, sent for the 'elders' of Ephesus to meet him at Miletus,

* Job xxxii. 7.

and he exhorted these elders to feed the church of God, over which the Holy Ghost had made them 'bishops,'—rendered in our version overseers. The same individuals designated elders in the 17th verse, are designated bishops in the 28th verse; and how could it be made more manifest that the two designations respected one class of office-bearers? We find Paul saying to Titus, '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. If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot, or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God.'* Here we have in one verse a requirement to ordain elders; in the next verse their requisite qualifications; and in the verse succeeding, a reason why such qualifications were to be demanded of them: 'For a bishop must be blameless.' It will be observed that the term elder, used at the commencement, is exchanged for the term bishop in the conclusion, while the same office-bearer is spoken of. An elder must have such and such qualifications. Why? Because a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God. Does not this identify the elder and the bishop? If not, identification is impossible. If it were said, the lord mayor of London must devote himself to his duties, for the chief magistrate of such a city has great responsibilities,—would not the language bear that the lord mayor and the chief

* Titus i. 5-7.

magistrate were the same office-bearer? Otherwise, the representation would be absurd; for why should the mayor devote himself to his duties because some other person had great responsibilities? Yet the mayor and the chief magistrate are not more identified in this comparison, than are the elder and the bishop in Paul's instructions to Titus.* These observations bring us to an important conclusion: that each of the primitive churches had one, and only one, general order of spiritual office-bearers, who were indifferently called bishops and elders.

* 'The next opinion about the origine of Episcopacie is that of Jerome, and he hath given it very fully, both in his epistle to Evagrius, and on the epistle to Titus. He holds that all things at first were governed in the church, *communi presbyterorum consilio*, and that the bishops were above the presbyters, *non ex dispositione dominicâ, sed ex ecclesiæ consuetudine*; [not by the Lord's appointment, but by the practice of the church.] And by divers arguments from scripture, he proves that bishop and presbyter are one and the same. Acts xx. they who, v. 17, are called presbyters, are v. 28, called bishops. Titus i. 5, *he left him to ordain elders*, and v. 7, it is added, *For a bishop, &c.* Whence he infers, that bishop and presbyter are one and the same.'—(Bishop Burnet's Observations on the First and Second of the Canons, commonly ascribed to the holy Apostles, p. 7.—Glasgow, 1673.)

CHAPTER III.

WHILE ALL THESE OFFICE-BEARERS RULED, ONLY SOME OF THEM TAUGHT, SO THAT A DISTINCTION SUBSISTED AMONG THEM, OF TEACHING AND RULING ELDERS.

It has been already shown, that in each of the primitive churches there was one, and only one, general order of spiritual office-bearers, who were indifferently called bishops or elders. At first sight, this conclusion might seem to militate against modern presbytery, since we make a distinction between ministers and elders, and thus appear to have not one order merely, but two orders of spiritual superintendents in our churches. If, however, I succeed in showing that the primitive elders, though one order as rulers, were not all occupied in preaching the word—that some of them ruled only, while others of them, besides ruling, taught,—then a close conformity will be established between our present church order and the scriptural standard. That the elders of primitive churches were not all public teachers may be argued,—

1st, *From the constitution of the Jewish synagogues.* Many facts relating to the synagogues are involved in great obscurity, and have hence given rise to much disputation. But diversity of opinion on many points makes agreement about others more remarkable and persuasive; and on this principle it is worthy of consideration, that while some learned writers suppose the rulers of the synagogue to have all received the same sort of ordination, and to have

been all entitled by their office to discharge the same class of duties, yet the highest authorities are agreed in admitting, that some rulers of the synagogue confined their attention to the regulation of its affairs, and that only some of them adventured on a public exposition of the scriptures. By this weakest statement of the case, then, the usage of the synagogue and our existing practice are in agreement. The admitted resemblance of the synagogues to the first Christian assemblies,* creates a probability that the same statement was applicable to the primitive churches.

That the elders of the primitive churches were not all public teachers may be argued,—

2d, *From the number of them.*—Every church, the smallest as well as the largest, was presided over by an assemblage of these office-bearers. But 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. Our Independent brethren allow of no elders but teaching elders; and what is the consequence? With very few exceptions, each of their churches has but one elder, where each of the primitive churches had a council of them. A fact of this kind is very significant, and deserves to be

* Appendix, Note A.

well pondered. Each of our Presbyterian churches has a number of elders; each of the primitive churches had a number of elders: but our Independent friends, who plead so earnestly for scriptural institutions, have in this departed from apostolic precedent, and, even in the case of their largest churches, have substituted one elder for a college of them. Why is it so? The reason is, that they think all elders must be teaching elders; 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 content themselves with one such elder for a church as equal to its necessities. But should they not doubt their interpretation of scripture, when it brings them into collision with scriptural facts? Should they not reason with themselves: one teaching elder suffices for a large congregation; therefore they cannot have been all teaching elders, of whom the apostles assigned certainly more than one, and likely a considerable number, to the most diminutive of Christian assemblies?

The importance of this point has been felt by intelligent Congregationalists, and they have endeavoured, as they could, to obviate its difficulties. We shall act fairly, then, in allowing them to speak on it for themselves. Dr Bennet, in his theology of the 'Early Christian Church,' a learned and valuable work,* says,—'The language of scripture often leads to the conclusion that it was not the design of Christ to require

* Delivered as a course of lectures under the auspices of the Committee of the Congregational Library; published in 1841.

a plurality of bishops in every church; for this office is mentioned in the singular, when the deacons are spoken of in the plural. (1 Tim. iii. 2, 8.) The argument of the apostle, derived from the father of a family, as Clemens Alexandrinus observes, leads to the same conclusion: "A bishop must rule 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?" Here a single ruler is supposed to preside in the church as in a family. In the Revelation, the seven stars are the angels, as Origen observes, or presidents of the seven churches. The term pastor supposes one shepherd over one flock.—(p. 223.)

In this passage, the supposition of each of the primitive churches having had a plurality of elders is controverted, and an attempt is made to show that scripture favours the one elder system now common with Independents. What, then, are the defences of this position? We are told that this officer is mentioned in the singular, when the deacons are spoken of in the plural; and we are referred for an example of this to 1 Tim. iii. 2, 8. In the 2d verse of that chapter it is said, 'a bishop must be blameless;' in the 8th verse it is said, 'likewise must the deacons be grave.' Does not this look as if there were to be one bishop and a number of deacons? Such is the argument of Dr Bennet; but it surely rests upon a very small circumstance. If we read the first verse, we easily perceive why one bishop is mentioned in the second. The apostle says in the former, 'This is a true saying,

if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.' Here it is plain enough why one bishop is specified: 'If a man desire the office of a bishop.' Could the apostle have said, 'If a man desire the office of two bishops, or a college of bishops?' It is surely enough that one man desire the office of one bishop. When the apostle, then, had used the singular in the first verse, was it not most natural and proper to continue it in the second, and to say, 'a bishop then must be blameless?' Again, Dr Bennet argues that the comparison instituted by the apostle between ruling one's own house and taking care of the church of God, implies that there is to be one ruler in the church, as there is in the family. The danger of thus extending the emblems of scripture beyond the exact use which scripture makes of them, could easily be shown. But in this case the task is superfluous. When the phrase 'church of God' is used, as it is here, without any locality being mentioned, it denotes not a fractional society of Christians, but the church universal. Surely in this church there is more than one subordinate office-bearer; and to it, therefore, the criticism of Dr Bennet cannot apply. That the apostle is to be so understood in this connexion, is farther evident from what he says in the 15th verse of the same chapter: 'But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.' What the apostle had before called the 'church of God,' he here calls the 'church of the living God,' and when he represents it, more-

over, as the ‘pillar and ground of the truth,’ we see that he speaks of the faithful collectively, over whom there are many office-bearers. Once more, Dr Bennet tells us, that in the Revelation the seven stars are the angels or presidents of the seven churches. By this he means to prove, that each church had a single president. But he knows well enough, that eminent men have understood the term ‘angel’ collectively, as denoting either the church or its associated rulers. Dr Goodwin, an eminent Independent, says, that the seven Asiatic churches ‘were fixed bodies, having each their elders, an angel, collectively taken, as the use of that phrase in that book is.’* The Rev. Herbert Thorndike, an Episcopalian already quoted, says, ‘To the argument drawn from the angels of the seven churches of Asia, I add only a reply, that angels stand there for presbyteries, or colleges of presbyters.’† Bishop Stillingfleet says, ‘If many things in the epistles be directed to the angels, but yet so as to concern the whole body, then of necessity the angel must be taken as a representative of the whole body; and then, why may not the word angel be taken by way of representation of the body itself: either of the whole church, or, which is far more probable, of the consessus, or order of presbyters in that church?’‡ Much

* Government of the Churches, book ii. chap. 3.

† Right of the Church in a Christian State, chap. 3. p. 92.

‡ Irenicum. I cannot at the moment find this paragraph in the Irenicum, and I therefore give it as it is quoted in Dr Mason’s work on Episcopacy,—an admirable book, which I am glad to have an opportunity of recommending.

might be said to confirm this exposition. But the use which Dr Bennet has made of the passage, admits of being combated by a shorter and easier method. One of the seven churches was Ephesus; and Dr Bennet admits himself, that, 'as the church at Ephesus had more than one elder, the apostle addresses them in the plural as bishops.'—(p. 222.) What, then, becomes of the angelic argument? Who was the one president at Ephesus, when the church in that city had more than one elder? By the author's own showing, we have elders at Ephesus, and among them a presiding elder. So it is not in any Independent church; but so it is exactly in Presbyterian churches, where elders who rule are presided over, in their sessional assemblies, by one elder, who both rules and teaches. Finally, Dr Bennet argues that the term pastor supposes one shepherd over the flock. This argument is not happier than the rest. One flock may have a plurality of shepherds. The term shepherd in the plural is associated with the term flock in the singular, very often in the sacred volume, 'Neither did my shepherds,' says God by Ezek., xxxiv. 8–10, 'search for my flock, but my shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock: therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand,' etc. In addressing the Ephesian elders, Paul exhorts them to 'take heed unto themselves, and to all the flock.' So that we have here one flock, and a number of shepherds; and how then does the emblem of a shepherd suppose singleness of

superintendence? Bishop Stillingfleet, after quoting this passage, says, it is ‘observable, *first*, that the body of Christians in Ephesus is called the flock of the church, and not the several flocks and churches over which God hath made you bishops. *Secondly*, that all those spoken to were such as had a pastoral charge of this one flock.’*

On a review, then, of these arguments, I feel warranted to say that they utterly fail of their object, and that the language of scripture never leads to the conclusion of its not being the design of Christ to require a plurality of bishops in every church. But there is much evidence leading to a conclusion directly the reverse. It has already appeared that there was a close resemblance between the Jewish synagogues and the first Christian churches; and we know that every synagogue had at the fewest three elders. Dr Goodwin says, ‘They (the synagogues) used to have three at least, that a major vote might cast it among the rulers.’† Dr Neander says, ‘Since the appointment of presbyters in the Christian church entirely corresponded with that of presbyters in the Jewish synagogue, at least in their original constitution; so we may conclude, that if a plurality of elders stood at the head of the synagogue, the same was the case with the first Christian church.’‡ If this reasoning be objected to as analogical and inferential merely, there is no want of direct scriptural

* *Irenicum*, chap. 7. p. 347.

† *Government of the Churches*, book ii. chap. 4.

‡ *Planting of the Christian Church*, vol. i. p. 41—Note.

testimony to the same effect. We read of elders in each of the churches of Jerusalem, Ephesus, and Philippi. Paul, in addressing the Hebrews, says, 'Obey them that have the rule over you.'* James exhorts him who is sick to 'call for the elders of the church.' These are individual cases; but we have more comprehensive examples on record. Paul says to Titus, '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.† On this passage Dr Bennet remarks, that 'as every city is mentioned, the plurality of bishops may refer to the plurality of churches.'—(p. 223, note.) If the author admitted that it was common in these days to have several churches in one city, then it would be easy to perceive that Titus might ordain elders in every city, and yet only one elder in every church. But he contends, on the contrary, that each of the largest cities had in these days but one church,—(p. 204, etc.); and, if this opinion be correct, how can the mention of cities have any such effect as he alleges? On this supposition, Luke avers that they ordained elders in every city. Dr Bennet says, no; they ordained one elder in every city: but in this way they ordained a number of elders in every country. How is the one of these to be brought out of the other, without charging gross inaccuracy on the historian? Who would say that we had a number of magistrates in every city, if we had only one magistrate in every city, and

* Heb xiii. 17.

† Titus i. 5.

the meaning were that we had a good many magistrates throughout the nation? Yet the error would not be more glaring in the Greek than it is in the English. Nor is this the only instance where such comprehensive language occurs. We read of Paul and Barnabas, that 'they ordained elders in every church.*' Here it is not said 'in every city,' but 'in every church;' so that the only evasion Dr Bennet could think of, is in this case unavailing. The early Christian fathers, in speaking of churches, always suppose each of them to have a number of elders, so often as they give us any intimation on the subject. The Rev. Herbert Thorndike, a learned Episcopalian already quoted, says, in relation to these points, 'Now the form of government estated by St Paul over these churches is pointed out to us, Acts xiv. 23; where we read, in the end of their first journey, that "Paul and Barnabas, having ordained them presbyters in every church, returned to Antioch." But unto Titus the apostle writeth thus (Titus i. 5): "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou mightest set in order the things that are wanting, and constitute elders in every city, as I had appointed thee." Elders in every church in the one place, and elders in every city in the other: both to the same effect; not meaning one in a place, but presbyteries; that is, colleges, bodies, companies of presbyters, with common advice to order the churches planted in these cities. Such a college of presbyters it was that we spoke of in the last chap-

* Acts xiv. 23.

ter, instituted by the apostle in the church of Jerusalem, the pattern whereof St Paul followeth in the churches which he converted out of the Gentiles. And then, in the church of Ephesus, you shall see St Paul (Acts xx. 17) sending for the bench of elders there to Miletus. Thus, in the church of Philippi, you shall find that the apostle directeth his epistle to the bishops and deacons there, which must be to the college of presbyters next above the order of deacons. Thus, when the apostle writeth to the Thessalonians, (1 Thess. v. 12,) “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord,” the multitude whereof he speaketh is to be understood of the like company of presbyters. Thus, in Ignatius, his epistles, you shall find him, up and down, reckoning next after the bishops the presbyteries of all the churches to which he writeth. The like in St Cyprian’s epistles for the presbyteries of Rome and Carthage.’—(p. 17.) Dr Owen says, ‘The pattern of the first churches constituted by the apostles, which it is our duty to imitate and follow as our rule, constantly expresseth and declares that many elders were appointed by them in every church. There is no mention in the scripture, no mention in antiquity, of any church wherein there was not more elders than one, nor doth that church answer the original pattern where it is otherwise.’* The proof, then, we hold to be complete and decisive, that each of the primitive churches had not one elder, as the

* True Nature of a Gospel Church, chap. 7.

Independent churches have now, but a number of elders, as we see exemplified in our Presbyterian polity.

Dr Bennet, not quite satisfied with his contrary reasoning, nearly admits as much. 'It is probable,' he says, 'that at first this practice (of having more than one bishop to a church) most frequently obtained, not only on account of the abundance of gifts bestowed to fit men for the work of the ministry, but also on account of the persecutions which usually fell upon the bishops; and when the most conspicuous was removed, it was desirable that another should be left to watch over the flock.'—(p. 224.) Here the difference between primitive churches and Independent churches is acknowledged. It is admitted that the former had a number of elders or bishops, where the latter have but one; and the fact being conceded, an attempt to account for it is subjoined. In those early days, we are informed, they had many gifts fitting men for the ministry, and many persecutions cutting off the ministers after they were appointed. These two explanations go to neutralise each other. If gifts qualified men to be ministers as fast as they were needed, why provide a superabundance of them by anticipation? The supposition that elders were so generally slaughtered is a great exaggeration, for comparatively few of them resisted unto blood, striving against sin. But had the fact been as alleged, would it have been kind to appoint more of them than were necessary, just to expose them to destruction? This idea of a reserve store of elders is nowhere countenanced in the New Testament.

But Dr Bennet tells us further, that ‘the first churches were designed to be the parents of others; so that, while one bishop was presiding over the church first formed, another pastor would go into the vicinity to form a new church, which might detain him permanently to watch over those to whom he was a father in God.’ This argument does not well consist with what he attempts to prove elsewhere, that in each of the largest cities, such as Jerusalem and Rome, there was, during the first century, but one congregation. Congregationalists are earnest in maintaining, that the word *church* always signifies in scripture either the whole church, or a single Christian society, and in support of this doctrine, they must prove that the greatest capitals of those days contained no more than one Christian church. But when we ask, why each church had so many elders; we are then informed that a number of them were occupied in erecting churches in their neighbourhoods. Surely the evangelising pastors, then, had not been very successful, when they laboured for a hundred years in the streets and lanes of the largest cities, without adding a single new church to the number! Apart from this seeming incongruity, we have seen that elders were the stated office-bearers in a particular church, and not itinerant missionaries; and that the New Testament, in any allusions made to them, supposes them to be labouring for the good of that church which they were appointed to superintend. Farther, and finally, was it only in the apostolic age that churches were designed to be the parents of others?

Is not the extension of Christ's cause just as incumbent on churches now as it was then, and why does not a like obligation create in Congregational churches a like multiplicity of office-bearers? We insist, then, on pleading with our Congregational brethren, that they return to apostolic usage, and obtain for each of their churches a number of bishops or presbyters. We plead with them to resume, in this particular, their own usage, for Independency and ruling eldership were not of old times deemed to be incompatible; and Dr Goodwin thought he honoured the Congregational system in saying, 'Every church is a city unto God: it is the city of the living God: it is the holy city, and hath a foundation within itself, of elders within its own gates.' Of course these elders cannot be all ministers of the word; so that some will rule only, and others will labour also in word and doctrine. This will be the inevitable result of reverting to a scriptural plurality of elders; and it surely favours presbytery, that a resumption of apostolic usage necessarily brings along with it our sessional arrangements.

That the elders of the primitive churches were not all teachers, and that some of them ruled only, may be argued,—

3d, *From various passages of the New Testament scriptures.*—In his epistle to the Romans, Paul says, '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.* That the apostle, in this language, points out a number of distinct offices, appears plainly enough from the connection. He exhorts, in the third verse, that no one 'should think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.' No one was to exalt himself above his brethren, as possessing higher gifts than they. The faith exercised in duties was the most important element in them; and as this faith refers all to Divine favour, it would, in the measure of it, produce sobriety of thought as to personal attainment. The apostle continues—'For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.' Each member of the body, it is here reasoned, has a distinct office; but none of them is so independent of the rest that it may glory over them. They are one body; and if, therefore, one member should disparage others, it would, in virtue of this relation, be disparaging itself,—it would be dishonouring the whole of which it formed part. Each member is to be honoured, not by de-

* Rom. xii. 6-8: Ἐχοντες δε χαρισματα κατα την χαριν την δοθεισαν ἡμιν διαφορα' εἴτε προφητειαν, κατα την ἀναλογιαν της πιστευως' εἴτε διακονιαν, ἐν τη διακονια εἴτε ὁ διδασκων, ἐν τη διδασκαλια. εἴτε ὁ παρακαλων, ἐν τη παρακλησει' ὁ μεταδιδους, ἐν ἀπλοτητι' ὁ προϊσταμενος, ἐν σπουδη' ὁ ελεων, ἐν ἰλαρητητι.

grading other members, but by executing effectively its own particular work. 'Having, then,' the apostle proceeds, 'gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy,' etc. No candid reader, I think, can follow this train without perceiving that the members of the church are here represented as having distinct offices, like the members of the body, and are cautioned against making the difference between them an occasion of vain-glorious strife. If it be so, 'he that ruleth' is a member of Christ's mystical body, holding a distinct office—an office which may be held separately from other offices; and he ought not, in consequence of any views entertained as to its relative importance, either to despise others or to be despised by them. It is no objection to this interpretation, that we cannot now define with clearness or certainty all the offices mentioned. An attempt has been sometimes made to define completely their respective provinces; but I do not feel it necessary to repeat these definitions or to pronounce upon their merits. It is enough that 'he who ruleth' is here represented as a distinct officer of the church, and the church ought surely to retain these officers, if their services are of a kind to be permanently needed. This was the opinion of Peter Martyr, a distinguished Italian reformer, who, on the invitation of Edward VI., became afterwards professor of divinity at Oxford. Having cited the words, 'He that ruleth with diligence,' he proceeds, 'Although I doubt not that there were many rulers in the church, yet, to confess the truth, this appears to me to be most aptly understood of

elders; not indeed of those who presided over the dispensation of word and doctrine, but of those who were given as assistants to pastors. These, as being prudent, zealous, and pious men, were chosen from the laity. Their business was to take charge principally of discipline—to see what every one did—and in every house and family to afford aid, as it was needed, whether for the mind or for the body. For the church had its elders, or, so to speak, its senate, who consulted about things as the time demanded. Paul describes this sort of ministry, not only in this place, but also in his first epistle to Timothy; for he thus writes, “Elders are worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in word and doctrine.” By which words he seems to intimate, that there are some elders who teach and propound the word of God; and that there are others who, while they do not this, nevertheless preside in the church as presbyters or elders.’*

* [‘ Qui præest in solitudine.] Etsi non dubito, multas fuisse in ecclesia præfecturas, tamen, ut verum fatear, mihi videtur appositissime intelligendum esse de presbyteris: non quidem de illis, qui præerant verbo et doctrinæ, sed de illis, qui pastoribus dabantur adjutores. Illi, ut prudentiores, et majori zelo et pietate præditi, eligebantur ex laicis. Munus illorum erat, curare maxime disciplinam, videre quid quisque ageret, et in unaquaque domo ac familia, quo cuique auxilio opus esset, quod vel ad animum spectaret vel ad corpus. Habuit enim ecclesia suos seniores, vel ut ita dicam, suum senatum qui de rebus utilibus pro tempore consultarent. Paulus hoc genus ministerii describit non solum hoc loco, sed etiam ad Timot. priori. Ita enim scribit, “ Presbyteri duplici honore digni sunt, maxime qui laborant in verbo et doctrina.”

Dr Thomas Goodwin, one of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, who ranks with the most learned Independents of the 17th century, says, in commenting on the 12th chapter to the Romans, and more especially the 8th verse—‘Though to rule is a pastor’s office as well as an elder’s, yet the elder is more especially said to rule, because he is wholly set apart to it. It is his proper calling, which he is wholly appointed to mind, and in a special manner. . . . Though the superior (officer) in common performs the same work with the inferior; yet the inferior is set apart to it wholly, which the other is not, but to some other of an higher kind, by reason of intending which he cannot so fully and wholly intend the other; and, therefore, it is observable, that speaking of a ruler’s office in ruling, he says, let him do it with diligence, for that is his work which he is to mind; and there will be enough of it to fill his hands.’*

The Rev. Thomas Hooker, a celebrated Independent pastor of New England, in his ‘Survey of Church Discipline,’ resolutely defends ‘the ruling elder’s place.’ He declares that Rom. xix. 7, ‘gives in witness to this truth, where all these officers are numbered and named

Quibus verbis significare videtur, alios esse Presbyteros, qui doceant et proponant verbum Dei: alios autem esse, qui, cum hoc non faciant, tamen ut Presbyteri seu seniores in ecclesia præsideant.’—*Loci Communes. Class. quar. cap. 1, p. 746.* London, 1583.

The work from which this passage is extracted affords no small countenance to the opinion which has been sometimes expressed, that Peter Martyr excelled even Calvin in crudition.

* The Government of the Churches, book vi. chap. 8.

expressly.*—Similar quotations might be brought from many other writers, not Presbyterians, all confirming the opinion we have expressed, that he who ruleth denotes, in the passage remarked upon, a ruling elder.

A similar passage occurs in 1 Cor. xii. The apostle there says, verse 28: '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.† We have here an enumeration of the offices, ordinary and extraordinary, subsisting in the primitive church, and among these express and separate mention is made of 'governments.' In the preceding verses the apostle censures all jealousies and feuds about the endowments possessed, and the places occupied, by different members of the church. He draws argument and illustration, as in the epistle to the Romans, from the complex membership and yet harmonious action of the human body—one bodily organ need not glory over another, for each is honoured or dishonoured in all the rest: 'Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now, ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church: first, apostles,' etc. Is it not perfectly plain that the ecclesiastical offices and the bodily members

* Quoted by Dr Miller—Office of the Ruling Elder, chap. 7.

† 1 Cor. xii. 28: *Και οὐς μὲν ἐβeto ὁ Θεος ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ πρῶτον ἀποστολους, δευτερον προφητας, τριτον διδασκαλους, ἔπειτα δυναμεις, ἴτα χαρισματα ἰαματων, ἀντιληψεις, κυβερνησεις, γενη γλωσσων.*

are exhibited in this connection as equally distinct, and as having equally little cause for relative boasting? And if so, governments, that is, governors, hold a distinct office, which may be filled separately. 'Are all apostles? (the inspired author proceeds)—are all prophets?' This language marks yet more emphatically the demarcation of the offices before-mentioned. Does every officer fill every office? No: each office has its own officer. The higher office indeed includes the lower, but the lower does not include the higher: for as Dr Goodwin remarks, 'that which is common to a superior officer with the inferior, may yet be made a proper difference of that inferior officer;'^{*} and, as there are prophets who are not apostles, and teachers who are not prophets, so there are governors who are not any one of the three; and who, nevertheless, should be contented and faithful in the situation assigned them.

Such is the simple and obvious import of the apostle's language. The more it is considered, it the more confirms this exposition. God hath set in the church 'governments.' This proposition is as unequivocally laid down as if it were alone; and what meaning has it, or can it have, if it do not mean that God has appointed some in the church whose business it is specifically to govern? If a stranger were to ask what a certain country contained, and were told that he would find in it legislators, generals, governors, etc., would he not understand each of these words to denote distinctive functionaries? The

* Government of the Churches, book vi. chap. 8.

governor, it is true, might also be a legislator, might be a member of parliament, and one of its principal debaters; but the stranger would understand that he might, on the other hand, be a governor and nothing else; and that, if he were admirably qualified for governing, he would not be despoiled of this distinctive trust, because he could neither draw up parliamentary bills, nor enliven a discussion by clever speeches. The representation is equally just when applied ecclesiastically. We have certain officers in the church, and among these, governments; and persons qualified for this trust may be appointed to it, though they should not be qualified for any other. So the passage, at least, has been understood by many able and disinterested judges. The Rev. Herbert Thorndike says, in his 'Discourse of Religious Assemblies,' — 'There is no reason to doubt that the men whom the apostle (1 Cor. xii. 28, and Ephes. iv. 11) called doctors or teachers, are those of the presbyters who had the abilities of preaching and teaching the people at their assemblies; that those of the presbyters who preached not, are called here by the apostle governments. . . . There were two parts of the presbyters' office, viz., teaching and governing; the one whereof some attained not, even in the apostle's times.'* I give the passage as quoted by Dr Miller, in his very excellent work on the 'Ruling Elder,' because I have not access to the original at present. I find, however, in other works of Mr Thorndike,

* Discourse of Religious Assemblies, chap. 4, p. 117.

that he is very angry with those of his own day who made like use of his observations, as Dr Miller and others have made since. In his 'Right of the Church,' etc., he says, 'Myself have the honour to be alleged, for one that approve lay elders, even in that place of that very discourse where I answer the best arguments that ever I heard made for them, only because I said then, as now, that we are not bound to think that all presbyters preached during the apostle's times,' etc.*—To settle the dispute with this learned prelatist, we concede to him that there should be no lay elders, for all elders are spiritual office-bearers: and he concedes to us, first, that every church should be ruled by a body of elders; and, secondly, that we are not bound to think that all the presbyters preached in the apostle's times. Points of difference remain, but with so much in common we are not disposed to quarrel. The learned Pareus, a German divine of the era of the Reformation, says, in his commentary on this passage—'He so designates, undoubtedly, the elders who presided over discipline. For the primitive church had its senate, who preserved good morals among the people, while the apostles and teachers were left free to preach. The apostle indicates this plainly enough, (1 Tim. v. 17,) where he specifies two kinds of presbyters. These governors, then, were not princes or prætors armed with the sword, but presbyters, excelling others in gravity, experience, authority, chosen from amidst the assembly with the church's consent,

* Chap. 3, p. 127.

who aided or relieved the pastors in administering discipline.’*

Dr Whitby, a learned Episcopalian, tells us that the elders among the Jews were of two sorts: first, such as governed in the synagogue; and, secondly, such as ministered in reading and expounding their scriptures and traditions. The second class he pronounces to have been the most honourable, and adds, ‘accordingly the apostle, reckoning up the offices God had appointed in the church, places teachers before governments,’ (1 Cor. xii.) † In these words, governing is allowed to be a distinct office from teaching.

The most decisive passage in favour of ruling elders remains to be considered. It is 1 Tim. v. 17: ‘Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in word and doctrine.’ ‡ These words could suggest to an unbiassed reader only one meaning: that all elders who rule well are worthy of abundant honour, but especially

* ‘Sic vocat haud dubie seniores, qui præsides erant disciplinae. Habuit enim primitiva ecclesia suum senatum, qui plebem in morum honestate contineret, cum interim apostoli et doctores doctrinae vacarent. Indicat id non obscure apostolus ad Timotheum, (1 Tim. v. 17,) ubi duos presbyterorum ordines constituit. Gubernatores ergo hi non erant principes aut praetores gladio armati, sed presbyteri, gravitate, experientia, auctoritate, praeter ceteris, pollentes, consensu ecclesiae e medio coetus delecti, qui pastores in gubernanda disciplina juvarent vel sublevarent.’

† See his Commentary on 1 Tim. v. 17.

‡ Οἱ καλῶς προϊστάμενοι πρεσβύτεροι διπλῆς τιμῆς ἀξιοσθῶσαν. μαλίστα οἱ κοπιῶντες ἐν λόγῳ καὶ διδασκαλίᾳ.

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. Various attempts have been made to invalidate this conclusion. Dr Guise, in his 'Practical Expositor,' explains 'double honour,' of 'the honour of maintenance.' Let the elders that rule well have liberal allowances, sufficient to make their worldly circumstances easy, reputable, and comfortable. That this is the sense of the words, he considers evident from what follows, ver. 18: 'For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.' Thus understanding the word honour to mean support, he cannot think it would be demanded for all elders, though specially for teaching elders. Why should elders, who simply ruled well without teaching, have double, or ample pay, at the church's cost, any more than the deacons, when the work of ruling occupied only their spare time, and 'left them at full liberty to pursue the business of their secular callings for their own and families subsistence?' In reply, it must be admitted that the word translated 'honour,' does sometimes denote pay or wages, and that the allusions which follow, to the feeding of the ox and the rewarding of the labourer, seem to favour this interpretation. Some of the best expositors, however, quite independently of the question now agitated, think this a low and narrow explanation of the language. They understand the apostle to say,

that the office-bearers mentioned ought to be honoured in a way becoming them, as the ox and the labourer have their appropriate remuneration. But it must be carefully observed, that this question about the meaning 'of honour,' does not affect in the slightest degree the countenance which this passage apparently renders to the distinction of teaching and ruling elders. Grant that honour means pecuniary reward. The apostle, on this supposition, enjoins, that ample recompense be given to elders who spend a proportion of their time in ruling well, and especially to those elders who occupy themselves more entirely with the affairs of the church, by not only ruling well, but also labouring in word and doctrine. Where the office-bearers were poor men, as most of them are known to have been, there was nothing in this equitable compensation for lost time very unreasonable or improbable, and nothing, certainly, to obliterate that distinction between ruling and teaching elders which the language of the apostle so clearly expresses. Surely the functions of elders are one thing, and the fittest mode of honouring them another.

In further supporting his views, Dr Guise admits that there is a distinction marked in the apostle's language ; but he thinks that the distinction lies not in the 'order of officers, but in the degree of their diligence, faithfulness, and eminence, in laboriously fulfilling their ministerial work, to the edification of the church.' This argument would seem to imply that ample honour was to be rendered even to those who were less faithful, though not so much as to those who were more faithful.

But when we see how earnestly the apostle enjoined a devoted fidelity on all office-bearers, can we imagine that he would require double honour for the *comparatively* inefficient of them? Some make the latter clause of the verse expository of the former. On this hypothesis the meaning comes to be—let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of ample honour, viz., the elders who especially labour in word and doctrine. To such an interpretation there are many and strong objections. It explains ruling well, by labouring in word and doctrine. But these things are perfectly distinct, and they cannot be explanatory of each other. To rule well is one excellence, to labour in word and doctrine is another excellence; and how could the apostle say, that by good rulers he meant laborious preachers? Some who excel in guiding affairs have no aptness for teaching. Shall we suppose, then, that the apostle confounded these things, so different, and that he deliberately explains ruling to mean preaching? If his intention had been to commend only the effective dispensation of the word, he might have done so simply and directly; and we find it hard to concede that he spoke of ruling instead of teaching; and then, to keep us from mistake, tells us, after all, that teaching alone was intended by him. Again, it is not said, ‘especially labour,’ as if to mark the degree of labouring; but ‘especially they who labour,’ fixing attention on certain persons as distinguishable from other persons—one section of elders from another section of elders; and eminent scholars have maintained that the Greek shows this

equally with the English version.* Finally, the word rendered ‘especially,’ is a mere mark of intensity, according to this rendering. ‘Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour;’ to wit, those who intensely labour in word and doctrine. Such a signification of the term is unexampled in the New Testament. It occurs frequently, but never with this import. ‘They all wept sore, and fell on Paul’s neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all (especially) for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.’ The meaning here is not that they sorrowed excessively for the words mentioned; but that they sorrowed specially for these words, as compared with others. ‘Wherefore, I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O King Agrippa.’ Here the whole assembly are first mentioned, and then, by the term ‘specially,’ Agrippa is singled out from the rest. The whole usage of the New Testament sanctions us in saying, that it is exactly thus in the passage now treated of. Paul first mentions all the elders who rule well, and then he singles out from these certain of their number who also laboured in word and doctrine. They were all ruling elders, but some of them were also teaching elders; and to these latter his directions especially applied.—That such is the proper understanding of this passage, has been, to a great extent, the concurrent opinion of Christian authors and Christian denominations down to a recent period.

* It is not said *οἱ μαλιστα κοπιωντες*, but *μαλιστα οἱ κοπιωντες*.

Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, who embraced Christianity in 246, and suffered martyrdom in 258, has many distinct allusions to this class of office-bearers. His 29th epistle, for example, is addressed to the elders and deacons; and the manner in which he there speaks of the elders, has led his commentator, Bishop Fell, to remark, in a foot-note, that ‘St Paul appears to have distinguished (1 Tim. v. 17) antiently between ruling elders and teachers.’*

Origen, who was born at Alexandria, A.D. 185, gives an account (Adv. Celsum, lib. iii. p. 142, edit. Cant.) of church discipline as administered in his age. Archbishop Potter, in his ‘Discourse of Church Government,’ chap. v., thus translates a portion of it:—‘The Christians try and examine as far as ’tis possible the very souls of those who desire to be their hearers; they first instruct them privately, and when they are found sufficiently disposed to lead a good life, they introduce them into the public assembly. Here they who have been but lately introduced, and have not received the symbol of purification (that is, baptism), are assigned to a different place from the rest, who have already given full proof of their sincere resolution to addict themselves wholly to the Christian doctrine and way of life. Some of these latter are ordained to inquire into the lives and conversations

* *Epistola xxix. Cyprianus Presbyteris et Diaconibus Fratribus, Salutem. [Aut modo cum Presbyteris.] Inter Presbyteros, Rectores, et Doctores, olim distinxisse videtur Divus Paulus, Epist. 1 ad Tim. c. iv. 17. (A misprint for v. 17.)—Bremæ, M DC XC.*

of those who present themselves to be admitted, in order to prohibit infamous and vile persons from coming into their assembly.'

It will be observed, from this passage, that of the Christians who were fully proved, some were ordained to inquire into the lives and conversations of applicants for admission. What could be said more characteristic of the position and functions of our ruling elders?

Hilary, more generally known by the name Ambrose, who wrote in the fourth century, tells us, in his comments on this chapter, that 'the synagogues, and afterwards the church, had elders, without whose counsel nothing was transacted in the church: By what negligence it fell into disuse I know not, unless, perhaps, by the indolence, or rather by the pride, of the teachers, while they alone wished to appear something.* Here the counselling and teaching office-bearers are clearly distinguished, the antiquity of ruling elder is explicitly asserted, and while the office is represented as falling into disuse, the writer ascribes the suppression of it to indolent or tyrannical bishops, who wished to rest or reign undisturbed by associates. Some have tried to torture the words of Ambrose into another meaning, but their testimony to a ruling eldership has been owned

* 'Synagoga et postea ecclesia seniores habuit quorum sine consilio nihil agebatur in ecclesia. Quod qua negligentia obsoleverit nescio, nisi forte doctorum desidia aut magis superbia, dum soli volunt aliquid videri.'—(Commentaria Sancti Ambrosii, 1 Tim. v. 1.)

by eminent men of all parties—by Bucer, Peter Martyr, Calvin, Whitgift, Zanchius, etc. etc.

Augustin, in the fourth century, makes frequent mention of this class of officers—to the extent, at least, of showing that he and many other pastors had elders who did not preach associated with them in the superintendence of their flocks. The churches of the Waldenses had ruling elders, when sound doctrine and pure discipline, banished from the world besides, took refuge in their valleys and fastnesses during the dark ages. This fact is abundantly proved in Blair's history of that interesting people. 'To another book of authority,' he says, 'we must pay particular attention, which is entitled "The Ancient Discipline of the Evangelical Churches in the Valleys of Piemont." . . . No writer mentions any copy as dated earlier than 1120.* This book of Discipline, as contained in Mr Blair's appendix, has one article concerning pastors, and a distinct article concerning elders. Of the latter it says, 'Rulers and elders are chosen out of the people, according to the diversity of the work in the unity of Christ.' In a separate article on excommunication, it says, 'But in case all these chastisements produce no amendment of life, nor forbearance of evils, Christ himself teacheth us how we ought to proceed against such an one: if he hear not those, tell it to the church; that is, to the rulers by whom the church is governed and con-

* History of the Waldenses, by the Rev. Adam Blair, vol. i. book ii. chap. 1: Twelfth century.

served.’* In relation to those passages, Mr Blair remarks—‘They had three orders of men above their ordinary members: the bishop, or teaching elder; the lay elder; and the deacon. The existence of the second class is clearly expressed in article 4th of the foregoing Discipline, for they are called rulers and elders chosen out of the people.’ †

At the time of the Reformation, when the church cast off the accumulated abuses of many centuries, and reappeared in all the loveliness of its primitive simplicity, the creeds and confessions of almost all reformed countries emphatically avowed the Divine appointment of this office, and exhibited, in vivid lights, its high importance to the prosperity of Christ’s kingdom. It was thus owned by the reformed churches of Switzerland, Poland, Germany, Holland, Belgium, and France. Even the church of England is no exception. The same convocation which passed the Thirty-nine Articles, sanctioned a Catechism drawn up by the Rev. Dean Nowell, in which the maintenance of discipline by a ruling eldership is unequivocally advocated.

In the concluding part of Mr. Nowell’s Catechism, the following answer is given as to the best means of remedying impure communion:—‘In well-constituted and well-regulated churches, a certain plan and order of government, as I have already said, was instituted and observed. Elders were chosen, that is, ecclesiastical magistrates, in order to main-

* Vol. i. pp. 534–536.

† Vol. i. p. 540.

tain and conduct ecclesiastical discipline. To these belonged authority, reprimand, and chastisement by censure. These, with the co-operation of the pastor, if they knew any who, by false opinions, or turbulent errors, or silly superstitions, or a vicious and profligate life, brought publicly a great reproach on the church of God, and could not without profanation approach the Lord's supper, repelled and rejected such from communion, and would not again admit them till they had satisfied the church by public penitence.*—In support of these views, we are referred, in the margin, to a number of texts, and among these, to 1 Tim. v. 17.

Respecting this publication, Bishop Randolph says, in the preface to the first edition of his *Enchiridion*, 'It is another object of the present plan, to show the genuine sense of the church of England, in her earliest days, both as to the grounds of separation from the church of Rome, and the doctrines which, after

* In ecclesiis bene institutis atque moratis, certa, ut antea dixi, ratio atque ordo gubernationis instituebatur atque observabatur. Deligebantur seniores, id est magistratus ecclesiastici, qui disciplinam ecclesiasticam tenerent atque colerent. Ad nos auctoritas, animadversio, atque castigatio censoria pertinebant: hi, adhibito etiam pastore, si quos esse cognoverant qui, vel opinionibus falsis, vel turbulentis erroribus, vel anilibus superstitionibus, vel vita vitiosa flagitiosaque, magnam publice offensionem ecclesie Dei adferrent, quique sine cœnæ Dominicæ profanatione accedere non possent, eos a communione repellebant atque rejiciebant, neque rursus admittebant, donec pœnitentia publica ecclesie satisfacissent.—(Noelli Catechismus, contained in the '*Enchiridion Theologicum* of Bishop Randolph.)

a long struggle, having entirely emancipated herself from that yoke, she at length finally adopted and ratified. For this purpose, my choice has been principally directed to such works as had the sanction of public authority, and which may therefore be relied on as containing the final and decided opinions of our reformers, approved of in the general by the church at large. . . . Of this kind, (that is, thus publicly received,) were ‘Jewell’s Apology,’ and ‘Nowell’s Catechism,’ the former of which is said to have been published with the consent of the bishops, and was always understood to speak the sense of the whole church in whose name it is written; the latter had the express sanction of convocation.’

Since these, then, were the principles of the English church, why were they not carried into effect? Bishop Burnet having told us, in the preface to the second part of his ‘History of the Reformation,’ that some reformed churches beyond sea brought in the laity with them into their courts, proceeds to say, in regard to England, ‘a platform was made of an ecclesiastical discipline, though the bishops had no hope of reducing it into practice till the king should come to be of age, and pass a law for the authorising it; but he dying before this was effected, it was not prosecuted with that zeal that the thing required in Queen Elizabeth’s time; and then those who, in their exile, were taken up with the models beyond seas, contending more to get it put in the method of other churches, than to have it set up in any other form; that contention begat such heat, that it took men off from this

and many other excellent designs.' In another part of his preface, still more to the purpose, the bishop informs us—'that there were many learned and pious divines in the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's reign, who, being driven beyond sea, had observed the new models set up in Geneva, and other places, for the censuring of scandalous persons, of mixed judicatories of the ministers and laity; and these, reflecting on the great looseness of life which had been universally complained of in King Edward's time, thought such a platform might be an effectual way for keeping out a return of the like disorders.' Then we are told of certain statesmen who demonstrated to the Queen—'that these models would certainly bring with them a great abatement of her prerogative, since, if the concerns of religion came into popular hands, there would be a power set up distinct from hers, over which she could have no authority. This she perceived well; and therefore resolved to maintain the ancient government of the church.'

The present churchwardens appear to be the wreck of this scriptural order of functionaries. In their annual attendance on the visitations of the archdeacon, they swear that they will present to that dignitary the names of all parishioners who are notoriously immoral.* The oath has become a dead letter; but, though inoperative at the present, it may be deemed commemorative of past realities. The earlier Congregational

* *Tracts for the Times*, 59, quoted in the *Plea of Presbytery*, p. 164—a work which contains much valuable information.

churches also had their elders. This was general in America. The Independents of England witnessed in times past to the same principle. Neal tells us, that 'to inform the world of the real principles of the Puritans of those times, the Rev. Mr Bradshaw published a treatise, entitled "English Puritanism," containing the main opinions of the rigidest sort of those that went by that name in the realm of England, which the learned Dr Ames translated into Latin, for the benefit of foreigners.' Under chap iv., which treats 'concerning the elders,' we have these propositions: '1. They hold that, by God's ordinance, the congregation should choose other officers, as assistants to the ministers in the government of the church, who are, jointly with the ministers, to be overseers of the manners and conversation of all the congregation. 2. That these are to be chosen out of the gravest and most discreet members, who are also of some note in the world, and able (if possible) to maintain themselves.*'

The celebrated Dr Owen, one of the brightest ornaments of Independency, has a strong passage on 1 Tim. v. 17, in his 'True Nature of a Gospel Church,' where he chastises objectors to the office of ruling elder with a zealous severity. After copying the pithy paragraphs, I have erased them, to give another passage, quite as persuasive in itself, from another of his works, which is less known. In his treatise on 'Worship and Discipline, by way of Question and

* History of the Puritans, part ii. chap. 1, p. 449—4th edit.

Answer,' he says—Question 31: "Are there appointed any elders in the church, whose office and duty consist in rule and government only? Answer: Elders not called to teach ordinarily, or administer the sacraments, but to assist and help in the rule and government of the church, are mentioned in the scripture, (Rom. xii. 8; 1 Cor. xii. 28; 1 Tim. v. 17.) Explanation—This office of ruling elders in the church is much opposed by some, and in especial by them who have least reason so to do. For, first, they object against them that they are lay elders, when those with whom they have to do deny that distinction of the church into the clergy and laity. For although they allow the distribution of it into officers and the multitude of the brethren, yet they maintain that the whole church is God's clergy, his lot and portion, (1 Peter v. 3.) Again, they affirm them to be elders, and therein not merely of the members of the church, but officers set apart unto their office according to rule, or the appointment of Christ. And if by laity, the people distinct from the officers of the church are to be understood, the very term of a lay elder implies a contradiction, as designing one who is, and is not, a church officer. . . . Besides, that some light in this matter may be taken from the church of the Jews, wherein the elders of the people were joined in rule with the priests, both in the sanhedrim and all lesser assemblies, there is in the gospel express mention of persons that were assigned peculiarly for rule and government in the church, as 1 Cor. xii. 28. And it is in vain pretended that those words, helps,

governments, do denote gifts only, seeing the apostle expressly enumerates the persons in office, or officers, which the Lord Christ then used in the foundation and rule of the churches as then planted. He that ruleth also is distinguished from him that teacheth and him that exhorteth, (Rom. xii. 8,) and is prescribed diligence as his principal qualification in the discharge of his duty. And the words of the apostle to this purpose are express, (1 Tim. v. 17,) ‘Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine.’ For the words expressly assign two sorts of elders, whereof some only attend unto rule; others, moreover, labour in the word and doctrine. Neither doth that word, as some would have it, ‘labour in the word,’ intend any other labour but what is incumbent on all the pastors and teachers of their church as their constant duty, (Rom. vi. 12; Acts xx. 35; 1 Thess. v. 12.) Now, can we suppose that the apostle would affirm them to be worthy of double honour, whom, comparing with others, he notes as remiss and negligent in their work? For it seems that others were more diligent in the discharge of that duty, which was no less theirs, if only one sort of elders be here intended. The scripture is not wont to commend such persons as worthy of double honour, but rather to propose them as meet for double shame and punishment, (Jer. xlvi. 10; 1 Cor. ix. 16.) And they are unmindful of their own interest, who would have bishops that attend to the rule of the church to be distinctly intended by the elders that

rule well, seeing the apostle expressly preferreth before and above them, those that attend constantly to the word and doctrine. And besides, what is thus expressly spoken concerning the appointment of this sort of elders in the church, their usefulness, in the necessity of their work and employment, is evident. For whereas a constant care in the church, that the conversation of all the members of it be such as becometh the gospel, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ be not evil spoken of, is of great concernment and importance; and the pastors and teachers, being to give up themselves continually unto prayer and the ministry of the word, cannot attend unto the constant and daily oversight thereof, the usefulness of these elders, whose proper and peculiar work it is to have regard unto the holy walking of the church, must needs be manifest unto all. But whereas, in most churches, there is little or no regard unto the personal holiness of the members of them, it is no wonder that no account should be had of them who are ordained by the Lord Christ to look after it and promote it.

“The qualifications of these elders, with the way of their call and setting apart unto their office, being the same with those of the teaching elders before insisted on, need not be here again repeated. Their authority, also, in the whole rule of the church, is every way the same with that of the other sort of elders, and they are to act in the execution of it with equal respect and regard from the church. Yea, the business of rule being peculiarly committed unto them, and they required to attend thereunto with diligence, in an

especial manner the work thereof is principally theirs, as that of labouring in the word and doctrine doth especially belong unto the pastors and teachers of the churches. And this institution is abused, when either unmeet persons are called to this office, or those that are called do not attend unto their duty with diligence, or do act only in it by the guidance of the teaching officers, without a sense of their own authority, or due respect from the church."

Dr Doddridge, another eminent Congregationalist, says, in commenting on 1 Tim. v. 17, [‘especially they who labour,'] ‘This seems to insinuate that there were some who, though they presided in the church, were not employed in preaching.’

Dr Dwight, whom Mr Orme, himself an Independent, characterises as a distinguished American divine of the Congregational order, thus writes in his ‘System of Theology,’ (vol. v. p. 171), ‘Preaching is everywhere in the scriptures exhibited as an employment superior to that of ruling. In the passage quoted from 1 Tim. v. 17, this truth is decisively exhibited. Here St Paul directs that preaching elders should be accounted worthy of more honour than ruling elders.’

Later writers of the Episcopalian and Independent persuasions have become more chary of eulogising the ruling elder’s office, as considering it a constituent of presbytery—antagonist to their systems. Occasional admissions of the same character, however, are still to be met with in modern publications. Archbishop Whately says—‘The plan pursued by the apostles seems to have been to establish a great num-

ber of small (in comparison with most modern churches), distinct, and independent communities, each governed by its own single bishop, consulting, no doubt, with his own presbyters, and accustomed to act in concurrence with them,' etc.* As to the mutual dependence, or independence, of Christian communities, I am not now called particularly to speak: but here is a distinct admission on the subject in hand, that, on the plan of the apostles, every bishop or pastor consulted his elders as Presbyterian ministers do, and acted in concert with them.

Mr Bridges, in his work on the Christian ministry, dwells on the importance of a pastor allying with himself efficient laymen in the superintendence of his charge; and when he gives these coadjutors the work, he might also give them the name and appointment of elders.

It is satisfactory, then, to think, that the government of a church by elders is so clearly and abundantly sanctioned by the word of God; and that the force of the proof has been so generally acknowledged by the Christian world. We may hope that still greater unity of sentiment on the same subject may be attained, and that the principles will be more than ever honoured in the effective application of them. The office would rise in favour, if all who held it ruled with diligence. To us it seems strange, that, under the same term, 'bishops,' the apostles should include both ministers and elders, when their

* Kingdom of Christ, p. 165.

standing is so different in modern estimation. It is true, we speak of the members of presbyteries or synods without distinguishing the ruling and teaching elders, of whom the court is composed. But still the one term, 'bishop,' so often applied to elders whether they ruled or taught, shows that they were more upon a footing in the primitive church than in the present working of presbytery. At their meetings for public worship, all the elders occupied one bench or platform, facing the people, to indicate the sameness of their order; and he who was to preach took his place with them, and delivered his message from amid his brethren.*

I do not say this practice should be resumed, though I would not object to its restoration; but I do say there should be more of the parity of which it gave evidence. If not in their seats, at least in their services, the elders should be in view of the people, and valued as the pastors with whom they co-operate. Let them

* Some Episcopalians, who substantially admit this fact, attempt to uphold the superiority of bishops, by alleging that the preaching elder was the bishop, emphatically so called, and that he had also a different sort of seat from the elders on either side of him. In the primitive church, says 'our learned Thorndike,' to use the language of Bishop Stillingfleet, 'the presbyters were wont to sit by themselves in a half circle at the east end of the church, with their faces turned to the faces of the people, the deacons standing behind them, as waiting on them, but the bishop on a throne (!) by himself, in the midst of the presbyters' seats.'—(Right of the Church, etc., chap. iii. p. 93.)—They must be very intent on securing a throne for the bishop, who find one in the simple arrangements of the primitive christians.

magnify their office. Let them show that they have a high conception themselves of the trust confided to them, and others will hold it in kindred estimation: but if they let down the office, what wonder if others trample it under foot? And how are they to magnify it? By demeaning themselves consequentially—by walking with the air and strut of office? Assuredly not. They must rule with diligence. The church, through all its sections of young and old, rich and poor, near and remote, must feel the pervading efficacy of their vigilant inspection. Then it will be seen that they have plenty to do who have only to rule, and wonder will cease to be entertained that labourers so estimable and invaluable have been classed by the apostles with ministers of the word, as participating in the same superintendence of the church, and similarly entitled to be esteemed very highly in love for their work sake.

CHAPTER IV.

WHILE THIS SYSTEM HAS THE SANCTION OF SCRIPTURE, IT IS MOST REASONABLE IN ITSELF.

THE superintendence of a congregation may be assigned to the minister exclusively, or to the church members universally, or to a company of elders. The two former of these plans are liable to obvious and serious objections. Is the church to be superintended

by the minister alone? The work is too great for him. The single duty of preparing and preaching two discourses every week is itself an arduous and engrossing occupation, if he is not to deal in a few commonplaces, and be ever saying nearly the same things in nearly the same words, but to read and think before speaking, and to bring out of his treasures things new and old.—Can he, in addition to this, give all the visitation that is due to the flock generally, and to the sick especially? Can he secure all the official attentions needful for the young by his personal assiduity? Can he ascertain, unaided, the character as well as the knowledge of those who ask admission into the church, and, after their admission, maintain single-handed a proper inspection of their behaviour? In addition to all this, can he fulfil the engagements of a public-spirited Christianity, and receive deputations, and conduct correspondence, and attend meetings, and deliver discourses and addresses as the interests of the gospel and the exigencies of the times may require at his hands? To enumerate these elements of labour, is to show that they cannot be the exclusive trust of one individual. If any man really take the burden upon him, he will soon sink under it, and give occasion for friends saying to him, as Jethro said to Moses, on seeing all that he did to the people, ‘What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even? The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou and this people that is with

thee, for this thing is too heavy for thee: thou art not able to perform it thyself alone.’*

Suppose that a minister could, is it desirable that he should, conduct the whole superintendence of the church? Undivided power is a perilous temptation to imperfect humanity; and the clergy have shown that they are not more exempted than any other class from its deleterious influence on the temper and conduct. Even suppose that he should be always in the right, is it befitting that he should encounter alone all the suspicion and obloquy which faithfulness itself may occasionally incur? If there had never been a pope over a single church, there never would have been a pope over the Christian world; and the absolute sway of a single ecclesiastic has the same essential impropriety, whether it be exemplified on the less scale or the larger. The minister must no doubt superintend all the church; that obligation is not disputed;—but though his superintendence be indispensable, it is not therefore sufficient; and if he have none to act with him in his works and labours of love, even his own exertions, from not being seconded and carried out, will be, to a great extent, neutralised and dissipated.

Is the superintendence of the church to be intrusted to its members universally? No doubt every Christian has relative duties to perform; and it becomes all of us, whether occupying public or private stations, to be ‘exhorting one another daily, while it is called

* Exod. xviii. 14, &c.

to-day,' that none of us 'be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.' But all this being admitted, it appears somewhat anomalous to speak of a society superintending itself. When the apostle says to the Hebrews, 'Obey them that have the rule over you,' we naturally think of a body of superintendents distinct from the general community, and can hardly suppose the parties who are addressed to wield the very power which they are exhorted to respect. The church is sometimes compared to a flock—sometimes to an army—sometimes to a kingdom; and none of these emblems affords much countenance to self-superintendence. Where is the flock in which the distinction is lost between the sheep and shepherds?—where the army in which the soldiers are indiscriminately privates and officers?—where the kingdom in which rulers and subjects are convertible terms? At present, however, we are testing institutions by their reasonableness; and the propriety is not very evident, of leaving the most important interests without a special guardianship. No other society is so regulated; and it is allowable to question whether a scheme antagonist to all experience can be conformable to grace. In other cases, that which is the business of all becomes the business of none; and though we here speak of religious and not of secular affairs, a principle is not changed in its nature or tendency from being applied to other and better objects; a cause of neglect in the world, is not a probable source of vigilance in the church.

Look at the case a little more closely; and, in ascer-

taining what is reasonable, inquire what is possible. The idea of every church member being also a spiritual office-bearer is a very pleasing conception; and there are lights and relations in which it is just as well as agreeable. Christ 'hath made us kings and priests unto God;'^{*} but if the sovereignty and priesthood of saints do not supersede a gospel ministry, they may be found equally inadequate to replace a ruling eldership. As a matter of fact, many are entitled to be members of the church who are utterly incompetent to manage its affairs. Some are disqualified for public duties by their sex, some by their age, some by their feeble intelligence, some by the total absorption of their time in their personal and family affairs. To whomsoever, therefore, the superintendence of the church may be assigned in theory, as a matter of sober reality it will eventually and inevitably be devolved on a few. But if these few take the lead of their own accord, is this volunteered eminence the best proof of title and qualification; and are those who so magnify themselves into leadership, the most likely to have been elected to that honour by the church, if its election had been consulted? Suppose these volunteer directors to be of all men the fittest for the post they occupy, must they not discharge its duties at great disadvantage, when they do more than others, and fill the higher seats, without any clear and definable claims to their assumed superiority? Suppose farther, and finally, that the superintendence of the church falls, by a rare felicity, into the best possible hands, and that the persons exercis-

* Rev. i. 6.

ing it do it all manner of justice in their respective circles or neighbourhoods, yet, in the absence of a regular organization, these assiduous attentions cannot be equally bestowed; and hence, members of the church who are in observable situations may be receiving superfluous visits, while others, far more entitled to sympathy, whose lot is retired and shaded, may be totally overlooked. It is almost an axiomatic proposition, a self-evident truism, that if the superintendence of the church is to be thorough and searching, it must be systematic. In other words, the care of the church must devolve on qualified individuals, and the work be so divided amongst them, that every section of the vineyard shall have its proper cultivation. But if the work, to be done effectively, is done thus orderly, where does the mode differ from our sessional arrangements? The actual superintendents may not be so designated. They may not be called office-bearers at all, or they may do the work of elders under the name of deacons, and transact, as a committee, all the session business.* But whatever these

* 'It is true,' says the Rev. J. A. James of Birmingham, 'that by the usages of our churches many things have been added to the duties of the office (of deacon) beyond its original design; but this is mere matter of expediency.'—(Christian Fellowship, p. 130.) What, then, are some of the things which have been added to the deacon's proper functions? 'A multitude of duties,' says Dr Campbell, of the Tabernacle, London, 'connected with the worship and the house of God, have been attached to the office as a matter of convenience and utility. This scheme is without any express scripture authority; and we think that the scriptures permit, if they do not require, an arrangement somewhat different. We are most decidedly in favour of a divi-

agents may be called, and whatever they may be considered, they have in truth the engagements of spiritual office, and want only the encouragement of its sanctions to lighten their burdens and promote their success. Is it to be supposed that Christ would impose such duties on any section of his servants,

sion of labour.'—(Church Fellowship, p. 60.) Here we learn that deacons are made to perform 'a multitude of duties connected with the worship and the house of God;' in other words, they are made spiritual office-bearers, like our elders. They do the work of elders and their own too; and we are decidedly in favour of a division of labour, though we would not divide it as the eloquent author proposes. That he speaks of spiritual duties is rendered still more evident from what he says afterwards, when, in defending such administration, he asserts of the primitive deacons, that 'to their temporal duties among the poor they added much spiritual service.' The same author says of these officers, that 'they have a right to *the affectionate confidence of the pastor*. He will wisely and prudently consider and treat them as his privy council; he will make them parties to all his spiritual concerns; and they, in turn, will cleave to him with an affectionate fidelity, cheerfully sharing with him the responsibility, and feeling it an honour to bear his burdens.' Would not this be a very good description of a minister and his session? 'They have a right, secondly,' says Dr Campbell, 'to the *respectful and implicit confidence of the people*. This is essential to the proper discharge of their duties. Let the people support their authority by all proper means. . . . It belongs to them in every good work to lead the way; and, while they lead in truth and love, the people should promptly follow,' (p. 62.) Did we ever ask a more comprehensive or authoritative guidance for the ruling elder? But Dr Campbell assigns duties to deacons which, in our Presbyterian congregations, would not be tolerated in any office-bearer. 'When additions are made to office,' he says, 'in churches already organized, considerations of peace and prudence

and yet deny them the benefit of an express and authoritative commission? His church has to be superintended as certainly as his gospel has to be preached; and shall he not, then, furnish credentials to them that rule well, as he confessedly does to them who labour in word and doctrine? This was the

require that the nomination should lie with the existing officers, with the privity of the pastors. They are the fittest persons to select appropriate colleagues; they know the duty; they know the people; they know the talents, tempers, and, in some measure, the characters of individuals; they know the men who will be likely to work in efficient harmony with the pastor and with themselves they will generally be able to anticipate the popular choice, and to fix on those on whom the people would fix, while their more extended and accurate knowledge will enable them occasionally to *avoid* fixing where the people would fix unwisely and unsafely. Among us, this scheme of preconcerted and official nomination to scriptural office would be reckoned a most serious interference with popular election. I fear that this undue exaltation of the deacon is, in a greater measure, the occasion of those abuses which Mr James thus impressively depicts:—‘What is the deacon of some of our dissenting communities? Not simply the laborious, indefatigable, tender-hearted dispenser of the bounty of the church, the inspector of the poor, the comforter of the distressed. No! but the “bible of the minister, the patron of the living, and the wolf of the flock.” An individual who, thrusting himself into the seat of government, attempts to lord it over God’s heritage, by dictating alike to the pastor and to the members; who thinks that, in virtue of his office, his opinion is to be law in all matters of church government, whether temporal or spiritual; who, upon the least symptom of opposition to his will, frowns like a tyrant upon the spirit of rising rebellion amongst his slaves: this man is almost as distant from the deacon of apostolic times as the deacon of the Vatican. Such men there have been, whose spirit of domination in the church has produced

opinion of the late venerable Dr Bogue. He says—
 ‘ Congregational churches, in general, employ deacons to perform in part the office of the elders who were ordained by apostolic authority to rule. Presbytery here comes nearest to the primitive pattern, though some difference still remains. Besides the pastor, it has both ruling elders and deacons.’*

Many talk as if presbytery were an artificial creation of planning theologians. It is so natural, however, that even its opponents can hardly stand clear of it when they have a cause in hand which they are earnest in prosecuting. Is slavery detested, and is a British public invoked to put it down—to break the oppressor’s yoke, and let the oppressed go free?—then public meetings are held; the best speakers who can be had are engaged to address these assemblages; boards of direction are formed to take charge of petitions, and to ply the legislature; and very likely the

a kind of *diaconophobia* in the minds of many ministers, who have suffered most woefully from their bite, and have been led to resolve to do without them altogether, rather than be worried any more.’—(Church Fellowship, p. 129.) Dr Campbell, after quoting part of this passage, adds, ‘ This is very dreadful! It is, however, but too true a picture of what has often existed in the church of God.’—(Church Fellowship, p. 61.) These are extreme cases; but, in the absence of such enormities, the deacons are still the elders of Independent churches, while ‘ a multitude of duties is attached to their office connected with the worship and the house of God.’

* Discourse at the setting apart of the Rev. John Reynolds, quoted in an able sermon on the Presbyterian eldership, by the late Dr Stewart of Liverpool.

speakers are appointed members of these boards, in consideration of their office, services, and character. But when was it ever heard that all the auditors were made directors, or that the direction was confided to the speakers alone? In such cases, it is at once seen that the work, to be well conducted, must be in the hands of a select agency; and the conclusion is just as speedily reached, that individuals who could not have spoken three continuous sentences in the presence of a multitude, may yet be far better fitted than the speakers themselves to turn to practical account the desirable impression which their speeches have produced. Thus, in the walks of philanthropy, the working of a beneficent measure is not retained by the crowd, neither is it committed to one or two oratorical debaters; but a board of management is appointed, and on that board the eloquent and the practical members sit side by side, having the same privileges and the same powers. It is superfluous to demonstrate how unlike this procedure is to Episcopacy on the one hand, and to Independency on the other,—to the exclusive rule of bishops and the universal rule of church members,—and how closely analogous to the appointment of an eldership, in which the minister or public speaker is included.

I am not now led to speak particularly of presbyteries as distinguishable from sessions, or it might be shown that the former, equally as the latter, have their foundation in the principles of the human constitution and of common sense. If different parties, whether they be individuals or societies, have work

to do in common, they must have a common organization. Now, the churches of Christ have their joint responsibilities. Young men must be trained for the ministry; and as each church cannot maintain its own theological seminary, there must be one such institution owned and patronised by many Christian societies. The teaching of the students, with the ultimate retention or expulsion of them, must be managed by some individual, or class of individuals, for the churches; and to all this extent the churches are represented in the performance of varied service most important to their interests. Again, Christians are bound to diffuse the knowledge of Christ's gospel,—to proclaim, through competent heralds, the tidings of salvation, till islands and continents, even to the ends of the earth, re-echo the joyful sound. But no single church is equal to this achievement. If several missionaries are to be sent into the same foreign field, the means must be furnished by numerous congregations. All the members of these congregations cannot vote as to the most eligible localities or labourers, and far less give a deliverance on the numerous and perplexing questions which arise in the guidance of the mission. Some board of direction is therefore appointed. In that board the churches, or members composing them, are represented; and no presbytery exercises a more authoritative control than do these missionary directorships. Let any one show that the presbytery of a religious denomination wields a more arbitrary power in conducting a mission, than the committee of a society

contemplating the same objects, and then we may begin to suspect that presbytery is conventional and imperious; but till then, we must be allowed to consider presbytery the simplest form of energetic action, and always least objectionable where it is most frankly and unequivocally adopted. The churches have, farther, to look to their alliances—to see to the character of other churches with whom they hold fellowship. Suppose that some church is ill reported of. Every individual Christian cannot seek and obtain personal satisfaction in regard to these rumours. Even the churches cannot do so singly and separately; or the suspected brotherhood would have nothing else to do than to answer interrogatories. The case must be examined into by a limited number, and others must act on their report. That report may be very unfavourable, and may infer such doctrinal error, or moral delinquency, as to induce a severance of all communion. Presbytery employs much the same means, and never extends its jurisdiction beyond reaching the same end. There are differences, no doubt, between the cases; but whether it be owing to the force of truth or prejudice, they seem to us to be greatly in favour of presbytery. Under the Presbyterian system, the arbiters have been formed into a deliberative assembly, quite independently of any particular case, and cannot be suspected of coming into office in order to oblige a friend or serve a purpose. Where the members of a Congregational church cannot settle a dispute among themselves, and wish to refer their differences to others, not of their society,

the channel of reference is not fixed and marked ; and hence, of late years, we have seen appeals made in the same case to one set of arbiters after another, with exceedingly different and incongruous results ; and sometimes the churches of one denomination have applied to ministers or members of other denominations, in order to secure an impartial mediation. They may be excellent people among whom these things happen ; in many instances they are undoubtedly ‘the salt of the earth,’ and ‘the lights of the world.’ I remark on the facts in no spirit of fault-finding, but simply to suggest that these untoward casualties are unavoidable where churches have a reciprocal obligation, and yet refuse to fulfil it upon system. Perhaps there might be improvements among our Congregational friends short of a change of polity, and we would have cause to rejoice over these ameliorations. If Independency is to remain substantially what it is, would it not derive benefit from moulding into a system its present actings,—appointing, for example, the pastors and deacons of a certain district the stated referees in that district, and then no suspicion could arise of packing a jury, in order to govern a verdict ? But even this alteration, simple as it is, might be considered a step in the direction of presbytery ; and if so, it may be reasonable to doubt whether the joint and relative duties of churches can be executed in a regular and efficient manner, without espousing more or less a Presbyterian economy.

Congregationalist Christians sometimes make large account of their liberty, as distinctive and unrivalled.

The plea has been remarked upon by anticipation ; and the less may be said now in considering its validity. That has certainly the aspect of a very plenary freedom, which gives every church member a vote on every question that concerns him. But we have seen that work has to be performed by the churches in which no such universality of direction can be enjoyed. Every pastor, also, especially in the absence of ruling elders, has a discretionary power as to what he shall bring before the church, as well as the time and manner in which it shall be presented ; and this pastoral right has received from the ablest advocates of Independency a very large and comprehensive interpretation.* But suppose the principle of popu-

* ‘ Still, however,’ says Mr James, ‘ there is *authority* belonging to the pastor ; for office without authority is a solecism. ‘ Remember them that have the *rule over you,*’ said St Paul to the Hebrews, (xiii. 7.) ‘ *Obey* them that have the rule over you. *Submit* yourselves ; for they watch for your souls,’ (v. 17.) They addicted themselves to the ministry : *submit* yourselves to such, (1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16.) These are inspired injunctions ; and they enjoin *obedience* and *submission* on Christian churches to their pastors.’ . . . ‘ It is my decided conviction, that in *some* of our churches the pastor is depressed far below his just level. He is considered merely in the light of a speaking brother. He has no official distinction or authority.’—(Christ. Fel. p. 56, 57.) In another part of the same work, Mr James says, ‘ Real Congregationalism is not democracy. It maintains, indeed, that every separate congregation of believers has the entire power of government within itself ; but it does not teach that that power is vested in the private members of the church. It admits and affirms, in common with other systems, that pastors alone are the *rulers* of the church ; but it more fully explains the nature,

lar deliberation to be rigorously applied, it remains to be determined whether a genuine liberty would result from its operation. That is the truest freedom which affords the strongest guarantees for impartial and upright dealing; and if these are best to be had by an aggrieved individual from a large and miscella-

and limits, and extent of this authority than they,' (p. 164.) Still farther on, in the same treatise, we are told—'All the proceedings at a church meeting should either *emanate directly from the pastor*, or from others *by his previous knowledge and consent*. The president of every society, and of every meeting, ought to be acquainted with all the business which is to be transacted by the assembly. He announces and explains the object of their being convened, and regulates the discussions which ensue. Every case, therefore, that is to be laid before the church should be stated by the pastor; who, like the judge upon the bench, is to show what the law saith touching the business in hand. If this be neglected, and members are allowed to introduce any business which they please, our church meetings would very soon resemble the scene which was exhibited at the tower of Babel,' (p. 170.) It may be thought that, when a pastor has consented to the introduction of a business, and has laid down the law regarding it, like a judge upon the bench, then the members of the church will, of course, be allowed to express their sentiments with all freedom, and at full length. But Mr James discourages this idea. 'AS LITTLE DISCUSSION,' he says, 'AS IS REALLY POSSIBLE should take place at our church meetings. The admonition of the apostle is always in season, but never more so than in reference to the times of the assembling of the saints: 'Let every man be slow to speak.' Nothing but the most obvious necessity should induce a single individual to utter a syllable; and, when any one does deliver his opinion, it should not be in a prating dogmatical manner, but in a few words, modestly spoken. Talking assemblies soon become disorderly ones. A wise and prudent minister will set his face against

neous assemblage, the students of government have strangely erred in all their principles, reasonings, and deductions. I admit that sessions, presbyteries, and all such bodies, should enter into office through a Christian suffrage. On no other footing do I, or can I, defend their presidency. The right of the people

them, and a wise and prudent church will support him in this conduct,' (p. 171.) These statements, when put together, give us no mean view of pastoral prerogative. No business may be introduced without the pastor's consent: he submits it to the meeting, and lays down the law regarding it with judicial authority: when he has spoken, there must be as little discussion as possible: not a single individual is to utter a syllable without a most obvious necessity; and, if any convert the church into a talking assembly, the minister is to set his face against all such loquacity. What freedom is there in a meeting so conducted?—a meeting controlled and gagged by a presiding judge, no doubt responsible to his Maker, but irresponsible to man? Perhaps the business cannot be otherwise conducted at these meetings. That the author now remarked upon is actuated in so speaking by no lust of power, but simply and singly by a desire to be useful, is attested by all the labours of his valuable life. Who knows not that he is one of the most amiable of men, and most edifying of writers? His exclusive aim is to benefit churches in preserving them from disorder, and to throw his shield over pastors less influential than himself. But, with very unfeigned and profound respect, I would suggest that, if these meetings cannot be otherwise regulated, and if so much has to be said on behalf of pastoral consequence, as we find contained in these works on Christian Fellowship, in order to secure a tranquil despatch of ecclesiastical business under pastoral superintendence; all this shows that the business is misplaced, and that it should be transferred to a bench of elders, chosen by the people to act for them, who could freely express their mind to each other, without restoring the confusion of Babel.

to choose their office-bearers we hold to be most sacred and inalienable: 'Whereof the Holy Ghost is also a witness unto us;' for appointments to office in the apostolic age were either directly by the call of God, or instrumentally by the call of the church; and when the former has been withdrawn, and is no more accessible, the latter is alone scriptural, and comes to us with all the force of a pattern and a law.

Election of rulers, then, should lie with the members of the church, and be unfettered in every element and aspect; and, if it be so, that election secures, and not only secures, but constitutes liberty. What is the palladium of political citizenship?—it is representa-

That I have not overstated the case might be shown by many additional citations. Mr James, for example, gives the minister an absolute negative on the admission of members to the church, and says, 'No member should presume to bring forward a candidate in opposition to the opinion of the pastor,' (p. 172.) Dr Campbell goes further, and not only lodges with the minister a negative on the admission of members, but makes the whole matter of admission rest with himself. 'There is not one instance,' he says, 'in the New Testament, of a case being submitted to the scrutiny of the church in order to baptism, or of any confession of faith being made afterwards to the church in order to admission into fellowship. The commission of Christ to his apostles clothes the evangelist or pastor at once with the authority and responsibility of administering the ordinance of baptism, and consequently of admitting members.'—(Church Fellowship, p. 19.) Such claims to official authority would be deemed extravagant enough in Presbyterian ministers. After making due allowance for accompanying explanations and modifications, I cannot easily reconcile them either with scriptural warrant or popular freedom.

tion ; the keenest reformer asks nothing more than to be fairly represented ; and it would be strange, indeed, if the palladium of civil liberty were the occasion and implement of ecclesiastical domination. An obscure church member supposes himself aggrieved. In seeking redress, he might have little hope from a minister whom he had offended, and as little from an excited throng, swayed by a dictator or a demagogue. But he brings his case before chosen judges—chosen from the people and by the people—expressly appointed to conduct these matters—having a character to keep or lose in the mode of settling them—the ornaments of their station—whom any court or country would think eligible as jurymen. If even they be swayed by personal or local prejudices, he can carry his cause to a larger and more disinterested tribunal, just as freely elected. This is representation, and this is liberty—the liberty of states, the liberty of churches, the only liberty which truly consists with the being of society.

PART II.

THE OFFICE OF DEACON.

LET us now view the office of Elder relatively to that of Deacon, and inquire how far the arrangements founded by some churches on the difference of these offices is substantiated by proof, and conducive to edification.

The first appointment of deacons is recorded, Acts vi. 1—6: ‘And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reasonable 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 and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and

Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch; whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.' The Hebrews mentioned in the first verse were the Jews of Palestine, who spoke the Hebrew language, while the Grecians were foreign Jews, who had come from countries where the Greek language was in more general use. A misunderstanding arose between these sections of ancient Israel, in consequence of the foreign Jews imagining, with or without reason, that their poor widows were not equally provided for as those of their Hebrew brethren. The apostles declared that they could not, consistently with a faithful discharge of other duties, conduct this business, when it had become so involved in misapprehension and strife; and therefore they gave directions for the election of persons, having suitable qualifications and character, to whom it should be given in charge.

Such is the plain and generally received interpretation of Luke's narrative. Other views, however, have been proposed, and not a little that is specious has been said in their defence. It has been doubted whether the seven mentioned in this chapter were *deacons at all*. 'The *seven*,' (says Archbishop Whately,) 'are nowhere in scripture designated by this title. They are referred to in Acts xxi. 8, not as the seven deacons, but simply as "the seven." And the primary and especial office for which they were appointed—that of stewards and almoners,—is not referred to at all in what Paul says of the office

of a deacon. Hence some have inferred that the seven persons mentioned in Acts were appointed to a *temporary* office, for a temporary and local emergency, and did not belong to the order of deacons, strictly so called.* It is true, as here represented, that the seven are not expressly called deacons; but the archbishop himself admits that the verb corresponding to the substantive is employed to characterise their services. If they are not called *διακονοι*, they are said *διακονειν*; and these two modes of expression suggest the same idea of the functions discharged. That the seven mentioned in the Acts were deacons, in the strict sense of the term, is further supported by the unanimous voice of antiquity; and as for the opinion, that they were appointed to a temporary office, for a temporary and local emergency, we cannot think so, when we see the importance attached to their appointment,—the careful narration of it by the evangelist, and the solemn manner in which it was conducted.

Supposing these seven to have been deacons, truly and properly so called, it has been farther questioned whether they were the *first* deacons, or whether they were additional deacons, selected from among the Grecians, in order to conciliate that section of the Jews. A writer in the ‘Encyclopædia Metropolitana,’ quoted by Archbishop Whately, argues that ‘some dispensers there must have been (previously), by whatever name they went.’ This is true; and

* Kingdom of Christ, p. 124. Note.

the alms may have been dispensed by the apostles, with the occasional and unofficial assistance of others. 'But,' continues the same writer, 'that the apostles did not officiate, is plain from the tenor of the narrative, which indicates that the appeal was made to them, and that they excused themselves from presiding personally at the "ministration," (as was probably desired by the discontented party,) alleging that it was incompatible with their proper duties. "It is not reasonable that we should *leave the word of God, and serve tables.*" This very assertion, then, is proof certain that they did not officiate.' The force of this argument turns on the declaration of the apostles, that they would not leave the word of God; as seeming to imply that they had hitherto adhered to the word exclusively in their ministrations, and would be injuriously altering their course, if they now took in hand other engagements. The comment is plausible, but not conclusive. That the apostles would not leave, and never had left, the ministry of the word, to perform other service, is true; but this is not proof certain that they had never any charge of the work which deacons afterwards performed. While the disciples were comparatively few, and while they were at peace among themselves, the apostles might have been able to see that poor widows were supplied, without requiring 'to leave the word of God' in order to 'serve tables;' but when believers became numerous, and one portion of them began to murmur against another, the same occupation, in these altered circumstances, might have consumed much more time, and

seriously interfered with other and yet more sacred engagements. That such is the explanation, appears to be distinctly suggested in the record itself; for Luke prefaces the statement of the apostles, as to leaving the word of God and serving tables, by telling us of the multiplication of the disciples, and the murmuring of the Grecians. The apostles could not now serve tables without leaving the word of God. Why? Because ‘in those days the number of the disciples was multiplied, and there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews.’ If such be the connexion, as I think it manifestly is, then it implies that the apostles discharged the duty of ministering to the poor, till they were prevented from doing so by the hindrances thus specified.

The author remarked on further argues, that ‘on reading over the names of the seven deacons, we find them all of the Grecian or Hellenistic party. . . . Now this surely would have produced, in turn, a murmuring of the Hebrews against the Grecians, unless they had already had some in office interested in looking after their rights.’ On this argument the celebrated Neander, than whom there is no greater authority in relation to such matters, observes—‘As to the Grecian names of the seven deacons, it cannot be inferred with certainty, from this circumstance, that they all belonged to the Hellenists; for it is well known that the Jews often bore double names—one Hebrew, or Aramaic, and the other Hellenistic. Still it is possible, since the complaints of the partial distribution of alms came from the Hellenistic part of

the church, that, in order to infuse confidence and satisfaction, pure Hellenists were chosen on this occasion. But if these deacons were appointed only for the Hellenists, it would have been most natural to intrust their election to the Hellenistic part alone, and not to the whole church.*

Archbishop Whately, and the writer in the 'Encyclopædia Metropolitana,' are farther of opinion that an allusion is made to deacons in the fifth chapter of the Acts; in which case the supposition of their first appointment being recorded in the sixth chapter becomes inadmissible. We are told of Ananias, that 'the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out and buried him.' The same young men are represented as performing a like service in the case of Sapphira, his wife. Now these young men, or *juniors*, in being so called, seem to be discriminated from *elders*. Who, in that case, should they be but the deacons, who are so frequently spoken of in contradistinction from elders or bishops, in various parts of the New Testament? Dr Neander sees little force in this argument. He says, 'It is far from clear that, in the last quoted passage of the Acts, the narrative alludes to persons holding a distinct office in the church: it may very naturally be understood of the younger members, who were fitted for such manual employment, without any other eligibility than the fact of their age and bodily strength. And, therefore, we are not to suppose that a contrast is intended between

* History of the Planting, &c., vol. i. p. 36.

the servants and ruling elders of the church, but simply between the younger and older members.' No good reason, then, appears for disputing the received opinions derived from a perusal of scripture itself, that the seven mentioned in the Acts were truly and properly deacons, and that their first appointment is recorded in the sixth chapter of that book.

There is yet another question of importance relating to deacons. That they had the charge of ecclesiastical funds, appears from the portion of scripture already considered, and is attested by all the Christian fathers who allude to their office and occupations. Indeed, some early churches considered the example presented in the sixth chapter of the Acts as so rigorously binding, that they adhered, in their appointment of deacons, to the number seven, whether their pecuniary affairs required more or fewer administrators. Undoubtedly, then, the deacons were stewards and almoners; but *were they nothing more?* Were they not also rulers? Were they not also teachers? Some answer in the affirmative, and plead scripture for the conclusion which they adopt. It seems to them, that when the seven were required to be 'full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom,' these qualifications surely pointed to a higher vocation than the distribution of money. But Neander tells us that the word *Holy* appears to be a gloss, and that the word *Spirit*, which is the true reading, denotes 'that inspiration for the cause of the gospel which is requisite for every kind of exertion for the kingdom of God.'*

* History of the Planting, &c., vol. i. p. 39.

epistles, requires of this class a high excellence of deportment and reputation; but when we consider how great a trust the beneficent funds of the church, in those days, became, and how much the prosperity of religion was staked on a careful and spotless application of them, we cannot marvel that the apostle desired the post to be filled by men whose integrity and discretion were above suspicion. It is observable, however, that he demands no quality in deacons, which would not be useful in directing the church's beneficence, and says not a single word respecting them which supposes them to be invested with teaching or government. We find, indeed, that Stephen spoke in his own defence;* and who may not when he is similarly assailed?† We learn also that Philip preached, but we do not require to suppose that he did so as a deacon, when we are informed that he was an 'evangelist.'‡ This much, indeed, may be readily conceded, that deacons, in managing the funds of the church, and especially in ministering to the wants of the poor, would have frequent occasion to speak a word in season to the afflicted. They would not find their lips sealed from uttering a sentence of instruction or consolation, as opportunity presented itself. The deacons who were found, in all such respects, the most efficient and useful, were the likeliest persons to be elevated to a higher station; and to this the apostle may allude when he says: 'They that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good

* Acts, chap. vii.

† Acts viii. 40.

‡ Acts xxi. 8.

degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

On the whole, there appears abundant reason to conclude, that the view generally entertained of this subject is correct; and that the serving of tables, or, in other words, the management of ecclesiastical funds, was the proper and special employment of deacons. How far, then, does the present usage of the church correspond with this conclusion? A great number of Presbyterian churches have deacons, and these follow implicitly the apostolic rule. On the other hand, a large proportion of our Presbyterian congregations have not deacons, but have committed the work of this order in part to elders, and in part to managers. Can this practice be justified? Some specious statements can be made in its defence. It can be urged, that even the apostles took charge, for a time, of eleemosynary funds, and did not resign the trust till they were shut up to do so, by an exigency which exists no longer. Are not elders, then, imitating apostolic precedent, when they retain this stewardship as long as they find it manageable? If disinterested zeal were to cast as much into the church's treasury as in primitive times; or if persecution were to render as many dependent on its bounty, then there might be need to recal the deacon's office; but why adopt, in common times, an uncommon expedient? No doubt, if the elders were burdened by monetary affairs, it would be proper to relieve them; but the serving of

* 1 Tim. iii. 13.

the poor, requires little time; and as for transactions more strictly secular, they are disposed of by managers or trustees appointed for the purpose. This, I think, is the amount of all that can be pleaded for the non-appointment of deacons in any of our congregations; and whether it be satisfactory to the reader or not, I confess that it is not convincing to myself. It has already appeared that deacons were appointed, not only at Jerusalem, in a season of emergency, but in the churches generally, for an indefinite period. And we have no warrant to explain every example of this prevailing usage, by imagined peculiarities of time and place. Nor can it be safely averred that the want of deacons has been productive of no practical evils. It is greatly to be feared that many elders, from having a charge of the poor, think they have done enough when they have attended to this province; and that the poor also have suffered from receiving half attentions, when they had a scriptural claim to a distinct and entire guardianship. As for managers, they are a class who have rendered valuable services to our churches; but the nature of their commission is anomalous, and it would be far better if the same individuals were set apart to their functions by regular and solemn ordination. We should not then have the strange and unseemly phenomenon of secular appointments in spiritual societies. All the vessels in our sanctuary would correspond with its sacredness, and exhibit, in legible characters, the inscription, 'Holiness unto the Lord.'

'Whereas it is our duty,' says Dr Owen, 'in all

things to have regard to the authority of Christ and his appointments in the gospel, if we claim the privilege of being called after his name, some think that if what he hath appointed may be colourably performed another way without respect unto his institutions, that is far the best. But omitting the practice of other men, the things that concern this office in the church, are, as was said, clear in the scripture.

‘First, The persons called unto it are to be of ‘honest report,’ furnished with the gifts of the Holy Ghost, especially with ‘wisdom,’ (Acts vi. 3). And those other endowments useful in the discharge of their duty, mentioned 1 Tim. iii. 8.

‘Secondly, The way whereby they come to be made partakers of this office, is by the choice or election of the church, (Acts vi. 2, 3, 5), whereupon they are solemnly to be set apart by prayer.

‘Thirdly, Their work or duty consists in ‘a daily ministration unto the necessities of the poor saints,’ or members of the church, ver. 1, 2.

‘Fourthly, To this end that they may be enabled so to do, it is ordained, that every ‘first day’ the members of the church do contribute according as God enables them of their substance, for the supply of the wants of the poor, (1 Cor. xvi. 2). And also occasionally, as necessity shall require, or God move their hearts by his grace.

‘Fifthly, Hereunto is to be added whiatever, by the providence of God, may be conferred upon the church for its outward advantage, with reference unto the end mentioned, Acts iv. 34, 35.

‘Sixthly, These supplies of the church being committed to the care and charge of the deacons, they are from thence to minister with diligence and wisdom unto the necessities of the poor; that so the needy may be supplied, that there may be none that lack, the rich may contribute of their riches according to the mind of Christ, and in obedience unto his command, that they which minister well in this office, ‘may purchase to themselves a good degree,’ and ‘boldness in the faith,’ and that in all, the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified with praise and thanksgiving.

‘It belongs therefore unto persons called unto this office,

‘First, To acquaint themselves with the outward condition of those that appear to be poor and needy in the church, whether by the addresses of such poor ones, who are bound to make known their wants, occasions, and necessities unto them, or by the information of others, or their own observation.

‘Secondly, To acquaint the elders and the church as occasion requireth with the necessities of the poor under their care, that those who are able may be stirred up by the elders, to a free supply and contribution.

‘Thirdly, To dispose what they are entrusted with faithfully, cheerfully, tenderly; ‘without partiality,’ or preferring one before another, for any outward respect whatever.

‘Fourthly, To keep and give an account unto the church when called for, of what they have received,

and how they have disposed of it, that so they may be known to have well discharged their office ; that is, with care, wisdom, and tenderness, whereby they procure to themselves ‘ a good degree, with boldness in the faith,’ and the church is encouraged to entrust them farther with this sacrifice of their alms, which is so acceptable unto God.’*

But while I allow that deacons should have a special charge of pecuniary affairs, I do not mean to say that elders are not to exercise a general superintendence over all that concerns the church’s well-being. After deacons were appointed, we learn that ‘ the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea ; which also they did, and sent it TO THE ELDERS, by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.’†

This passage shows that the main responsibility of seeing destitute saints relieved, was still supposed to rest with the eldership. They have, in fact, a general charge ; and while they give their principal attention to the most important interests, they must labour to suppress every abuse by which the work of God might be hindered. If, for example, the income of a church fell short of its expenditure, and if the elders shut their eyes to this virtual insolvency till it became desperate, and members and minister and all were involved in serious difficulty,—there would be, in this procedure, a most culpable negligence. The members

* *Worship of God by way of Question and Answer*, pp. 164—167.

† Acts xi. 29, 30.

of session are solemnly bound to secure, as far as in them lies, the temporal prosperity of the congregation, were it only in subserviency to a nobler and loftier usefulness.

Having considered the scriptural constitution of Christ's kingdom, do we not find it worthy of himself? Look at the order instituted, and the forms observed, by some sections of religionists, and we would suppose church government the most intricate and complex of all moral mechanism. Look into the scriptures, and what do we see? Each church provided with two orders of stated office-bearers. One of these orders has more distinctively a spiritual charge; and the other has the guidance of pecuniary disbursements. All the former rule, and such of them as are qualified, also teach. Could any arrangements have more of the simplicity that is in Christ, and be marked, at the same time, by more of the sufficiency and comprehensiveness which are discernible in all his institutions? As these office-bearers, too, are chosen by the people, and represent them in the functions which they discharge, we have here, by anticipation, that very scheme of representative government, of which the adoption in political communities is classed with the greatest of modern improvements. Many object to the system just as being too free—too democratic. But even though their objection could be made valid in respect of the kingdoms of this world, they need fear nothing from the 'liberty wherewith Christ has made his people free.' A Christian

church, with all its imperfections, is not a set of anarchists; and power may be safely lodged with such a community, which might be considered dangerous in the hands of the profligate. Then the church is a spiritual society, and the rights of its members have regard to divine privileges; so that ecclesiastical power, if kept as distinct in fact as it is in its own nature, no way encroaches on temporal dominion. And, finally, the church, though apparently a republic, and the freest republic in the world, is in reality a kingdom; and no subjection to man is so entire and so subduing as that which it owes to its exalted Sovereign. He has given it a code of laws, which he who runs may read; and while these laws provide for the peerless honour of him who ruleth in Zion, they also inculcate that civil obedience, which, from being enlightened in its nature, and religious in its sanctions, is infinitely surer than a constrained and blinded vassalage, and presents a barrier more impervious than battlements between every species of unhallowed violence, and the benignant sceptre of righteous administration.

PART III.

DUTIES OF ELDERS.

CHAPTER I.

DUTIES COMMON TO THEM WITH OTHERS—DEPORTMENT IN SECULAR AFFAIRS, GOVERNMENT OF THEIR OWN FAMILIES.

ELDERS have duties common to them with others, which do not immediately respect their office, but of which the performance or neglect very seriously affects their official standing. Here I shall remark on their deportment in secular affairs, and on the government of their own families.

SECT. 1.—Most of our elders are engaged in *business*; no small proportion of them are tradesmen, and have to say, with an apostle, ‘These hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.’* It is of great importance that Christians, and especially Christian elders, should so deport themselves in worldly transactions, as not to convey the impression of being worldly characters. Of course

* Acts xx. 34.

it is not meant that they should be remiss in their temporal callings, or place themselves at the mercy of any extortioners who would practise on their simplicity. Consideration, and diligence, and frugality, in prosecuting their secular vocations, are not only allowable, but positively incumbent, that they may walk honestly towards them that are without, that they may provide for their own families, and that they may have to give to him that needeth. Pecuniary embarrassments in any circumstances,—and, above all, when resulting from culpable indiscretion,—form a decided obstruction to an elder's usefulness. A due regard, however, to such considerations, is perfectly compatible with an estimable deportment in business communications. It is undesirable that an elder be characteristically a hard man,—that he pass in the commercial circle for what is there termed a *Jew*. A noted greed of gain, a keenness above common, in looking to self-interest,—these are not traits which recommend his ecclesiastical position. Nor is it certain that his outward circumstances themselves will be thus benefited. Generally speaking, there is little gained by that mode and bearing which bespeak avarice. A man whom it is difficult to deal with, is not, therefore, in all cases or most cases, the more prosperous in his dealings. To beset, and importune, and flatter, in driving a good bargain,—to hesitate, and stickle, and argue, on the last item of contested terms, while a reluctance is manifested to cede advantage equalling the eagerness to take advantage,—all this may occasionally succeed, but the success is

limited, and is commonly neutralised by injurious tendencies. How much better is it to shun the semblance of a sordid capidity—to evince a still greater dread of wronging than of being wronged—and ever to maintain, broad and wide, the distinction between a reasonable industry and insatiable covetousness! In all this there may be nothing of positive piety—no mention whatever of religious truth; but there is a beautiful harmony with religious profession: and, to act otherwise, and exhibit an unfavourable contrast with many secular men in their own province—the only province in which numbers of them meet with Christians at all—is dishonouring to our holy faith, and brings religious principle under obloquy and doubt. Let our elders, then, as business men, walk circumspectly. Let them remember in the marketplace their relation to the sanctuary, and do nothing for gain derogatory to godliness. By all means, let them be diligent in business; yet so as to be ‘fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.’*

SECT. 2.—Most of our elders are heads of families; and there is no requisite to efficient rule in the church, on which the apostle Paul insists more particularly than *the proper government of one's own house*: ‘A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife:’ ‘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

* Rom. xii. 11.

he take care of the church of God?''* These statements are strong and explicit on the subject which they respect, and we need not be surprised at the consequence which they attach to domestic superintendence. A man's family are so identified with himself, that their good or ill behaviour must reflect honour or dishonour on his own head. When members of the church know that he commands little respect at home, and that all is insubordination and anarchy under his own roof, they cannot be much disposed, by acquaintance with such facts, to yield him, where his claims are weaker, a willing subjection in the Lord. Besides, as the passages quoted above suggest, much the same qualifications are necessary to efficiency in both situations; and a proved incapacity in the one, is therefore a valid ground of exclusion from the other. Both require a happy combination of kindness and firmness: in both, a measure of system, and constancy in adhering to it, are quite indispensable; and if the family suffer from the absence of such attributes in the regulation of its interests, how shall the church prosper under the identical disqualifications?

Such observations may, indeed, be over-extended. A wise father may have a foolish son; and every elder is not to be denuded of his office whose parental hopes have been miserably blasted by filial misconduct. Certainly not; or Aaron must have lost the priesthood, when Nadab and Abihu offered strange

* 1 Tim. iii. 2, &c.

fire before the Lord;* and the rebellion of Absalom would have been its own justification, showing, by the fact of its existence, that David was not competent to be king of Israel; and, in a word, our own church would have been deprived, by this test, of some of the best of men who have ever adorned its official stations. I might easily give examples, in confirmation of the last statement, but I refrain from citing these honoured names in a connexion so painful. All such modifications, however, and exceptions being admitted, the apostolic rule is clear in its import, and searching in its application. When a child of many pious prayers and counsels turns out ill, the excessive odiousness of the result causes it to be marked and mentioned; and hence the cases appear numerous, from being all known. The dispensations of Providence bear out, as a general truth, the statement—‘Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.’† On the whole, the better class of society have sprung from the better class of society; and does not this show ‘that the children of God’s servants continue, and that their seed is established before him?’‡ It must be farther remembered, that all good men have their failings, and that, if their besetting sin should happen to be parental remissness, the mere fact of their being good men will not make that sin less heinous in itself, or less ruinous in its consequences. Eli was a good man, but he was an erring father; and hence the judgment

* Lev. x. 1.

† Prov. xxii. 6.

‡ Ps. cii. 28.

of God fell very dreadfully on him and on his offspring. To all this it may be added, that there is so much which Christian parents have it in their power to secure. They can uphold the stated and regular observance of family worship. If their children are not of weak intelligence, they can lodge very much of scriptural statement even in the infant mind. And, therefore, if the devotional exercises in an elder's house be irregular and intermittent; or if his family, when applying for admission into the church, be found, on examination, to be ignorant of revealed truth and unfamiliar with its language, at a loss to express one bible doctrine, or prove it by a single text, and still halting and blundering when the commonest passages have been hinted at and half repeated, there is a demonstrated and radical evil in such household administration, and an imperative call for humiliation and amendment. But who of us has not need to institute such reformation? In what circle of kindred or friends is there not too little of religious discourse, too little of devotional spirit and engagement, too little of dissuasion from sin, consolation under trial, and stimulus in duty? In the prospect of death, men set their house in order; but the best preparation for that solemn issue, is to order it well in life. Let our habitual converse with endeared relatives have a kindness, and faithfulness, and sacredness, befitting the prospect of soon parting from them, with an ulterior hope of again meeting them—to part no more for ever. Would we be found with the seed of Abraham, and inherit the promise of having our families blessed in him? Then let us copy

that faithfulness which elicited the acknowledgment : ‘I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.’* Would we be favoured with Joshua in guiding a chosen people to a promised country—a spiritual Israel to a heavenly Canaan?—let us adopt his pious resolution: ‘As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.’† Would we sing with David of mercy, as well as of judgment? With him let us exclaim: ‘I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me! I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.’‡ A right discharge of public duty will always dispose us to visit our habitations, and not sin; and, on the other hand, the transition will be appropriate and joyous from the private tabernacle of the upright to the public tabernacle of the congregation—from a dwelling of Jacob to the gates of Zion.

It is time, however, to speak of the duties which devolve on elders as such, and which directly respect their official appointment. These duties are performed by elders individually, or in their collective and sessional capacity. It may be well to consider these two classes of duties severally, and in succession.

* Gen. xviii. 19.

† Josh. xxiv. 15.

‡ Ps. ci. 1, &c.

CHAPTER II.

OFFICIAL DUTIES OF ELDERS VIEWED INDIVIDUALLY—EACH HIS DISTRICT—DISTRICT ROLL-BOOK—VISITATION OF CHURCH MEMBERS—VISITATION OF THE SICK—EXPOSTULATION WITH OFFENDERS—ATTENTIONS TO THE YOUNG—PRAYER MEETINGS.

SECT. 1.—Each elder should have a portion of the congregation, residing within a *defined district*, committed to his special superintendence. An arrangement of this character is absolutely indispensable to the good of the church. If all the elders have charge of all the members, each will trust to another; and the infallible result will be, that congregational duty will fall into confusion and neglect. Let no elder, then, want his district; without it he is a sentinel at large, or, in other words, no sentinel at all. The district of each elder should be of such extent as he can effectively overtake. If it be too large, he will not do it justice; and when he cannot do all the duty, he will find a ready excuse for not doing almost any duty, and for discharging his whole trust in a negligent and cursory manner. A precise rule is not attainable in such cases, because elders have very different measures of time at their command; and what is moderation for one, might be excess for another; but, generally speaking, no elder should be charged with the inspection of more than twenty, or, at the most, twenty-five families.

SECT. 2.—Each elder, to whose care a section of the congregation has been assigned, should also have

a *district roll-book*. Some might get on without it ; but in most cases it is necessary, and in all cases useful. This roll should not be a meagre list of names. The bounds of the district, with the localities it comprehends, should be first of all stated. After the names of the members, their place of residence, their occupation, the number and ages of their children should be all notified ; and hints may be subjoined of any peculiarities in their circumstances and history, which a minister or other friend would find advantageous in visiting and addressing them. There is no difficulty in giving this plan effect. District roll-books are now on sale, which indicate by their headings how they are to be filled up, and leave no room for perplexity or mistake. A degree of carefulness is required in keeping them correct, as church members come and go ; and, even while they remain in the same congregation, often shift from one district to another : but if the lists be corrected frequently, they will be corrected easily, and a reluctance to undergo this small amount of trouble would be a sorry token of fitness for the eldership.

It may seem trivial and unclerical to dilate on a matter of statistics and registration ; but even morals have their mechanism essential to their working, and the instrumentality now recommended is of first consequence to spiritual superintendence. Its importance will become more manifest, as the scheme of which it forms a part becomes more fully developed. But our elders will bear with us meanwhile, when we entreat them in no case, and on no account,

to want this tabular view of their districts, or fail in bringing them up to the existing date with scrupulous fidelity. If professors in our colleges keep catalogues of their students, and carefully record their attendance and appearances, with every circumstance affecting a just estimate of their respective standings,—if our elders themselves, in their secular callings, not only register the names of parties with whom they deal, but preserve the exactest account of every circumstance in every transaction,—is it too much to expect that a kindred vigilance be displayed, and similar memoranda preserved, by responsible stewards in the house of God?

SECT. 3.—The preceding suggestion will be the more easily acted on, if attention be paid to another, which we now subjoin, in exhorting elders to *visit their districts*. The elder may accompany the minister, as is very common, in his regular ministerial visitation; but the elder should also visit his district alone. The minister has all the congregation to inspect, and a considerable time is required to complete the circuit of all its families. He is often grieved, indeed, that his periodical calls, through the pressure of other engagements, and the magnitude of his charge, are so widely separated. But if an elder have a small district, he can, without undue effort, see all whom it comprises in a shorter time, and therefore more frequently. It is also prejudicial to the standing of elders, that they be never seen unless in attendance with the minister, as if their presence were

only subsidiary and accessory, and too unimportant to be valued by itself. To all this it may be added, that an elder may say much in the minister's absence, which could not be so well said in his presence. There may be an opportunity of removing false impressions about his ministrations which obstruct their success, and especially of enforcing attendance on his bible classes, or other means of improvement, without any appearance of personal compliment.

In every view, then, it is desirable that an elder visit his district apart. To promote the performance of this service, the ultimatum of time allowed for it should be defined, and a regulation should be adopted, that every elder see all the members in his appropriated section at least every six months. A day, also, should be fixed for receiving from every elder a report, written or oral, of his half-yearly visitation. Is it objected, that the proposal requires too much? Not, it may be answered, if the district be small; and especially not too much, if, in ordinary circumstances, the elder simply look in upon the family, and ask how it fares with them. Persons who have other ends in view—who are prosecuting, for example, a political canvas, can ransack hundreds of abodes in a few days or hours; and can an elder not see twenty or thirty families, to whom he stands most sacredly related, in the course of six months? But the mere seeing of them, it may be objected, could do little good; and unless they are to be exhorted and prayed with, the visit may as well be dispensed with. The objection is not valid. A flying visit,

where nothing more is practicable, will suffice to preserve acquaintance with the people, and to keep all matters of registration in thorough order. But these are minor benefits, and come far short of exhausting the happy results of an elder's stated attentions, however transient. The elder misconceives his position, who makes so little account of his own calls. He does not know how kindly they are taken,—how they endear him to abodes familiar with his accents, and every way augment his influence with the flock of which he is an overseer. Let him try the plan; let him give it a fair and full trial. It will commend itself; it will present opportunities of doing good which he never thought of, and which could not be foreseen. Let him not defer his visits till the last month of the allotted six, and then be driven from them by some untoward casualty. Let him accomplish them the first month, and if he can introduce another visit into the remaining five so much the better. But whatever may be thought of times and modes, let the service be performed. With all the urgency compatible with respect, I do say—visit the people. I have other suggestions to give, other duties to dwell upon, but they all suppose and require a frequent communication between members of the church and their chosen superintendents. Suspend this intercourse, and all effort relaxes, all interest ceases. The electric chain is broken, and the current of celestial fire is arrested and lost.

An elder should attend to all in his district, and to all impartially; but even a perfect impartiality does

not suppose a literal equality in his attentions. There are some who require more of his oversight than others. I notice three classes of these : the sick, the backsliding, and the young.

SECT. 4.—An elder is expected, and bound to be *spe- cially attentive to the sick*. In a time of trouble, his friendly offices are most prized, and are likely to be most useful. He may sometimes have it in his power to benefit the afflicted in temporal respects, as well as by spiritual consolation. When the sufferers are poor, he can bring their case under the attention of those who are able to relieve them ; and they are hard-hearted, indeed, who might relieve sore calamity, and refuse to do so on an elder's representation. Many will be glad to help the straitened, having such unequivocal testimony that they can do it with effect—that the persons pleaded for are truly necessitous, and will turn the aid administered to good account. Where a sick person is injured by the officious thronging of visitants into the sick chamber, and the relatives in attendance have not the discretion or courage to check the impropriety, an elder may sometimes interpose his counsel in a gentle, inoffensive, and yet efficacious manner. But while these matters have their importance, and indicate a species of humane attentions very becoming in a spiritual functionary, there can be no doubt that an elder enters the house of mourning chiefly in the character of a religious adviser. Happy is the office-bearer who understands and performs this duty well ; to excel in this province is not the attain-

ment of all rulers, or all teachers, nor is it given even to every master in Israel. There is a certain tact, a certain delicacy, in aptly handling the bruised reed, and fostering the smoking flax, that can neither be written in rules nor learned from them. Yet some hints derived from experience may not be altogether useless.

The sick should be visited *promptly*; for an elder will be stung to hear that such an one has died in his district, whom he might have seen, and did not, during illness: and he will poorly satisfy his own mind by saying—I had no idea the illness was of that violent character: had I supposed that any immediate danger was apprehended, I would have gone with all speed. It is unspeakably better to act with a celerity in these cases, which leaves no delay to be explained or palliated. The members of the congregation ought to inform the elder when there is any affliction in their families. But, if they do not, he should not reckon such information, when he learns the fact otherwise, an indispensable pre-requisite to his visit. It is an excellent rule, never to take offence at real or supposed slights in connection with illnesses or bereavements; for people are not themselves at such times, and it is cruel to measure their acts by a rigid criticism. At all events, the sending or not sending for an elder, often lies more with the relatives than with the immediate sufferer; and he should not be punished for their inadvertency. Invited, then, or not, the elder, in all ordinary circumstances, should lose no time in visiting the house of mourning. How desirable that he come early, if he is to come in ‘the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ!’

It is not necessary, and, unless in unusual circumstances, it is not proper, that he stay long. The suffering and enfeebled frame is easily exhausted, and therefore the words spoken in such cases should be few and well chosen. Exhortations and prayers should both be brief, and we should be on our guard not to prolong them. It were well that all who visit the sick adopted the suggestion; for there is no just idea of the mischief done by sitting for half hours at a sick bed, and thus taxing unduly the attention of a patient. Besides, if an elder's visits are short, he can make them the more frequent; and if he soon leave and soon return, he will find this distribution of his time assigned for such duty at once the most acceptable and the most edifying.

It is reasonable to suppose that sick persons and their friends will be often desirous to elicit an elder's opinion of the nature of a malady, or its probable danger. He should not, however, affect medical skill if it be not possessed by him, and should be slow to shake confidence in professional advisers. In so far as he remarks on the complaint, he must beware of inspiring false hopes. To gratify a sufferer who clings to life, he must not overstate his anticipations of recovery, and thus blunt the edge of providential warnings. It is a false friendship, it is a real cruelty, to soothe solicitude and lull into security, by speaking of renewed health and pleasure, when thought is pointing to aggravated illness and approaching dissolution. But, on the other hand, an elder should remember that there is an opposite extreme. In order

to be faithful, it is not necessary to give expression to every foreboding. If he have no right to promise life, he is just as little entitled to predict death. There is One who is Lord both of death and life, who often removes when removal is least expected, and often restores when restoration is despaired of; and, knowing these facts, we do well not to infringe his prerogative. Among the working classes especially, relatives themselves often give utterance to excessive fears with unrestrained freedom. In this manner they may induce the catastrophe which they foretel; and therefore they should be restrained rather than encouraged in this practice, and calmly reminded that we know not, and that it is not for us to know, the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power. Unless in extreme cases, it is enough to remember and to remark, that every disease is evidence of our mortality, and premonitory of our demise,—that any disease may terminate fatally, and should therefore be improved as if this were its near and inevitable issue,—that whether we are to die or live, it is the same grace which qualifies for both alternatives; and, therefore, on either supposition, we should apply instantly and earnestly for its needed succours. A large proportion of scripture has respect to affliction, and an elder can do nothing better, in addressing the afflicted, than cite revelation in its own language. Though he should simply repeat a number of appropriate passages of the divine word, he will find this rehearsal of heavenly counsels far more impressive and persuasive than the

wisest of human maxims, or the most connected and eloquent of uninspired orations.

For all that needs to be farther said upon this point, it may suffice to add, that next to a true and deep piety, a kind-hearted sympathy with sufferers is the best guide in accosting them with propriety. A heart melted by the sight of woes, readily adapts itself to their special exigencies. Let us recal the loss of dear departed friends, and remember the time when we hung in anguish over their palid cheek and quivering lip,—let us verify in prospect our own certain and impending demise, and bethink ourselves what sort of comforters we shall desiderate in these solemn moments,—then shall we ‘remember those that are in bonds as bound with them, and those who suffer adversity as being ourselves also in the body.’ Placing our own souls in their souls’ stead, we shall feel for them; and this fellow-feeling will prompt appropriate sentiment, and seek for itself acceptable words, and breathe into our very tone and manner a considerate and healing tenderness. I have spoken as if piety and sympathy were distinguishable—and in a certain measure they are so; for we find some distinguished for commiseration, of whom a decided godliness cannot be affirmed. But, in another view, they are identical; for piety comprises love to man, and that love, in a case of suffering, must assume a sympathetic character. Indeed, the hard and stony heart is never thoroughly softened, till it is subjected to the influence of the blood of sprinkling; and then it ceases to be stone, and becomes flesh. Let us come

much to Christ on our own behalf, and learn from his condescension and compassion, in composing our griefs, how it becomes us to comfort them which are in any trouble. We shall never speak words more reasonable in themselves, or more blessed from on high, than when we comfort others by those consolations wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

I shall conclude these remarks on the visitation of the sick, by answering one or two objections.

(1.) I have been told of elders who objected to visit the sick, on the ground that this is a species of teaching, and that they are not teaching, but ruling elders. The objection is so foolish, that I can hardly suppose it put forward in good earnest by any person who has been appointed to an important office. Yet as several friends have requested me to notice it, I give it these replies:—First: When the apostle of the Gentiles speaks, 1 Tim. v. 17, of only some elders as labouring in word and doctrine, he alludes, as all expositors agree, to public instructions, and cannot be understood as exempting any class of elders from doing good otherwise, as they have opportunity. Secondly: Scripture is sufficiently express in assigning this duty to all elders without distinction: ‘Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him.’* Paul, in addressing the Ephesian elders collectively, exhorts them ‘to feed the church of God;’† that is, to discharge the functions of shepherds to the church—for

* James v. 14.

† Acts xx. 28.

so the language in the original signifies. And what would be thought of a shepherd who allowed the sheep committed to his care to languish and die, and gave them no attentions? Thirdly: All Christians are bound to visit the sick: 'Pure religion, and undefiled, before God and the Father, is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.'* Can it be supposed, then, that presbyters alone are exempted from this obligation, or that a relative duty binding on all is not peculiarly incumbent on elders of the church, to whom a guardianship of others has been specially and solemnly committed? Fourthly: A minister cannot give all the attentions needed by the sick. In case his charge be of any magnitude, this one department of labour would require his whole time and more to do it justice. If, then, ruling elders are not appointed to aid ministers of the word in this important province, we are shut up to the conclusion, that no adequate provision has been made for the discharge of its duties. Fifthly, and finally: A church could have no sympathy with an elder in fulfilling any of his functions, who had no sympathy with them in the day of their calamity,—who knew that they were sick, and yet visited them not—that they were in the prison of affliction, and yet came not unto them; and, therefore, if any invested with this office are so heartless as to neglect the distressed on such a miserable pretext, I know not what other official obligation they can discharge with advantage.

* James i. 27.

(2.) Some elders scruple to visit the sick, on the ground that they are not qualified for the service. This objection wears a very different complexion from the former. But, after all, it may be better only in appearance, as it is no uncommon thing for indolence, and even pride, to flee from duty and detection in the guise of humility. Where timidity is unfeigned, I would remark, in alleviating its fears, that the simplest manner of performing this duty is the best. If you have nothing of your own to say to the sick, may you not rehearse some of God's sayings to them? May you not repeat to them some of his promises, and kindly appeal to the sorrowing soul, whether it do not find them great and precious? If a sense of personal insufficiency be discoverable in your manner, that will promote your object, while you point attention away from man, and direct it for supplies to the fulness which is in Christ.

(3.) Some elders object to visit the sick, because the performance of this duty by them appears to serve no purpose; an elder's visit is not accepted for a minister's visit, and therefore the minister is not aided by co-operation—which leaves the calls on his personal attentions neither silenced nor diminished. I reply, that the light in which an elder's visits may be viewed is no measure of their usefulness. They are eminently fitted in themselves to do good; and if this end be gained, it matters little whether the elder be considered an independent counsellor, or the minister's assistant. That an elder's visits are sometimes undervalued is an abuse, and has arisen from the

unscriptural neglect of the office. Let these office-bearers be efficient, and the very frequency of their visits will create a dependence on them, and appreciation of them, and earnest longing to have them repeated. Were it found, indeed, that a minister discontinued his own attentions, because he found substitutes in the members of session, a reasonable dissatisfaction might be awakened. But the attentions of elders have quite a different tendency. They make him acquainted with cases of distress, of which he might not have otherwise known; and while his mind is relieved from the pressure of impracticable toil, he is stimulated to do all he can for the sick, in the certain knowledge that others are traversing the same path, who are necessarily observant of the measure of his faithfulness.

SECT. 5.—The *backsliding* members of a church form another class, particularly requiring an elder's attentions. It is his duty to speak with them on the sinfulness of their conduct, and strive, by God's blessing, to bring them to repentance. This obligation is not, indeed, peculiar to office-bearers. We find it commanded in the most absolute and comprehensive form: 'Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.'* Of like extent is the promise—'Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the

* Lev. xix. 17.

error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.* Expostulation, in one form or another, is competent to all. Servants may fitly rebuke fellow-servants, and the youngest children their companions in childhood. Circumstances may occur, in which inferiors do well to admonish superiors, and the child the parent. The servant of Naaman wisely said to him—‘If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?’ † And though our Lord himself was in early life a signal example of filial obedience, residing at Nazareth with Joseph and his mother, and being ‘subject to them,’ ‡ we find him on one occasion exchanging that subjection for censure, and saying, ‘How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?’ § The duty, then, is general, to ‘have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them.’ || At the same time, the duty of reproof is not devolved equally on all.

Parents are bound, in a very special manner, to interdict and condemn all misconduct in their offspring. Nor is it a passing expression of disapproval that will discharge this responsibility. Eli, hearing all that his sons did unto Israel, said unto them, ‘Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil doings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that

* James v. 19, 20. † 2 Kings v. 13. ‡ Luke ii. 51.

§ Luke ii. 49.

|| Ephes. v. 11.

I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?'* This seems to be serious expostulation, and yet, because it was tardy, occasional, and irresolute, we find Jehovah afterwards saying of Eli—'I will perform against him all things which I have spoken concerning his house; when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him, that I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.'† Is there not many a house—the house of many a real saint—desolate as that of Eli, from the same cause—the relaxation of parental discipline?

The ministers of religion are also peculiarly obligated to tell offenders their faults: 'Preach the word,' says Paul to Timothy; 'be instant in season, and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.'‡ Of like speciality is the obligation resting on the elders of the church, to see to the well-doing of its members. They are rulers, and what sort of rule would it be that took no cognizance of transgression? It is of incalculable moment to sustain the standard of Christian morality in our churches; and while all should endeavour, after their own manner, and in their own measure, to contribute to this result, yet so much depends on the elder-

*1 Sam. ii. 23, &c.

† 1 Sam. iii. 12, &c.

‡ 2 Tim. iv. 2.

ship, that if their part be neglected, the purity of the society is infallibly and fearfully compromised.

Any sin, when it becomes known, is a proper subject of remonstrance by an elder. There are some sins, however, which, from their prevalence or danger, will call for his more frequent and earnest dissuasions. *Absence from church* is among these. It is one of the surest signs of degeneracy when persons desert the public ordinances of religion, not remembering the Sabbath, and not reverencing the sanctuary. Such contempt of Divine institutions is very sinful in itself, is always allied with other elements of backsliding, and removes the transgressor from the appointed means of correction and improvement. Some, who do not forsake the church wholly, rest quite contented in a half-day attendance, or every other day attendance, when they might be present with perfect regularity. Such conduct, if it be not checked, is apt to become general, and always to proceed from bad to worse, till church-attendance, in this country as in continental countries, would almost fall into desuetude. Elders, then, should have their eye on such cases, and not shrink from telling Sabbath-breakers their guilt and danger.—Another sin, of dreadfully menacing aspect in the present day, is *intoxication*. While other vices slay their thousands, this slays its tens of thousands. It is this sin which empties our homes and churches, and fills our bridewells and cemeteries. Inebriating liquors have been termed strong drink; and strong indeed they are, when reason falls before them, and the claims of friendship,

and the love of a good name, and the comforts of time, and the interests of eternity, are of no avail to withstand their ravages; when multitudes of our youth, far outnumbering the armies which in modern wars defended our country and discomfited its foes, and won its glory, are taken captive, almost without a struggle, and bound in the chains of a perpetual slavery by this detestable indulgence. The enormity of the evil has given rise to various plans for arresting its progress. To decide on the intrinsic or comparative merits of these philanthropic schemes is foreign to my present object. This much, however, is obvious; that he who does nothing to promote sobriety must be wrong. None can be innocently idle in the view and amid the desolations of such a deadly plague as intemperance. All may do much individually to bring this immorality into abhorrence, and the admonitory vigilance of elders may be of incalculable value in warding it off from the precincts of the sanctuary.

Such are some of the offences which warrant and demand the faithful dealing of an elder with the offender. Much depends, however, on the mode, as well as the matter, of exhortation. One rule, which our Lord has laid down as to the manner of proceeding in such cases, is never to be forgotten or violated. He has expressly enjoined that, where the offence is personal, and not known to the public, a private settlement of it should be attempted; and if due acknowledgment or reparation be made by the party in the wrong to the party injured, no farther steps should be

taken.* Besides observing this rule himself, an elder may have frequent occasion to inculcate the observance of it on others. The rule, however, applies only to private offences; and when any sin, even though it may have been ever so secret in the first instance, becomes noised abroad, and so brings a scandal on the Christian cause and church, then a personal settlement of it is no longer admissible. The vindication of the church must be as wide as its reproach. Even then, however, although an elder is not bound to communicate with the person in fault before submitting the case to the session, it can generally do no harm, and may often do much good, to speak with the individual apart, and inform him of the measures which the nature and publicity of his transgression render indispensable. Courtesies of this kind convince of kind intention, and remove the pretexts which shelter impenitence. When a desire is thus manifested to save feeling in the application of discipline, it always commands respect, if not acquiescence, and seldom disturbs good understanding. Indeed, this is stating the case very feebly. Let an elder wear, in his own blameless character, an impenetrable panoply; let him not only be a just man, but a man of benevolent worth; let him enter on the task of censure with manifest pain to himself, and obviously from a sense of duty and wish to benefit, and he wields in these attributes an impressive, an appalling power. The audacity which laughs to scorn the mace and the

* Matt. xviii. 15.

sceptre of earthly greatness, may quail before his scriptural and spiritual authority. I do not say that it will, in every case, subdue into contrition—that end it can never reach without God's blessing ; but this I say, that the man who despises such admonition, has few restraints left between him and destruction. I have known those who have resisted and reviled a faithful and affectionate office-bearer in the self-denying fulfilment of his functions ; but I have known none of them whose scorn of God's servant has not recoiled upon themselves. We should pray in hope for all ; but I would despair of such scorers, if I were to despair of any.

Seeing, then, that official censures are weapons so penetrating, an elder will do well to handle them with discretion, and to beware in the handling of them of allowing ought that is earthly to impair their celestial purity and power. Many counsels might be given, but this only I shall remark—that remonstrance, to be effective, must be expeditious. A stone, in downward motion, is best arrested at the beginning of its course. When it has tumbled from steep to steep, and has acquired at every stage of its descent augmented violence, a resistance may fail at the last to qualify its speed, which would have stopped it entirely at the commencement of its fall. So is it with downward conduct. A word may reclaim after the first act, where volumes of entreaty impose no restraint on the confirmed habit. An elder, then, should not procrastinate in checking misconduct. One of the best elders I ever knew, was very earnest in acting

upon this principle, and he related to me an incident which had mainly impressed its importance on his mind. A highly-respected member of the congregation, in which he was an office-bearer, became suspected of exceeding in the use of spirits. At first the suspicion was treated as a calumny, and the friends of the accused spoke of it with indignation. Nothing, therefore, was done in the matter—not so much as to institute any inquiry to ascertain the truth or untruth of the rumours. The suspected individual maintained, on the whole, his prior standing, and no one could be bold enough to confront him on the delicate subject. Suspicion went to rest, but from time to time revived, and always in alliance with new corroboratory indications. Still the respectable man could not be charged, however gently, with the supposition of inebriety. At length his excesses became more decided and apparent: he was seen drunk one day in the streets: the town rung with the sad news, and no more delicacy remained in subjecting him to discipline. The session took up the case, and the elder I have adverted to was appointed, along with another, to wait on Mr ——, to converse with him on the *fama* affecting his reputation, and summon him to their next meeting. He received them with a mournful expression on his countenance. When they had informed him of the occasion and design of their call, he replied to this effect—‘Your visit is kind, but late. Had you come sooner, while I had a struggle with myself, you might have aided my better resolutions. But now all is over. My character is lost; my self-

command is gone, and I am a ruined man—for ever and ever. Shortly after he expired in a fit of drinking. When the elder told me these circumstances, he was much solemnized by the recollection of them, and said he would brave any accusation of censoriousness rather than encounter another such interview.

SECT. 6.—It is one of the greatest improvements of modern times, that so much care is bestowed on *early tuition*. But though this field of labour receives more attention than formerly, it is not yet adequately cultivated. The offspring of professing Christians are received into the visible church by baptism, and the church is solemnly bound to see that all thus admitted into its fellowship are suitably instructed. If no means be employed to secure this end, their admission is a mere ceremony—rather, a positive mockery; and the opponents of infant baptism find too much pretext in the conduct of its friends for holding it in derision. All the members of the church should derive benefit from their relation to it corresponding with their state and wants; and if the church neglect the young, who are its acknowledged charge, assuredly the rulers of the church shall not be found guiltless.

There should be *classes of children*. These are commonly taught on the Sabbath evening, because the season corresponds with the exercises, and is otherwise the most convenient for pupils and teachers. Some have a prejudice against Sabbath schools. It is evident, however, that to children who would be other-

wise neglected, they are invaluable, and that they ought to be maintained, were it for their sakes alone. To the offspring of religious parents they are less necessary, and did the question lie between school and domestic instruction, a decided preference would be due to parental superintendence. But I apprehend that these means of improvement are best conjoined, and that when they are both well conducted, they will be found mutually serviceable. The parent will find it an advantage, in directing youthful attention to prescribed lessons, that a more public rehearsal of them is in prospect; and the Sabbath-school teacher, when he experiences unusual ease and comfort in discharging his duties, can generally trace these facilities to well-conditioned homes.

As to the manner of conducting these junior classes, a considerable portion of the exercises must necessarily consist in the recital of passages committed to memory. It is of importance that the tasks be select, that they be of practicable amount, and that the performance of them be firmly, though not sternly, exacted. Each scholar need not repeat the whole lesson. This process becomes tedious and monotonous, and tempts those who have concluded, to use the freedoms of a pastime. It is better to call now on one, and now on another, to give the succeeding verse, taking care that none be ultimately omitted; and all are thus held in vigilant expectation.

Even the very young should be taught, as they are able to bear it, the meaning of scriptural statement. Where this is done by questioning, great care should

be taken not to make the questions lengthened and prosing. Let it never be forgotten that the learners are comparative babes, and that instruction, to be suitable for them, must partake of their own quickness and vivacity. There is reason to fear that infant training often errs on the side of a dull solemnity. Those who are so commendably occupied, will therefore bear with the reiterated exhortation to study cheerfulness, and even sprightliness, in their mode of teaching. The catechising of children, to be at all agreeable to them, and consequently effective with them, must be prompt, and brief, and varied, as their own mercurial and versatile temperament—shifting and sparkling, if I may so express myself, like the playful sunbeams on a rippling stream. Yet the questions should not be frivolous; nor should they lie so much on the surface as to engage no thought, impart no information, and merely elicit another verbal repetition of sentences, or members of sentences, already uttered. Children must feel that their faculties are exercised, and their knowledge enlarged, or they soon weary of insipid truisms. From all these observations, the inference is easily deducible, that the first to be drilled by the teacher is the teacher himself, and that unless he has premeditated his interrogatories, he is not likely to make them either fascinating or useful.

As children may pretend to be at school when they are not, and an institution excellent in itself may thus be perverted to the worst possible evils, parents should be admonished to watch over their attendance; and teachers will promote immeasurably the value and

efficiency of their labours, by keeping lists of their scholars, marking the absentees, and afterwards calling to learn the cause of their absence.

These observations respect children ; but instruction should be afforded to the more advanced of the rising generation, and *classes should be formed of young men and women*. The period of life succeeding childhood is in every view most important. It is the golden age for learning. The season of first feebleness has passed away ; the season of second and sadder infancy has not yet come ; and the mind, all buoyant, inquisitive, impressible, and sprightly, has every advantage in profiting by education. With superior facilities for improvement, there is then also a peculiar liability to intellectual and moral perversion. While the understanding gains strength, so does emotion—so do the passions ; and if youthful lusts, which war against the soul, are permitted to conquer self-restraint, and subdue into crime, alas for juvenile promise, and the fond hopes it had inspired ! At such an epoch there is more need than ever for wise direction ; but it becomes diminished when it most of all requires to be augmented. Day-schools are then left, parents are often parted from, other protective influences become, in like manner, inoperative ; and is not this the necessitous hour for the church interposing—for the members of the church, and, above all, the rulers of the church, supplying a lack of other guardianship by compensating ministrations ?

As these classes consist, professedly, of young men and young women, it is desirable to fix a minimum

age, that their distinctive character may be preserved. The more advanced dislike to be associated with mere children; and, when attainments do not correspond with age, the older are especially apt to be shamed by the superior answers of the younger, into silence and desertion. The minimum age should, for these reasons, be somewhat high—fourteen years, or thereabout. But, while none are admitted under this age, unless in special cases, it is of great consequence to obtain the attendance of numbers much older; for the term of education cannot be too far extended, or the false shame of being made wiser too much discouraged. The stated meetings benefit more from being regular than frequent. Many young people, in service of one or another species, can scarcely obtain leave of absence so often as one night a week; and, if they cannot attend always, the temptation is strong not to attend at all. It may be best, in such circumstances, that the young men and women be assembled on alternate weeks. But, whatever may be the interval selected, the time fixed must not be on slight grounds departed from; for, if the class be this week forgotten, and next week set aside, its ruin is inevitable.

The exercises in the senior, as in the junior classes, must consist partly of scriptural recitations. This is the more necessary, that a careful committal of passages to memory is falsely supposed by many to be an occupation only for children; while the advantage of it is to all incalculable. If recollections of scripture be vague and erring, how can they, in a time of need,—perhaps of temptation, perhaps of death, or to men-

tion each incumbent duty, how can they, in the pleadings of prayer,—be adduced with certainty, readiness, and power? A few verses, then, should be assigned to be repeated memoriter; but they should be few; for the toil-worn of our youth cannot burden their memories with onerous tasks, and by the attempt to impose them, such classes, as facts testify, would be infallibly wrecked.

The exercises in these classes, to correspond with the standing of their members, must be, to a large extent, of an explanatory nature. It is not meant that the classes should be lectured at great length on the nature of doctrines or duties, for protracted addresses are unsuitable to such meetings, and have not unfrequently the effect of annihilating them. The system of question and answer, already remarked upon in relation to junior classes, is here also the best medium of communicating knowledge; of course, modified somewhat in accommodation to the altered circumstances. Two or three questions of the Shorter Catechism, with associated proofs; and two or three verses of some gospel or epistle may, after being repeated from memory, form the appropriate subject of query and response. The more varied the illustrations are which the teacher elicits or suggests, they will be found the more pleasing and inspiring. The facts, the principles, the precepts of scripture should all be in requisition; and, indeed, assistance may be derived, with happy effect, from stores of useful knowledge not expressly religious—from the observations of travellers, the annals of history, and the discoveries

of science. All this requires very little erudition. Enough may be gathered, with little trouble, from popular treatises, and a floating literature, easily and universally accessible. Still, a measure of study is necessary; and, if any one think to superintend such classes efficiently without investigation and forethought, he mistakes his undertaking. He must regulate his reading with a view to their benefit, and, so often as other engagements will permit, should prepare particularly for each particular meeting with them. The ever recurring secret of success is thus seen to be *labour*. If any desire the office of a bishop, he desires *a good work*; and ruling elders are bishops in the nomenclature of scripture. Miraculous gifts have been withdrawn; and, though that undefinable quality genius were as prevalent as it is rare, it would not supply the place of diligence. Indeed, inspiration itself did not release from exertion, but rather stimulated to surpassing effort; for the apostle of the Gentiles, as he excelled others in preternatural endowments, also ‘laboured more abundantly than they all.’*

Classes of the kind now under consideration, are commonly superintended by the minister. Where this is the case, they are best held on a week-day evening; for the minister is then in better case for conducting them vigorously, than after being wasted by his pulpit services; and whoever may be the teacher, it is well to have the week’s worldliness relieved by intermediate devotions, and the maxim

* 1 Cor. xv. 10.

practically inculcated, that religion is not the business of the Sabbath exclusively, but generally of life. Let not impossibility be hastily pleaded. There are flourishing week-day classes of this nature both in country districts and in towns, and if others in similar localities be declining or extinct, the cause may be circumstantial, and not essential. Let the mode be doubted of, and once and again altered in order to be amended, before suspecting and changing the day, at the expense of resigning six days to unbroken secularity, and crowding all such labours into the day of rest.

In some cases, the minister, from age and infirmity, or other causes, cannot hold these classes, and then the charge of them devolves on the elders. They may be often conducted advantageously by both; but abandoned by both they should never be. In the history of my own congregation, these classes, as formerly conducted by elders, have proved a signal blessing. One who experienced their benefit, thus speaks of them in our last year's congregational report:—'Several of the elders had classes in their respective proportions—a practice, the advantages of which cannot easily be estimated. During the last four years of Dr Dick's life, a class was conducted in the session-house by Messrs James Sommerville and David Anderson. Of those who attended this class during the last two years of its existence, several females have become instructors of the ignorant, and all the male scholars, without exception, have been employed as Sabbath school teachers.'

Let all our congregations, then, have their senior

as well as junior classes. In regulating youth, we are regulating manhood and womanhood; for, in all ordinary cases, the one period of life fixes the other's character. A special difficulty is sometimes complained of, in securing the attendance of young men. But the end is too important to be hastily relinquished. Much should be done to gain their presence, and sustain their interest. We thus influence their views and habits at the only time when modelling agency can be applied with any measure of facility, or any likelihood of success. Soon, very soon, the world's affairs will be intrusted to them;—soon, very soon, the interests of Christ's church itself will pass subordinately into their hands; and to initiate and ground them in a well-informed, and sober-minded, and vitally-energetic piety, is doing the noblest service that can be done to secure and expedite the glory of the latter days.

There is another species of attentions to the young, which it is of great consequence they should receive. It is well known that every year brings a large influx of youth into our commercial cities. Some of these young persons conduct themselves with propriety, and become the ornament and strength of churches to which they attach themselves. But the danger to which the inexperienced are exposed in our large towns are very great; and it is melancholy to think how many of them are seduced into 'the paths of the destroyer.'* We have our bills of mortality, and they are gloomy records; but still more affecting would be

* Ps. xvii. 4.

the recorded wrecks of juvenile promise and parental anticipation.

In so far as these youthful entrants into cities can be induced to attend classes for religious instruction, a great object is accomplished. But not a few of them are debarred, by circumstances, from making use of such means of improvement. Are they to be neglected, then, or merely receive a stated visit with other members and adherents of the congregation? Their case requires more consideration and sympathy. Very possibly their new pastor has received a letter of introduction with them—a letter from their parents, breathing all the solicitude of parental affection; or, from their former pastor, testifying that hitherto they have deported themselves commendably, and soliciting a watchful eye on their future behaviour. A minister has little of the spirit of his office who does not feel interested in the charge so committed to him; but he cannot do all that he would; and, when he has done his utmost in these instances, he is painfully impressed with the insufficiency of his services. The elders can come to his help. Each member of session can have his eye on so many of these youths; and, by showing them a little domestic kindness, may enhance the effect of official counsels. Elders may also introduce them to church members of respectable standing and beneficent disposition; and thus the pensive and unprotected stranger may suddenly find himself at home, and fenced about by all the influences of Christian friendship from the perilous snares on which he was stumbling.

SECT. 7.—There are some engagements which do not respect exclusively any class of persons, but which, as being conducted by elders individually, naturally fall under this division of my subject. Of these I shall notice only—*district prayer meetings*.

Many passages of scripture point to the duty and advantage of such assemblings for supplication: ‘Again I say unto you,’ declares our Lord emphatically, ‘that 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.’* We find some of the most signal manifestations of God’s presence and goodness recorded in scripture as being made to companies of disciples who were thus occupied: ‘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.’ † Is it asked, in what they all accorded? The explanation is furnished in the preceding context: ‘These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.’ ‡ Peter and John, on their release from imprisonment, ‘went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord. . . . 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

* Matt. xviii. 19.

† Acts ii. 1, 2.

‡ Acts i. 14.

the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul.’* When ‘Herod stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church,’ Peter, by his orders, was kept in prison; but ‘prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.’ When Herod would have brought him forth for execution, the same night he was delivered by angelic ministration. ‘And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.’† These were extraordinary cases; and yet kindred facts have occurred in recent times. I shall adduce an example, as told, to the best of my recollection, by Mr. Reid, one of the missionaries connected with the London Missionary Society in Africa:—He was labouring in Caffraria while the colony belonged to Holland. The Dutch government became jealous of the British missionaries, and sent for them to come to Cape Town, without giving them any intimation of the design of the summons. On reaching the seat of rule, they were told that their labours must be discontinued, and that they must not revisit their flocks, even to bid them farewell. The missionaries held a conference—so they intended it to be; but when they were met, one of them said, ‘What can we confer about? to deliberate is useless, where we have no power to decide: let us rather pray.’ The suggestion was adopted, and the missionaries successively addressed a throne

* Acts iv. 23.

† Acts xii.

of grace, continuing 'instant in prayer.' They were yet devoting themselves to this exercise when a rumour reached them that a squadron was visible at sea. It was a British fleet, having for its destination the capture of the colony, and was speedily in conflict with the Dutch navy. The flames and smoke of battle could be seen from the land, and the cannon's thunders were distinctly audible. In a few minutes the fight was over, and the colony belonged to Great Britain. On a representation to the new authorities, the missionaries were empowered to return to their mission stations. When Mr Reid went back to the people of his charge, they received him with rival surprise and joy. Having learned that they were to be deprived of their instructor, they had assembled to consider what should be done; and the question was raised among the taught, as it had been among the teachers, what can we do but pray? They engaged and persevered in prayer; and Mr Reid's restoration to them, in God's own way and God's own time, was the subject of supplication when he presented himself in their assembly!

In many of the darkest periods of the church's history, when the pulpit has emitted only such instruction as causeth to err, devotion has been very principally cherished and preserved in prayer meetings; and it is certain that when a season of revival and reformation comes, these excellent institutions are the invariable cause or effect of such 'newness of life.'—An able writer says:—"Where the spirit of prayer is dull, the 'first love has been left.' It must be so,

both with the individual and with the church. There is then declension. And the return of the spirit of prayer is *revival*. The criterion is sure. It is an unfailing spiritual thermometer. Where prayer is cold, the heart is cold; and as the heart warms, prayer warms. As in the former case, so in this—it is at once an *indication* and a *means*.—Let me here also, then, urge the question upon you, with all faithfulness, and with a full sense of the equal need of urging it upon myself,—How is it with you *in the closet*? Do you redeem time for personal devotions?—and, even while you are engaged in your daily vocations, is your heart in that spiritually dependent and grateful frame, which is implied in the command, ‘Pray without ceasing?’—in other words, are you living habitually in the spirit of prayer,—in the inward mental attitude of devotion?—How is it with you *in the family*? Do you allow every trivial inconvenience to stand, as an excuse, in the way of this important duty,—the duty of *domestic* prayer?—and do you huddle it over in a careless and perfunctory manner, as if, while your conscience would not permit the neglect, your heart had no pleasure in the performance?—Or do you count it a privilege and a delight to gather your family around your domestic altar; and does your heart feel the disappointment and the blank, when at any time it cannot be done? If there are any members of churches living in the neglect of personal prayer,—or any heads of families in churches living in the neglect of domestic prayer,—I say, unhesitatingly, to such, that they are in a

state of declension themselves, and that they are chargeable, as far as their example goes, with the spiritual deadness of their families, and with the listless lifelessness of their brethren.—The two duties will go together, and in the spirit with which they are fulfilled will be proportionate to each other. Where there is life in the personal, there will be corresponding life in the domestic exercises. And in proportion as there is life in both, there will be life too in the prayers of the *fellowship-meeting*, and of the *church*. A praying spirit in the closet and in the family, will take delight in the private *coteries* of Christian conference and devotion; and it will come in its full force to the sanctuary.—Are prayer-meetings, then, on the increase among you? Why should there be a neighbourhood in which brethren reside, without one? I know not a more pleasing symptom of a reviving and thriving church, than the multiplication of these, and their spirited attendance.”*

To augment the interest of such meetings, some associate with prayer the reading of missionary intelligence, others the exposition of a part of scripture, and others the discussion of some important article of faith. Any of these adjuncts may be so regulated as to do great good, and where it is so, I would be sorry to disturb the arrangement. But they may be perverted into an occasion of personal display and party strife, and very great evil may result from such abuses. So far as my knowledge extends, prayer meetings

* ‘Revival of Religion,’ by R. Wardlaw, D.D., pp. 38, 39.

are generally most successful when their nature is most in accordance with their name—when the exercises are throughout spiritual and devotional—when the assembled worshippers find ample materials of occupation and delight in reading God's word, celebrating his praise, and supplicating his throne. While religious associations are so conducted, they are among the best indices of congregational prosperity, and surest fountains of future and ever-flowing good. It is desirable, however, that none of the services be unseasonably prolonged; for those who wish to attend may have little time at their command, and in any circumstances piety is not likely to be advanced where strength and patience are exhausted. These remarks respect only the mode of conducting prayer meetings, and do not invalidate the importance of holding them. They are of high and holy consequence. Scripture, and history, and present facts, unite in attesting their value. Let every elder form them who can; and if the attendance be small, and he labour in vain to enlarge it, let him not be discouraged, while the numbers fulfil the stipulation of the promise, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.'*

* Matt. xviii. 20.

CHAPTER III.

DUTIES OF ELDERS VIEWED COLLECTIVELY—FREQUENCY OF MEETING—MINUTES—CONGREGATIONAL LIST—APPORTIONING OF THE CONGREGATION—ADMISSION OF MEMBERS—DISCIPLINE—MEASURES AFFECTING PUBLIC WORSHIP, ETC.—GENERAL ENCOURAGEMENT TO BENEFICENT INSTITUTIONS—CONCLUSION.

I have now to consider the duties of elders viewed collectively, or in session assembled. Some remarks on this department of the subject have been anticipated in treating of the former; and it may be necessary sometimes to revert to the former in treating of this, as it is scarcely possible to keep them wholly distinct. Still, advantage results from considering them, on the whole, separately.

SECT. 1.—A session should *meet with due frequency*. If elders be called together only at distant intervals, and perhaps even then at no stated time, but casually and irregularly, the superintendence of the congregation must be in a ruinous state. The reason cannot be, that there is no duty for the session to perform: the only explanation is, that the performance of it is neglected. In ordinary circumstances, a session should not meet seldomer than once a month for its regular business; and it is greatly to be wished that another monthly meeting should be held, punctually, for devotional exercises.

SECT. 2.—The *acts of session ought to be regularly minuted*. It is of much consequence that the minutes

be carefully kept—that they be expressed with a measure of accuracy, and written in a fair legible hand. If possible, they should be completed, read, and approved of, at the meeting of which they record the transactions, as this removes all danger of interpolation, and all suspicion of mis-statement. Should the suggestion be found impracticable, pretty full notes, at least, should be taken at the time, and the first business, after the session is constituted, should always be to hear and pass the minutes of the meeting preceding.

SECT. 3.—Mention has been already made of district roll-books. Out of these *a congregational roll* should be formed by the session, and every care should be exercised to keep it in an accurate condition. Admissions and disjunctions of members should be entered into the record immediately on their occurrence, that omissions may not happen through procrastination and forgetfulness. A roll of the congregation should be kept by the minister, as well as by the session, and both can be derived and corrected from the same data. As each elder is not only responsible for his own district, but has a general accountability for the state of the congregation, it belongs to all of them to see that every one of their number is active and faithful in his particular province. If any portion of the flock be really slighted, while nominally inspected, the evil should be ascertained, and a remedy applied. The elder who is remiss may plead want of time, or bad health, or the magnitude of his district; and in such a case some new arrange-

ment can be made to relieve him. But on no account should a section of the congregation be left to inquire month by month, and one half year after another, who their elder is, without seeing any of his own doings, to indicate the answer.

It is a first duty of the session, then, to see that the congregation be well apportioned among its members, and that the arrangements for each district be in good working order.

SECT. 4.—It belongs to the session *to admit applicants into the fellowship of the church*. In the discharge of this duty, they do well to cherish a deep sense of its importance. What is all other congregational prosperity worth, if our congregations be not composed of genuine believers?—if the principle of selection be not at least acknowledged, and with some fidelity acted on, in our ecclesiastical administration? We may have numerous, intelligent, affluent, and influential audiences; but if no discrimination have been made between the chaff and the wheat—the living and the dead—these audiences, however respectable, are not entitled to be considered Christian churches at all. It is only when reasonable evidence of saintship is insisted on, that a stimulus is given to acquire the indispensable qualifications,—it is then only that persons of the same views and spirit, being separated from others, and brought into fellowship, favourably affect each other by reciprocal sympathy,—it is only then the society becomes a spiritual Israel, and can expect to have fulfilled in its behalf the glorious things

which are spoken of Zion. It is no valid objection, that we deal harshly with people in denying them church privileges. The cruelty consists in fostering their delusion, and seconding their self-destruction; and the truest of all friendship is tendered them in restraining their presumption, exhibiting to them their danger, and pointing out to them the only path by which saving privilege can be reached, and its external manifestations consistently observed. Equally futile is the objection, that we are imperfect judges of character, and should not usurp functions which we are incompetent to wield. Our comparative ignorance and liability to err furnish adequate grounds for caution, and gentleness, and charitable interpretation, but not for levelling the land-marks which the hand of God has erected, and which his word clearly defines. Is no distinction to be made? If infidels or profligates choose to make a sport of the Lord's supper, and call for the cup of blessing as Belshazzar did for the sacred vessels of the temple, are we to accede to their demand? Or, suppose only that persons are, to our certain knowledge, absolutely ignorant of the first principles of Christianity, are we to encourage them in transforming a significant service into a meaningless ceremony, when it is morally impossible they can profit by the engagement? It will be said, these are extreme cases. But, however extreme, they establish a principle—the principle of discrimination; and when once that principle has been admitted, where shall we stay its application?—where, with any approach to consistency, or semblance of respect for scripture, or

any practical effect, if not in requiring such elements of character and behaviour as constitute a credible profession of faith in Christ?

What, then, is to be done for the protection of the church's purity in the admission of members? Care must be taken to ascertain that the persons applying have a competent knowledge of divine truth—that they are acquainted with those cardinal principles which are essential to the Christian scheme, and of which the faith is therefore indispensable to salvation; above all, they must have clear apprehension of the facts, that by nature and practice we are condemned and depraved, and, to be delivered from this complicated ruin, must be justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and sanctified by the Spirit of our God. What renders justification necessary?—What is the nature of the privilege so expressed?—In what sense are we justified through Christ?—In what sense are we justified by faith?—Where, or in what words, is justification spoken of in scripture?—What is understood by being sanctified?—Who is it that sanctifies?—Wherein does sanctification differ from justification?—What proofs can be adduced from scripture in behalf of these views? If such questions, kindly put, and in a variety of lights, and with auxiliary suggestions, cannot be answered, the gospel is not understood. How, then, can it be believed? And if such persons were admitted into the church, to what would their admission amount, or what communion could there be between enlightened godliness and practical heathenism? To ascertain the knowledge of applicants for church privi-

leges is, in the opinion of many, the prerogative of the minister; but there is no reason why it should devolve on him exclusively. There are many reasons why the duty and responsibility should be shared by other members of session. Where a teaching and a ruling elder differ in their estimate of a person's knowledge, there is ground to pause, and to institute farther examination; where the examiners agree, such agreement confirms the judgment of each, and establishes the confidence of the whole session in the representations given them. Where persons are kept back on account of deficient knowledge, it is a pity that the delay should wear the aspect of harsh rejection, or be in any way so conducted as unnecessarily to wound feeling and discourage renewed application. Satisfaction should be expressed that they are giving their minds to the subject—that they have profited so far by the conversations held with them—and that good hope may be entertained of their growing proficiency. If it were a common practice to guide the less informed applicants through a course of catechetical exercises before receiving them into communion, and if persons so deferred were made aware that theirs was no isolated case, but simply an exemplification of common usage, all appearance of special and personal affront would be done away; and the excellent effects of the system would more and more facilitate its operation. This is, in fact, the plan pursued in many, if not all of our congregations; and where it is most fully tested, causes the least irritation, and is found productive of the most edification and thankfulness.

A minister or elder, in conversing with applicants, should have it in view not only to ascertain their acquaintance with doctrinal and denominational principles, but also to discover what spirit they are of, and whether they speak of religion as those who feel its value and have experienced its power. There is much need for caution in this province, lest we usurp the office of the Searcher of Hearts; but still, knowledge may be uttered with a marked heedlessness and irreverence not easily reconcilable with godly fear; while just views may be associated with a humility and seriousness in stating them, strongly corroborative of simplicity and godly sincerity.

Supposing each applicant thus conversed with, *repeatedly* and *apart*, what other steps should be taken to test honesty of profession? Attestations should be asked from parties the best qualified to give them. It is good to obtain as many of these as possible, though some of them may be of less value than the rest; because facts of consequence are occasionally developed where the disclosure of them was least expected. Some churches make light of testimonials from certain other churches, and scorn to ask or take them as any evidence of saintship; but the consequence is, that abandoned and impenitent offenders are sometimes admitted by them, whom other societies had rejected. Though written testimonials are useful, still greater benefit often results from asking references to Christian friends, and communicating with such parties orally. People will say what they will not write, and speech has much significance which writing

wants. It should be asked whether the person, if the head of a family, be known to observe family worship; whether he ever formed or attended prayer meetings; whether he be regarded and spoken of as a truly religious person, etc. etc.? Such inquiries must of course be exceedingly varied according to the circumstances. Were such faithfulness of scrutiny habitually and impartially instituted, improper applications for admission into the church would be reduced in number, while those of a satisfactory character would be increased, and the session would find its duties become both easier and pleasanter. A healthful tone of piety in a church has the same tendency to scare the impious. When it becomes understood that all the members of the church give as God hath prospered them for the maintenance of his cause, the avaricious and niggardly will not relish such fellowship. When congregational or district prayer meetings become so well attended that attendance on them is expected, and a failure in it is noticed and remarked upon, a prayerless person will connect himself elsewhere. The practical efficiency of a church is thus intimately allied with its purity, and the improvement of either is the advancement of both.

It remains to add, that much perplexity may be looked for in reducing these principles to practice. That none but Christians should belong to the church of Christ, is a maxim commanding ready assent. But to know what we should do, and how far we should go, in ascertaining who are Christians, is often a problem of very difficult solution. Sometimes there

is little evidence to be had, and the case, in its own nature, may not allow of much; but, when all that exists is favourable, it is a questionable proceeding to deny Christ's ordinances to those who are probably his people. No set of rules can be instituted for our guidance, because piety may be proved or disproved in any one of numberless ways; and the cases to be considered are so different, that each must be decided on its own merits. It may be said that, where there is any doubt, it is best to err on the side of caution, and exclude for the time. But there is always doubt: for we have no discernment of spirits, no absolute knowledge of the people of God, and the question still recurs, what degree of doubt demands and vindicates postponement of admission? We must have some standard or other in our minds by which we try requisite qualification; and whatever that standard may be, whether it be high or whether it be low, we have still to determine what, in many cases, is very hard to be determined, whether the person applying come up to it or not? The difficulty which thus hangs over the duty should dispose every elder to think forbearingly of the manner in which other elders discharge it. Let each for himself elicit all the evidence he can of true Christian character. When a case is submitted by the brethren in the eldership, let him freely and fully express his views of the testimonies proffered. But if, after all this, the session receive one whom he would have rejected, let him remember that persons may hold the same principle of pure communion, and yet differ in the application of it; and

let him give all the rest equal credit with himself for wishing to promote the church's highest interests.

SECT. 5.—It belongs to the session, in their collective capacity, *to administer church discipline*; for the purity of the church must be respected, not only in the admission, but also the superintendence of its members. The duty is of high importance. ‘It was one of the greatest glories (says Bishop Burnet) of the primitive church, that they were so governed that none of their number could sin openly without a public censure and a long separation from the holy communion; which they judged was defiled by a promiscuous admitting of all persons to it. Had they consulted the arts of policy, they would not have held in converts by so strict a way of proceeding, lest their discontent might have driven them away, at a time when to be a Christian was attended with so many discouragements, that it might seem dangerous, by so severe a discipline, to frighten the world out of their communion. But the pastors of that time resolved to follow the rules delivered them by the apostles, and trusted God with the success, which answered and exceeded all their expectations; for nothing convinced the world more of the truth of that religion than to see those trusted with the care of souls watch so effectually over their manners, that some sins which, in these loose ages in which we live, pass but for common effects of human frailty, men were made to abstain from the communion for many years, and did cheerfully submit to such rules as might be truly

medicinal for curing those diseases in their minds.’* When persons deny the offences laid to their charge, and the session is constrained to lead a proof of guilt, this province of duty may become delicate and arduous. In general, however, it is not necessary to have recourse to a formal trial. Firm and affectionate dealing, based on a well-informed acquaintance with the case, commonly secures a full acknowledgment of the truth, and is also the appointed and appropriate means of reaching the grand end of discipline—the edification of the offender. Very much might be written on this head; but I deem a prolonged discussion of it unnecessary. If the elders extend those attentions to the backsliding which we have seen to be due from them individually, the same principles will regulate satisfactorily their united and judicial purgation of scandal. Let not, however, a hasty dismissal of this subject impair the conviction of its importance. Iniquity cannot be winked at in the church, and the presence of God simultaneously enjoyed; for evil cannot dwell with him, neither can fools stand in his sight. As the Jews ejected all leaven from their houses before the fifteenth day of the month Nisan, that none might be found with them after the killing of the paschal lamb during the days of unleavened bread, so let us ‘purge out the old leaven’ (the leaven that is of impure fellowship) from the house of God, still more sacred than our own dwellings, that we ‘may be a new lump, as we are unleavened. For

* Hist. of the Reformation. Pref. to Part II.

even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.’* It was one of the encomiums bestowed on the Ephesian church—‘Thou canst not bear them which are evil.’ † Let us read our obligation in its commendation; and ‘he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.’

SECT. 6.—The session have to consider any proposals submitted to it by its own members, or by the members of the church, for *the improvement, in regard to times and forms*, of public worship. Here a medium must be preserved between inflexible prejudice, and restless innovation. Those who are for no changes, and those who befriend all changes, are equally unreasonable and antisciptural in their conduct. The duty incumbent on individuals, is no less binding on church courts—‘To prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.’ A session must also learn to respect the will of the congregation, strongly entertained and legitimately expressed, without quailing and succumbing, to the utter loss of character and influence, before every breath of opposition pleading congregational authority.

SECT. 7.—Even those *institutions which are not necessarily or exclusively under the charge of the session* should always be in its view, and enjoy its countenance. A congregation is bound, as persons singly are, to do good to all men, as there is opportunity. If it can have, it ought to have, its day-

* 1 Cor. v. 7.

† Rev. ii. 2.

school and Sabbath schools, for poor outcast children,—its home and foreign missionary associations,—its Christian instruction agencies, for visiting wretched and neglected neighbourhoods,—its clothing societies, and other instrumentalities of beneficence. Let it not be imagined that these operations will drain away the resources of a congregation from its own pecuniary liabilities. The principle of benevolence, brought into action for one good object, will be found available for other good objects; and they who are mindful of missionaries, will not be miserly to ministers. Besides, God has promised to compensate a hundred fold, even in this life, the sacrifices made in his cause; and are we, in disbelief and contempt of these promises, to hazard nothing for the promotion of his glory? This much is certain, that our self-saving congregations are in general our straitened and decaying congregations; while flourishing churches have in many instances to date their prosperity from the day they devised liberal things. Let a session smile, then, on all these enterprises of faith; and if they have not their origin and direction, let them find their spring, their fulcrum, their associating centre, in sessional approbation.

CONCLUSION.—I conclude these remarks on the duties of elders collectively, with two general counsels.

1.—In sessional deliberations, ‘let all things be done with charity.’*

* 1 Cor. xvi. 14.

only be at peace among themselves, but should regard and treat each other as personal friends. Any feud in a session is most ruinous. A silly quarrel between two elders, settling down into habitual enmity, may do incalculable mischief; it vitiates the spirit of sessional discussion, and other elders are drawn into the misunderstanding, and become as keen as the original disputants. A quarrel in the session readily extends to the congregation, where each of the parties bids for favour and support; and thus the strife diffuses and prolongs itself; and 'where strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.'* But what can I do? a contentious elder will say. Am I to sacrifice truth to peace, and lay down my privileges to be trampled on by insolence? Certainly not: but where alienations are formed and perpetuated, this is rarely a fair statement of the case. There are commonly great faults on both sides; and supposing all the wrong to be on one side, though the aggrieved party should not sin, in order to conciliate, he should seize opportunities of pacifying where principle is not imperilled, and seek the noblest of all victories, in overcoming evil with good. If any one set his heart on the portion of the peace-maker, it is amazing how he will be brought, sooner or later, in one way or another, to the possession of the inheritance.

2. Elders should observe a general silence out of doors about their sessional proceedings. It is true that sessions are open courts; equally so as presbyteries: and

* James iii. 16.

I often feel desirous that all the world looked upon them; for presbytery is nowhere seen to so much advantage as in these lowliest of its judicatories. There we behold men of Christian worth making large sacrifice of time and trouble in order to do good. Their observations may want elocution, but they have the higher attributes of sound sense and upright principle. The time is spent not in talking but in working; and one is surprised, when so little is said, to see so much transacted. The wisdom, the candour, the kindness manifested on these occasions, have often filled me with admiration, and deepened the conviction, that a system so benignant in its character must be divine in its origin. There are exceptions, no doubt, to such commendatory allusions; but all my experience warrants me in saying, that if presbytery be its own witness anywhere, it commends itself in its sessions.

These sessions are open courts. Yet they must have the right of all courts to sit, when they think proper, with shut doors; and as cases which are local, and which affect private character, are often adjudicated on by them, they must in mercy exercise this right with unusual frequency. Besides, the unostentatious efficiency of sessions may result partly from the absence of all temptations to display; and modest operatives may express their opinions freely to brethren, who would be completely silenced by the presence of the public. Such considerations, in the absence of all interdicts, have indisposed our congregations to intrude on sessional meetings; and it were well that the same consideration and delicacy prevented members of ses-

sion from unnecessarily noising about their own communings and enactments. When elders, without any distinct call of duty to divulge their proceedings, must be telling here and there what has been passing among them—what such an one said, and how such another voted—they stir up contention where none existed, they create illicit tribunals to overrule their own, and follow a course of which the whole tendency is to weaken their official influence, and bring their office itself into contempt. It would be better for the session to court a direct and staring publicity, than have its acts reported and canvassed in this discreditable manner. If I remark strongly on this indiscretion, the evil which I know it to have done to some congregations may be pleaded as an apology for apparent vehemence.

PART IV.

QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS.

CHAP. I.

AGE, ETC.

THE word 'elder' points to *age*, and supposes, even in its official use, that the functionaries so designated, are old enough to have some experience. This remark, however, must not be overstrained. We know that attainments are not always in the ratio of years; and, if a young man be otherwise qualified for the eldership, he ought not to be held disqualified from the mere circumstance of his youth. Timothy was, perhaps, the youngest of Paul's coadjutors; and yet he appears to have been the most efficient of them all. We need the fervour of youth; and if this quality has been well directed, and a career, though brief, has been usefully occupied, the church may freely elect such of its members to office, on the principle that they have lived longest who have done most.

In alliance with this qualification for the elder's office, I may notice the importance of having some time at one's disposal to devote to its duties. A writer

who has in various ways done good service to presbytery, says on this subject—‘An indispensable requisite to the discharge of all duty is time, and, we may add, residence. At the same time, let not any entertain exaggerated ideas on the point. Let it not be imagined that the duties of the elder are such as seriously to encroach on one’s leisure. Where the districts or proportions are small, and this can be secured only by the multiplication of elders, a few hours steadily devoted every week to the parochial duty of the elder, I have been informed by those who have made successful trial, are sufficient, in ordinary circumstances, to meet the leading moral and religious wants of the district.’*

I might multiply observations on such qualifications for the eldership; but I think it better to speak of others which are less circumstantial, and more spiritual in their character.

CHAP. II.

PIETY.

THE highest of all requisites to a right discharge of the duties of an elder is *piety*. This will do much alone: all things else, without this, are nothing. If I viewed the subject in the light of argument, I would

* Eldership of the Church of Scotland, by the Rev. J. G. Lorimer, p. 78.

pass from this qualification after naming it; for what need is there to prove that religion is necessary to a religious office-bearer? That is an axiomatic proposition; and commends itself to acquiescence by its self-evident reasonableness. But the subject is now viewed practically; and moral truth, to be duly estimated, must not only be heard and owned, but dwelt upon. I feel, too, that I now touch the central mechanism, or rather the very source, of all vital action; and that, failing here, I should fail wholly in this solemn and responsible service. I am desirous, therefore, to dilate a little on this topic, if I may thereby deepen the conviction, that elders should not only be pious, but eminently and devotedly pious, and should aspire at new and unprecedented attainments in the life of faith.

True godliness is the one thing needful to all; and there is no escape from its claims in shunning sacred office. Some, indeed, who pay little attention to religion themselves, remark very solemnly on the responsibility of spiritual guides, as if it were a commendation of themselves to think thus awfully of duties of which the performance is devolved upon others, and as if it were a palliation, amounting almost to exculpation of their heedlessness, that they had not attempted to occupy these high places. This, however, is poor consolation. Have these persons, in truth, estimated their merited perdition, and, finding it quite moderate and endurable, reconciled themselves to the prospect? There is no scriptural delineation of future and eternal retribution which would

warrant, in any worker of evil, such placid expectation of its approach. Hell shall be, to all inheriting it, the blackness of darkness, an abode of torment, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. If comfort may be, in any instance, derived from minor accountability and desert of punishment, surely it belongs not to privileged Britons. A clearer and fuller revelation of Divine truth has been imparted to us than was possessed by Chorazin or Bethsaida; and are not all who abuse higher opportunities proportionally exposed to the denunciation—‘It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, at the judgment, than for you.’* Still, they who are set over the house of God, are under very special obligations to be themselves religious. They have had many talents committed to them; and ‘unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.’†

At present, however, I speak of piety as qualifying for office; and if the statement be strong, it is not extreme, that the simplest and most childlike piety is the best of all qualifications, even for the loftiest official engagements. All the duties of an elder have indissoluble relation to piety, and are so dependent on its stimulus and succours, that they must fade or flourish with it. Individual godliness here enters so much into official fitness, that it is often impossible to discriminate them. The remark applies to teaching as well as to ruling elders. It might not seem, at

* Luke x. 14.

† Luke xii. 48.

first sight, as if *goodness* and *oratory* had a very intimate connection; and yet the close alliance, and almost absolute identification, of moral excellence and true eloquence has been asserted by the Roman author Quintilian, in language very remarkable to have been spoken by a heathen. 'Let our orator, then,' he says, 'be such as Marcus Cato has defined him—a good man, expert in speaking; but that which he has placed first, is, in the nature of the case, the more excellent and important requisite—the being a truly good man.'* Again, he remarks, still more explicitly, in the same connection—'Nor do I contend only that an orator should be a good man; but that without being a good man, he cannot be an orator.'† I have cited this opinion of the influence exerted by moral frame on public efficiency, to strengthen the persuasion of it where it is still more obvious. Well may we assert, not only that the guardians of the church should be good men, but that without being good men they cannot be its guardians. Their rarest exploits even, must chiefly result from possessing, in rich abundance, the commonest graces. Advert to those great spiritual benefactors through whom God blessed the world in their respective ages, and to what is their

* 'Sit ergo nobis orator, quem instituimus, is qui a M. Catone finitur, *vir bonus, dicendi peritus*. Virum id quod ille posuit prius, etiam ipsa natura potius ac majus est, utique *vir bonus*.'—De Inst. Ora. Lib. 12. cap. 1.

† 'Neque enim tantum id dico, eum, qui sit orator, *virum bonum esse oportere*; sed ne futurum quidem oratorem, nisi *virum bonum*.'—Appendix. Note B.

signal usefulness most remarkably traceable? They may have possessed genius, acuteness, or fancy, of an elevated order; but these, without piety, would have been inert or mischievous. They were mainly animated and impelled in their philanthropic career by superior faith in the Divine testimony—love to God and man—realising anticipations of future glory—in short, by those graces of the Spirit which are accessible and indispensable alike to teachers and taught. If, too, we inquire by what hindrances their efficiency was mostly impaired, it will appear that these were not so much intellectual as moral. The glaring transgressions of David and Peter need not to be mentioned—appalling violations of universally incumbent duty, by which the wicked, to this day, embolden and excuse themselves in the commission of their wickedness.

To adduce less flagrant examples, no character appears more blameless and amiable in the inspired annals of imperfect men, than that of Daniel. No specific act of iniquity is recorded against him. Yet he participated largely in prevalent calamity. And why? Was it from any defect in his prophetic powers?—any shortcoming in extraordinary endowments? His own explanation is, ‘Neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him.’* The apostle

* Dan. ix. 10, 11.

of the Gentiles laboured abundantly, and with distinguished success. If you ask why he did not accomplish still more, the answer may be found in such sayings as these: 'In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I find not: for the good that I would, I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do.'* Modern history furnishes kindred attestations. Not to speak of such lapses as Cranmer's recantation of Protestantism, or Calvin's alleged participation in the cruel death of Servetus—the injuriousness of which to the cause of truth is too obvious and notorious to require more than passing mention—we find all the Reformers, in their autobiographical sketches, lamenting their defective piety, and ascribing to this cause their dispiriting repulses and disappointments. 'I have done somewhat,' says Knox, 'but not according to my duty.' 'He acknowledges,' says M'Crie, abridging his MS. letters, 'that in public ministrations he had been deficient in fervency and fidelity, in impartiality and diligence; and that his conscience now accused him of not having been sufficiently plain in admonishing offenders.'† Similar citations might be adduced in great numbers, all showing that these great and good men partially failed, not from wanting ability and facilities; but by relaxing application, or resenting injury, or compromising conviction, or in some such way transgressing the common law of Christ.

* Rom. vii. 18, &c.

† M'Crie's Life of Knox, vol. i. p. 125.

It is one of the saddest tokens of ecclesiastical declension, when ungodly ministers and elders come to be relished or endured. Even in these cases, it is not so much that piety is wholly and avowedly dispensed with, as that the practical standard of it is reduced and shrivelled. Apostacy veils its favour for these reprobate functionaries, under a professed disapproval of their accusers as acrimonious and uncharitable—all implying that genuine piety is necessary in such office-bearers; that respect is due to them only on the supposition of its being possessed; and that a disapproval of its existence would divest them, even in the estimation of the profligate, of all title to excuse or sufferance. Those elders among us who labour in word and doctrine, would do well to lay solemnly to heart these admonitory considerations. If we be not pious, and if this were known, our ministrations would be abhorred. Suppose a minister, by some infallible criterion, shown to be irreligious, a total stranger to vital godliness, and the prey, as all unrenewed men are, of depraved sentiments and lusts, could such an instructor, amid the certain knowledge of his true character, obtain a hearing, or preserve his station? Allow him the finest genius, the most finished oratory, yea, application the most intense, and energy the most indomitable, still, what would all these avail the acknowledged and convicted impostor? Think of the sorrow or scorn which must pervade an assembly, in hearing him elaborately prove what they knew him not to believe, and earnestly recommend

what they knew him not to esteem, and awfully denounce what they knew him not to dislike, and imploringly inculcate what they knew him habitually to neglect! A comedian or buffoon may be applauded; he performs to spectators like himself; he avows his dissimulation, of which the perfection is his praise; and his admitted aim is simply to amuse. But how shall the man be borne with, who, in practising as thorough mimicry, perverts religion into his mask, and the pulpit into his stage, and the church of Christ into his auditory, avowing all the while simplicity and godly sincerity, citing revelation as his sanction, and God as his witness! Were such a man to appear in his true colours, his exhibition would be detested by all; 'men would clap their hands at him, and hiss him out of his place.'* The delineation applies with scarcely diminished force to ruling elders. If their piety were disproved, how could their presidency be tolerated, and who could see, without shuddering, a profane hand bear the symbols of Christ's sacrifice to the guests at his table?

Such an exposure can rarely occur. A measure of dubiety is wisely cast over our state and condition, to bound alike our approval and condemnation of fellow-men, either of which might injure by excess. But though the relative effect is thus modified, the case is not essentially changed. That conduct is no less nefarious for being obscured, which, if it were only developed in its naked and vivid deformity,

* Job xxvii. 23.

would elicit such execrations. Though man cannot discern it, God can; and what are the plaudits of a world worth, while he who made all worlds is beholding and abominating? The day, too, is coming, when he shall remove the veil that is upon all faces, when he shall try every man's work of what kind it is, and disclose its hidden elements to an observant universe. Then shall the profane usurpers of sacred office, who, like Satan, transformed themselves into angels of light, stand publicly detected—the detection more tremendous for having been deferred, presenting the more guilt and incurring the more anguish and ignominy; and, while the Judge of all convicts the holiest pretensions of basest hypocrisy and perfidy, and glorious saints and seraphs eye the conviction with indignant loathing, commensurate with their faultless purity, how shall the miserable culprits, who used to court ostentatious publicity and celebrity, call upon the rocks and mountains to cover them, and feel as if hell itself would be desirable, if its closing mouth would somewhat shelter them from such Divine, universal, and overwhelming reprobation!

This is strong language; but God forbid we should seek relief from dreadful realities in gentle designations. Let our comfort be found in fleeing from 'the wrath to come,' and 'laying hold on eternal life,' in making personal and habitual application to the 'blood of sprinkling,' and proving the genuineness of our interest in Christ, by the excellence and amplitude of its fruits.

We are much in danger of taking our piety too readily for granted. Office-bearers in the church are especially exposed to this temptation. A philosopher, versed in the sciences, is necessarily acquainted with their simple and primary elements; and so a superintendent of the church, a judge and guardian of the qualifications of its members, can hardly suppose himself devoid of that knowledge which every babe in Christ possesses, and which is supposed in every service which he performs, and every sentence which he utters. Then, all his friends and acquaintance, and Christian society, and the community in general, give him credit, as they ought, in charitable construction, for unfeigned godliness; and how hard is it to distrust this concurrent testimony, when it is all in favour of ourselves! It might seem as if the piety of our elders were demonstrated by the very terms on which they hold their office: they serve the church gratuitously; and what else than sincere and decided religion could prompt and carry on their disinterested labours? The genuineness of piety is not safely inferred from such premises. Ungodly men have crept into spiritual office in every age—not excepting the periods of fiercest persecution. Let none rest, then, in such fallacious evidence, but let all of us give all diligence to make our calling and election sure.

To secure and cherish piety, we must use the means appointed for the end. It is not enough that we come into contact with these means in relation to others; we must frequently engage them expressly for ourselves. The word of God should be read daily, with

an immediate view to personal profiting. A master in Israel must become as a little child, that he may enter the kingdom, and as a 'new born babe, desire the sincere milk of the word, that he may grow thereby.'

The importance of prayer cannot be too highly estimated. In this exercise our Lord spent whole nights. The apostles considered its demands upon their time commensurate with those of preaching, and entitled to be mentioned first:—'We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and the ministry of the word.' The constancy of Paul's petitioning is manifest from its particularity:—'For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that, without ceasing, I make mention of you always in my prayers.'* 'I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.'† 'We give thanks to God always for you, making mention of you in our prayers.'‡ His epistles abound with such statements; and it will be well for us, and well for our congregations, if they find an echo in our experience. Some of the Reformers speak of having consigned several hours daily to prayer, though it be difficult to reconcile the averment with their numerous and onerous occupations; and Luther, before being as enlightened in the faith as he afterwards became, was wont to express the assistance which he derived from prayer for other duties by his well known maxim—'Bene precasse est bene studuisse.' To have well

* Rom. i. 9.

† Ephes. i. 16.

‡ 1 Thess. i. 2.

prayed is to have well studied. The following passage on prayer occurs in Fuller's sermon, delivered at the funeral of the Rev. J. Sutcliff:—"One of the sentences uttered by your deceased pastor, when drawing near his end was, 'I wish I had prayed more.' This was one of the weighty sayings which are not unfrequently uttered in the view of the solemn realities of eternity. This wish has often occurred to me since his departure as equally applicable to myself. . . . In reviewing my own life, *I wish I had prayed more than I have for the success of the gospel.* I have seen enough to furnish me with matter of thanksgiving; but, had I prayed more, I might have seen more. I wish I had prayed more *for the salvation of those about me,* and who are given me in charge. When the father of the lunatic doubted whether Jesus could do anything for him, he was told in answer that if he could believe all things were possible. On hearing this, he burst into tears, saying, 'Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief.' He seems to have understood our Lord as suggesting that, if the child was not healed, it would not be owing to any want of power in him, but to his own unbelief. This might well cause him to weep and exclaim as he did. The thought of his unbelief causing the death of his child was distressing. The same thought has occurred to me as applicable to the neglect of the prayer of faith. Have I not, by this guilty negligence, been accessory to the destruction of some that are dear to me; and were I equally concerned for the souls of my connexions as he was for the life of his child, should I not weep with him? I

wish I had prayed more *for my own soul*. I might then have enjoyed much more communion with God. The gospel affords the same grounds for spiritual enjoyment as it did to the first Christians. I wish I had prayed more than I have *in all* my undertakings: I might then have had my steps more directed by God, and attended with fewer deviations from his will. There is no intercourse with God without prayer. It is thus that we ‘walk with God, and have our conversation in heaven.’” Stimulated by these examples and counsels, let us be ‘instant in prayer.’ The happy result will show that the ‘prayer of faith’ has still power with God, and prevails,—that he will ‘regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.’* In response to our entreaties, he ‘will create in us a clean heart, and renew within us a right spirit—not casting us away from his presence, or taking his Holy Spirit away from us; but restoring unto us the joys of his salvation; and upholding us with his free Spirit. Then shall we teach transgressors his ways; and sinners shall be converted unto him.’†

CHAPTER III.

KNOWLEDGE.

RULING elders do not pass through a college course in preparation for office, and they are not expected to be deeply learned. They ought, however, to sustain and

* Ps. ciii. 17.

† Ps. li. 10.

to deserve the character of being well-informed men. Without a measure of *knowledge*, both theological and general, surpassing the average attainments of society, they must discharge very imperfectly their important duties. We have seen that they have to comfort the afflicted, to remonstrate with the offending, to instruct the young, to test the knowledge of others; and how shall they do all this, if they are not themselves well instructed in the kingdom of God? There are other duties belonging to the eldership, for the right fulfilment of which it is still more needful that they give themselves to reading. They sit as members of presbyteries, for example, when discourses, and other exercises of students, are judged of; and what a power would the appropriate remarks of such judges possess in recommending to students juster views, or better taste, or a more disciplined accuracy? Even were they not to speak at all on such occasions, of what importance is it for elders to give an enlightened vote on the proficiency of students, and the licensing of probationers?

Elders should read those works which Christians in general read, in consideration of their superior excellence, what has won for them a wide circulation; and also in order not to be found ignorant where ignorance would be most discreditably. They would be reasonably ashamed if they had to answer, No, when asked whether they had ever read the *Pilgrim's Progress*, or *Boston's Fourfold State*, or *Doddridge's Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*.

But an elder's reading should be considerably in-

fluenced by his official station. The best commentaries on the scriptures, the best systems of theology, the best histories of the church, have all special claims on his careful perusal. Those books which the church has adopted as standards of its faith, or seasonable exhibitions of doctrine and duty, or compends of the laws and forms which regulate its government, ought to be ever within his reach for consultation and reference. Elders should also read works expressly on the eldership, such as Dr Miller on the Office of the Ruling Elder, or the Prize Essay on the same subject, which was advertised for some time ago, and is now in course of adjudication.

But, above all, let elders study the Bible. "The whole scriptures," says a high authority, "are delivered to us as the rule of our faith and obedience, and are the instrument which God employs for the conversion of sinners, and the advancement of the Divine life in their souls. They are the light which conducts them to the Saviour, and guides them in the way of salvation. This important office we assign to the whole, and not exclusively to a part, on the authority of the Apostle Paul; who, having said concerning Timothy, that 'from a child he had known the Holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus,' adds, 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works' (2 Tim. iii. 15-17.) The word

is the principal means which God has appointed for the application of redemption. There are indeed other religious institutions; but as they are founded on the word, so, as far as they contribute to accomplish this end, their efficacy is derived from it. Prayer is an eminent means of obtaining spiritual blessings; but the directory of prayer is the word, from which alone we learn what blessings we should ask, and what are the grounds on which we may hope for success. The sacraments also are means of salvation; but they would be unintelligible, unless their design, and the import of the symbols and actions, had been explained; and we should have no encouragement to use them, if we had not been assured that they are seals of the new covenant, and the Holy Spirit had been promised to render them effectual.”* I do not say that elders, for being such, should read the bible, for all are bound to do so, whatever be their history, circumstances, or position; but I do say that they should read it *more* for being elders. From all official doubts, and fears, and difficulties, let them take refuge in revelation. Its aid is boundless and ceaseless. Would you pray with copiousness and fluency?—then search the scriptures. Would you address a word in season to him that is weary?—then search the scriptures. Would you instruct effectively your own families, or schools, and classes?—then search the scriptures. Would you repel triumphantly the artillery of error by weapons not carnal?—then search

* Dick's Lectures, vol. iv. pp. 77, 78.

the scriptures. These scriptures are the ‘good seed;’—these scriptures are the ‘wells of salvation;’—these scriptures are God’s ‘lively oracles;’—these scriptures are ‘the sword of the Spirit;’ and all this multiplicity of figures shows that none of them is equal to its subject; that they are all needed, and all inadequate to denote the vast and diversified value of the word of God. Wherever, then, you may be wanting, and wherever you may be weak, seek, above all things, to be ‘mighty in the scriptures.’

CHAPTER IV.

SOUNDNESS IN THE FAITH.

OF course every one thinks his own belief orthodox. But Presbyterian churches have symbolic books; and elders, when ordained to office, solemnly avow acquiescence in the doctrinal principles which these books contain. They would be guilty, then, of heinous dishonesty, if they accepted office in a church and did not hold the doctrines of scripture as set forth in its subordinate standards. It is not enough, however, that an elder coldly assent to a Calvinistic creed. He should be a devoted friend of evangelical religion, and against all contrary errors ‘should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.’* These words, however, would be miscon-

* Jude 3.

strued if they were explained as sanctioning a virulent advocacy of gospel truth. 'Be ready always,' says an apostle, 'to give an answer to every man that asketh you, a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.'* Thus speaks the apostle of the circumcision; and the same principle is enunciated by the apostle of the Gentiles when he exhorts, that 'speaking the truth in love, we may grow up into him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ.† Let us show that we have the truth of Christ by displaying the spirit of Christ, and ever act as remembering that, although we should have a speculative acquaintance with his truth, yet, 'if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.' And are we, then, to be men-pleasers, and avoid offence by compromising faithfulness? Assuredly not. We are to maintain the truth at all hazards; and always defend it in its own spirit, just that our defence of it may be more forcible and more effectual. When so many crude theories are afloat, and old heresies in a new guise are carrying away such multitudes of the simple, it is especially important that office-bearers in the church hear and ponder these words of Paul to the elders of Ephesus: 'Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of

* 1 Pet. iii. 15.

† Eph. iv. 15.

God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that, by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.* The importance of this topic would dispose me to discuss it more fully. But I withhold any additional remarks of my own to make room for the following important and seasonable observations. Dr Heugh, in pointing out the particular errors against which the melancholy circumstances of the Genevan church are well fitted to guard the British churches, says :—“The first I notice is the danger of allowing unsound doctrines to enter into a church. The truth as it is in Jesus, the word of the truth of the gospel, is a sacred trust, committed by God to his people, than which, one more momentous and holy cannot be confided to man; and the fidelity of the church, is to be proved by the vigilance with which she guards this grand deposit. ‘That good thing which was committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghost, which dwelleth in us,’ said Paul to one of the primitive teachers. ‘Thou hast kept the word of my patience,’ was the approbation of our Lord, bestowed on one of the primitive churches. ‘Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints,’ is a divine command to the whole body of the faithful

* Acts xx. 26-31.

in Christ Jesus. The truth of the gospel is the very food of souls, divinely prepared aliment, that by which men are enlightened and sanctified, consoled and saved, assimilated in character to God himself, and fitted for his service and glory in both worlds; and, if this truth be parted with, the very staff of spiritual life is broken; if it be vitiated by the most specious human admixtures, the food of souls is spoiled, and that which was ordained unto life may become little else than a ministration of death. But if such fatal results are to be prevented, the first inroads of error must be jealously watched, and faithfully repelled; for it too frequently happens, that its patrons artfully conceal their *whole system*, and, at first, rather prepare the way for its admission, by the suggestion of doubts, or of plausible theories, thrown out for inquiry, and accompanied with great professions of candour, meekness, and charity, than by an honest and bold avowal of their real opinions. The irruption of error is often like the gentle loosening of a sluice, from which, at first, only a little is permitted to ooze out, nothing whatever calculated to create alarm; but which, when fully opened, allows a flood to rush, by which fields, once fertile, are quickly overrun, and are soon converted into stagnant and pestilential marshes. It resembles the first slight indications of vital disease in the human body, which, if at once subjected to prompt and wise treatment, might be remedied with ease, but which, if neglected then, spreads rapidly through the frame, and terminates in incurable malady, and ultimate dissolution. The Ge-

nevan church, and too many of the continental churches as well as she, are, indeed, sad and solemn warnings to us, warnings, reiterating those long ago supplied by the degeneracy of many churches which were planted and watered by the apostles of Christ—warning to ministers of the gospel, to ‘hold fast the faith,’ to ‘take heed to themselves and to the doctrine,’ and to ‘continue’ to do so, if they would save themselves, and them that hear them; and, I will add, warnings to the whole Christian body, to ‘prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good.’ It appears that to scarcely any one subject do the inspired apostles more abundantly direct the primitive churches than to this, nearly all their epistles containing solemn admonitions against corrupting, or departing from, the faith; which, I am sure, were never more needed by the British, as well as the continental churches, than at this day. For, to take but one example, it is not too much to say, that the vast Hierarchal Establishment of England, is at this moment nearer to the deadly errors, the debasing superstition, and the befooling mummeries of Popery, than, a century ago, Geneva was near to Unitarianism and Neology. It has been stated publicly, and without contradiction, by one of the most devout and cautious among the ministers of London, at a public meeting recently held in that metropolis, that of the eighteen thousand clergy of various orders connected with the church of England, not more than three thousand could be found willing to subscribe any declaration whatever against the new phase of Popery, designated

Puseyism. Yes, the enemy is sowing tares over all the British soil, the most unfit of all seasons, assuredly, for men to sleep.”*

There are other qualifications for the eldership which might have been introduced and discussed with great propriety. But I have already given a sample sufficiently large, perhaps, to appear formidable ; and of a nature so fundamental and comprehensive, that they cannot be dutifully pondered without suggesting all the rest.

After showing how much elders have to do, and how much they have to learn, it is time to direct their attention to more encouraging views of their office.

* State of Religion in Geneva and Belgium.

PART V.

ENCOURAGEMENTS OF ELDERS.

ELDERS have many and great encouragements in executing their office. All of them centre in the fact that it is of Divine appointment. It has been impressively said of the ministry, and may with equal truth be affirmed of the eldership—"This subordinate rule is all derived from Christ. It is the Lord who makes them rulers in his household. In that family none has authority, in the strict sense of the term, but HE. No king, no parliament, no man, no body of men, has any right to constitute men stewards over the family of God. That belongs to HIM who is Jehovah, 'set as His King on the holy hill of Zion,' to Him who is set as 'a Son over his own house.' All church power comes forth from Him. He directly appointed the first office-bearers in the spiritual society which he established; and none are rightly constituted but those who are so, in accordance with the principles laid down in the apostolical epistles and exemplified in the practice of the apostolical churches. It is of importance, however, to remark, that though called to office by the instrumentality of their brethren, their

authority is derived not from them, but from their Master; by Him, not by them, are they to be directed in the performance of their duties; and to Him, not to them, are they accountable for the manner in which they discharge them. It is His doctrine they are to teach, His laws they are to administer. The steward or overseer, though chosen, if such be the appointment of the Master, by his fellow-servants, is to be guided in managing the household not by their will, but by the will of their common Lord.”*

Hence it follows,—

1. That the *office is honourable in itself*. They who would not be the servants of subjects, are yet proud to be in the service of a sovereign; and the greater and more illustrious a sovereign is, the more eager are the ambitious to fill places around the throne. Shall it be reckoned no distinction, then, no gratifying and animating distinction, to hold a public trust of the King of kings, and Lord of lords—of Him who is God over all, blessed for ever? Elders may have temporal callings, and spend much of their time even in manual labours; but all this held true of Paul, without invalidating the authority and dignity of a higher vocation. They may be called *lay elders*, as if to divest them of all ecclesiastical status; but human appellations cannot annul or modify a Divine institution; and an elder, entering his ecclesiastical

* Discourse on the death of the Rev. Robert Balmer, D.D., by the Rev. John Brown, D.D., Edinburgh, p. 25.

functions in a scriptural manner, and cherishing the spirit while performing the duties of his post, is as truly an office-bearer in the church as were the prophets and priests under a bygone economy, or the apostles and evangelists under a newer and better dispensation. He is the servant of the most High God! What a power is there! what an impulse in that single consideration! If his heart misgive him, at any time, in struggling with official difficulties; if he be tempted to be ashamed or dismayed under the odium and sneers to which fidelity may sometimes subject him, he may well be reassured and emboldened on looking at his commission, his Divine commission, and seeing it subscribed by the King's own hand, and sealed with the King's own signet!

From the fact that the office is of Divine appointment, it follows,—

2. That *all its engagements are of a beneficent character*. They must be worthy of that God who assigns them; and we know that 'the Lord is good; that his mercy is everlasting; and that his truth endureth to all generations.'* It is true, indeed, that God may punish by the instrumentality of his servants. We find angels not unfrequently employed in destroying his enemies; and the civil magistrate is 'the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.'† Even in these cases, the honoured agents of Jehovah have ample assurance

* Psalm c. 5.

† Rom. xiii. 14.

that their commission is not malevolent—that in doing what is commanded, they do what is right in itself, and will prove felicitous in its tendencies—and that when the end and the effect are fully developed, these will warrant, and from all pure intelligences elicit, the ejaculation, ‘Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty: just and true are thy ways, thou king of saints! Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name; for thou only art holy, for all nations shall worship before thee, for thy judgments are made manifest!’*

But the work assigned to elders is not of this avenging nature. Their office finds its place in a great scheme of mercy, and ranks with the institutions of that gospel which brings glad tidings of great joy to all people. They have to be ‘with’ Christ, and to ‘gather with’ † him, when he comes in his providence as he has come in person, to seek and to save that which is lost. It is theirs, more especially, to act under the Great Shepherd, when ‘he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.’ ‡ They are a gift from Christ to his church; and, as we may be sure that so munificent a Lord will not make paltry and unprofitable presents, we are informed that he hath given these and like functionaries ‘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

* Rev. xv. 3, 4.

† Matt. xii. 30.

‡ 1 John x. 3.

the stature of the fulness of Christ.’* To elders it belongs to tend the sheep for whom the Good Shepherd laid down his life; to inspire them when they are obedient; to reclaim them when they are erring; to screen and protect them when they are in danger. Is there no happiness in doing all this good to those whom Christ loves so tenderly? The privilege, it must be owned, is poorly appreciated by multitudes. ‘All,’ says an apostle, ‘seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s;’† and the averment made of that generation is too applicable to the present. To seek, however, is not to secure one’s own. Satisfaction is too noble a prize to be won by selfishness. They who seek their own may so far succeed; they may acquire their own gain, their own fame, their own power—but *not their own happiness*. When all the means are apparently grasped, the end still eludes them. If we would reach true joy, we must cherish a true philanthropy, ‘not seeking our own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.’‡ What we must seek, is the happiness of others, of relatives, of friends, of the church, of the world; and while theirs is sought, our own will come unsought, and take us by agreeable surprise. To impose a rein on presumptuous sin, to guide the step of anxious inquiry, to rear the olive branch over subdued contentions, to shed a ray of hope on the realms of despair, or insinuate a healing balm into wounded spirits,—that is wealth, that is victory, that is

* Eph. iv. 12, 13.

† Phil. ii. 21.

‡ 1 Cor. x. 33.

bliss; and that is the daily service of a sincere and strenuous eldership.

From the Divine appointment of this office it follows,

3. That they who fill it in dependence on God's grace, are secured of *all needful assistance in discharging its duties*. God can give them aid of an external and visible character. He can make them *strong in their pastor*. A minister owes much to the eldership. He should always treat them with personal respect; he should be always consulting them in his official measures; he should delight in vindicating them from reproaches, and cheering their constancy by just commendations; and elders who are on this footing with their minister will find, in his standing and influence, their own walls and bulwarks. Indeed, the efficiency of a minister is, of itself, an invaluable help to godly elders. Their minds are set on the prosperity of the congregation; and when, after a time perhaps of decay and trouble, they see jarring elements harmonised, and languishing interests renovated by the impulsive hand of high pastoral fidelity, how can they but hail the benign dispensation, and be emboldened in the contemplation of it, to thank God and take courage! Must it not rejoice their hearts to have a man after God's own heart, for their chosen teacher and official fellow-labourer?

God can make an elder *strong in the other members of session*. He can bring into the office men 'full of faith and power;'^{*} and an elder who quailed

* Acts vi. 8.

when he was alone, and when he thought only of himself, may be ashamed of his timidity, and inspired with new vigour in the assembly of his brethren.

God can encourage elders *through the church superintended by them*. The church may do incalculably much to inspirit its office-bearers. It is a great encouragement to them to be, first of all, called by the Lord's people to the Lord's work. On this ground it is deeply to be lamented that, even where the election of elders is perfectly free, the number who vote is often so limited. This narrow exercise of the suffrage is injurious in many ways. It brings discredit on Christian liberty as of no value in the estimation of them who have it; and it enables any knot of individuals to bring into the session a favourite of their own, who may be little qualified for the trust, and very obnoxious to the congregation generally. But what I chiefly remark upon now is, the discouraging effect of such fractional voting on the elders elect. They might recognise the voice of God in the vote of the church; but can they recognise the vote of the church in some twenty or thirty uplifted hands amid hundreds of church members? On the other hand, a well supported choice is equally efficacious for good. It carries power in its appeal, and is remembered with a soothing and sustaining delight by elders, so chosen, to the last day of their life. If, then, the church would encourage its overseers, let them be borne into office on the full and flowing tide of a congregational invitation.* The church may greatly encourage its

* For remarks on mode of electing and ordaining elders, see App. Note C.

elders after they have been invested with office. It can support them in the firm administration of discipline, instead of seconding the resistance of wounded and impenitent pride. It can favourably entertain the measures they set on foot for its own immediate benefit, or the evangelization of the world through its instrumentality; it can defray, cheerfully and liberally, the expense incurred by them in representing its interests at presbyteries and synods; and it *might* place in their hands a small but select library specifically adapted for their official necessities and accountabilities. Labour becomes light, when performed for a congregation thus 'knowing them who are over it in the Lord, and esteeming them very highly in love for their work's sake.'*

God can encourage elders through the *visible fruits of their labours*. They may learn of cases where persons, in attending their prayer meetings, have become devotional. The children whom they have trained in the way in which they should go, as they become old, may not be departing from it; and they may have to tell of those who have passed from their youthful classes to the superintendence of the young, to the secretaryships and treasurerships of religious associations, to the work of the ministry at home, or the far off fields of missionary enterprise abroad. They may know of sighs, through God's blessing on their words of comfort, transformed into songs; or may meet in the streets the patterns of sobriety whom their timely remonstrance had snatched from dissipa-

* 1 Thess. v. 12, 13.

tion. These are seals of office which sparkle with light from heaven, and lift the heart to the Father of lights, whose image is reflected in his own credentials!

But, suppose that all these encouragements should fail; suppose that elders should be weak in their minister, impeded and opposed in brethren, disappointed and grieved in the congregation, and unacquainted with any fruits of righteousness produced by their labours; even on this extreme supposition, God can still uphold them *by his own Spirit* ‘working in them mightily.’* If they object, faintheartedly, ‘Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak; for I am a child,’ he can reply, ‘Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee, thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord.’† He can make the language of David theirs—‘I will praise thy name for thy loving kindness, and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name. In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.’‡ If they have to relate with Paul—‘No man stood with me, but all men forsook me,’ they may be enabled, with him, to subjoin—‘Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.’

* Col. i. 29. † Jer. i. 6-8. ‡ Ps. cxxxviii. 2, 3.

§ 2 Tim. iv. 16-18.

To be shut out from earthly help is doubtless awing ; but, if it prove a shutting up to heavenly succours, the gain is greater than the loss. Indeed, the Divine faithfulness cannot be fully appreciated till it is trusted alone, and yet trusted absolutely ; and many a time has God demolished other reliances, that he might vindicate the sufficiency of his unaided arm. To trust in God only, and in God wholly ; to look away even from his works, and find a perfect, infinite, and eternal inheritance in himself,—this is the victory of faith and the reign of grace ; and happy are they who mourn, if they are to be thus comforted.

From the Divine appointment of this office it follows,—

4. That *all who have filled it, in its own spirit, have borne testimony to its desirableness* The true servants of Jehovah have ever found him a kind Master ; and there ‘hath not failed ought of any good thing which the Lord hath spoken unto the house of Israel.’* That elders find themselves happy in the discharge of their functions, is in many ways evinced. Though many of them have great difficulty in accepting the office, very few resign it when it has been accepted and proved by them. The resignation of the trust is a very rare occurrence. Does not this show that the facts furnish a confutation of fears ? Again, the elders who appear most in love with their labours are generally the first to hail any scheme

* Josh. xxi. 45.

of enlarged usefulness. And, in a word, the dying attestations of elders to the Divine goodness often turn on their official experience. The comforts they have been administering return upon their own heads. The courage they have acquired in action remains with them in suffering; and the grace they had secured to make them useful to others, is the well-spring of their joy in their own time of need. When nature is sinking, and the mind is wandering, the dearest relatives are sometimes overlooked by the departing office-bearer of the church in the imagined prosecution of his spiritual calling. He is standing by the sick-bed, and exhorting the distressed not to be dismayed; or, the accents of prayer ascend from his tremulous lips, and we discern, in his petitions, the weekly prayer-meeting gathered around him, and pouring, through his enfeebled but fervent utterance, their associated supplications! Or, he is in the midst of his brethren, lauding, perhaps, some measure for the furtherance of religion, and promising it his 'best support,' in accents which leave no doubt of sincerity, and no hope of performance. He has already left his own dwelling. The spirit of his higher calling has carried him to Zion, and he takes his flight from the temple on earth to the temple in heaven!

Such a life may have had its trials; but such a death has no terrors. The worst emotion it awakens is not pity, but envy; and a Balaam may well say over it—'Let me die the death of the righteous; and let my last end be like his.'*

* Num. xxiii. 10.

From the Divine appointment of this office it follows,—

5. That a *faithful discharge of its duties shall be abundantly recompensed in a future state*. We have no merit, and cannot, therefore, receive a meritorious recompense; but, even to redeemed sinners, a gracious recompense is promised, and accessible. Scripture gives us to understand that there shall be an intimate connection between present faithfulness and eternal happiness. And this holds true, not only in the general, but as respects particular appointments and even individual acts; for, ‘Whosoever shall give to drink,’ avers our Lord, ‘unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.’* The promise is here made to beneficence; and a very large proportion of the promises have the same application:—‘They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.’† The beatitudes awaiting official faithfulness are especially enlarged upon in the scriptures:—‘Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, That he will make him ruler over all that he hath.’‡ No doubt, where the relation is happy and blissful to

* Matt. x. 42.

† Dan. xii. 3.

‡ Luke xii, 42-44.

overseers, it becomes so likewise to the church superintended by them ; but the benefit is greatly enhanced in being thus mutual and reciprocal. ‘What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.’* ‘Ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus.’† The same apostle, after noticing the diversified and extraordinary self-denial which he cheerfully underwent in fulfilling his ministry, tells us, in explanation, ‘This I do for the gospel’s sake, that I might be partakers thereof with you.’‡ The end is deserving of all the means. Well may we toil to promote the eternal happiness of others, in which we ourselves are largely to participate. The labours of the spring-time will not appear to have been excessive, when we reap our harvest in the salvation of souls, and meet in the heavenly Canaan with some, or many, whom we have aided in guiding to that happy country. Whatever, then, may be the trials and discouragements of the journey, its end at least is inspiring. We serve under him who brings many sons unto glory ; and how shall fears and fightings be forgotten when the whole enterprise shall have been accomplished—when the outcasts of Israel shall have been all assembled—the dispersed of Judah all gathered together—when rulers and ruled shall embrace each other in celestial mansions, and mingle their hallelujahs before the throne of God!§

* 1 Thess ii. 19. † 2 Cor. i. 14. ‡ 1 Cor. ix. 23.

§ Appendix, Note D.

Elders do well to review and ponder these encouragements, whatever stage they may have reached in their official career. But I would especially urge them on the attention of those who may have been elected to the office, and may not yet have accepted the appointment. It is one of the greatest evils in the church that so many decline this sacred trust. Those who are most averse to take it, are often those, too, who have most time to bestow on its engagements, most means to second their benevolent purposes, and most influence to carry the congregation along with them in good measures. Such persons can see all the work of the eldership devolved on a few operatives, sufficiently toil-worn and care-worn by their own hard service, and absolutely refuse to help them with one of their fingers. On such a state of things the Head of the church cannot fail to look with high displeasure. It is every way ruinous. When the office is rejected by persons deemed respectable, more generally than by other sections of the community, the apparent reason is that they look upon it as vulgar, and deprecate the holding of it as injurious to their gentility! Whatever may be their motives, the effect is, that contumely is cast on a Divine trust, and Christ is slighted and dishonoured in one of his institutions. The session comes in this way, also, to be of one class; and every class has its own snares and prejudices. It would be very disastrous if all elders were gentlemen. But on the same grounds that such exclusiveness would be reprehensible, it is also to be regretted, that the poorest only of the people should

be their spiritual overseers. What can be expected of these men, but that their unaided counsels should bear the stamp of their condition? and whether are they to blame or the more opulent and educated Christians who desert them, and then complain, perhaps, of their 'narrow views' and 'shabby actions?'

This absence of the more influential members of the congregation from the session, necessarily weakens sessional authority, and tempts the subjects of discipline to show disrespect and insubordination. Above all, if a juncture come in which the utmost weight of character is needed to compose differences and maintain order, a feeble administration is unequal to the exigency. Cases could be cited in which congregations have been troubled for many years by disputes about sessional acts, and from the day that a powerful addition was made to the session, all these misunderstandings and murmurings have given place to a profound tranquillity.

A due regard to these considerations should make those who are chosen to the eldership, slow in casting it from them. Do they shrink from the responsibility of accepting it? They should remember that the responsibility is not all on the one side. Survey these consequences of refusal, and can you be willingly answerable for them? Think, too, of withstanding the most sacred and authoritative manifestation of the will of Christ. You have inconveniences and scruples; but can you pronounce these the leadings of Providence rather than the voice of the church convened in Christ's name, and observing, in your election, his own institution?

You profess to have obeyed the call, *follow me*, when the end was *your own salvation*. Will you not obey the same voice, using the same language, when the end contemplated is *the benefit of others*? Has compliance with the first call proved so bitter, that you have no faith in the recommendations of the second? But it may be still objected by elders elect, that they are not qualified for a station of such onerous accountabilities. This plea of unfitness is more urged than any other, or than all others together; and, therefore, it may be proper to remark on it more fully.

First of all, let it be observed in reply, that a high notion of personal fitness would be a sorry evidence of its possession, and that a deep sense of personal insufficiency is one of the first requisites to faith in Christ, and efficiency in his service. The office requires men to fill it whose exclamation, in the view of its duties, is, ‘And who is sufficient for these things?’* Moses had the same objections to be a lawgiver, and Isaiah to be a prophet, and Paul to be an apostle. But the weakness of these men was their strength; for when they were weak then were they strong.

Secondly, The plea of unfitness may be urged under exaggerated impressions of the difficulties to be encountered. Here, as everywhere, the yoke of Christ is easy, and his burden is light. He gives the means of doing all that he commands to be done; where opportunity ceases, obligation ceases; and is not this ‘a reasonable service?’ In the capacity of

* 2 Cor. ii. 16.

a private Christian, you are bound to do all that you can for Christ. In the position of an elder, what more can be demanded of you? The chief difference is, that the same amount of labour, when allied with office, does a great deal more good. All are bound to minister comfort to the afflicted:—‘Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.’* But an elder’s visit has an effect quite its own. The want of it is felt; the enjoyment of it is valued. The sound of his Master’s feet is behind him, and he is recognised as a messenger from the Lord of Hosts. Others are bound to reprove sin; but reproof will be taken well from an elder, when it would be resented from a private member of the church. Such things are expected from him, and reckoned becoming in him; and how much all this facilitates the performance of duty it is superfluous to demonstrate. All should take part in beneficent exertions; but few can give them the same effective countenance as elders. Their presence is ever mentioned among causes of congratulation and guarantees of success; and, if they simply look in upon schools, or prayer-meeting, or kindred institutions, conducted by others, their occasional presence is patronage and support. In all this there may be no service deserving the name of toil, certainly no greater amount of labour than is incumbent on the private Christian; and yet the good achieved is greatly augmented, if not many times multiplied.

Thirdly, The plea of unfitness, while professedly

* 1 Thess. v. 11.

urged in self-accusation, may be really reproachful to Christ. You have great deficiencies; be it so. Can He not supply them? You see difficulties in your way; granted. But can He not give you to say—‘By thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall?’* That you are feeble does not decide the question. Is God as feeble as yourself? Is his grace a phantom? Are his promises illusory? Can he not put his treasure in you, an earthen vessel as you are, and there keep it safely, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of men? God can do all this; if he be trusted for it, he will do all; and the conduct which says that he cannot, and will not, has only the fair semblance of humility, and the dark reality of unbelief. ‘Be strong, and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the Lord hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. And the Lord, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.’†

* Ps. xviii. 29.

† Deut. xxxi. 7, 8.

CONCLUSION.

PERHAPS more than enough has been already said, yet I cannot conclude without a few paragraphs of earnest appeal. This is an important movement, and must have great effects, good or bad. If the result were, a confirmed indifference, even that effect would be vast and eventful on the side of calamity. But we are not disposed to indulge these gloomy prognostications. It is a delightful token for good, that elders themselves are the principal agents in devising and propelling measures for the fuller proving of their office. The subject has been long and seriously pondered by many of them ; and when action is the result of deliberate and prayerful reflection, we look the more confidently for its prosperous issue. The cause must not be relinquished by them. In the exercise of that faith which worketh by love, they must advance with a growing energy, and neither fail nor be discouraged, till they have secured for this Divine ordinance all its scriptural elevation and soul-saving efficiency.

It is not meant that teaching elders should stand aside, while ruling elders are aiming at sessional improvement. The ministers of the word must do all

that in them lies to second the praise-worthy endeavour of their brethren in office. There has been a lamentable remissness in this respect hitherto. Incalculably much has been done to advance the proficiency of ministers and students, and also of private Christians. Books and addresses, without number, have been written, which present in every possible aspect the obligations and privileges of all these classes. But our sessions have been nearly overlooked, and a passing notice of their appointment in the more general defences of Presbytery exhibits most of the attention with which they have been honoured. Up to this hour there are hundreds of them who, in relation to their office, know not what treatises to consult for their own satisfaction and guidance. The progress in this work has been one of declension; for in older times, each Presbytery maintained a constant communication with the sessions in its bounds, and strictly inquired into their condition and faithfulness. The like instrumentality should be instituted afresh. There is no class in our churches so accessible as elders; none so capable of profiting by wise and friendly suggestions, and none whom it is so important to benefit for the edification of others. In every view, then, it is of high consequence that Presbyteries and Synods open up a correspondence with sessions, and strengthen their hands in the effort now making for the augmentation of their usefulness. The Presbyteries of the Church of Scotland, in their parochial visitations, were wont to put such questions as these to the minister of the parish, regarding his elders and deacons:—

‘ 1. Is your session rightly constitute, and all the elders and deacons duly admitted according to the acts of the assembly? 2. Do they all attend gospel ordinances, and the diets of the session? 3. Are they grave, pious, and exemplary in their lives and conversations? Do they worship God in their families? Is any of your elders an ignorant man, a drinker of healths, a tipler, a drinker excessively to drunkenness, a swearer, an observer of Yule-days, etc.? Is he one that observes not the Sabbath? Is he careful to keep his oath of admission taken before God in face of the congregation, not to delate or censure, but as edification requires? Do any of them work on solemn fast or thanksgiving days? Is any of them a mocker of piety? 4. Are they diligent, careful, and impartial in the exercise of their offices? Do the elders visit the families within the quarter and bounds assigned to each of them? Are they careful to have the worship of God set up in the families of their bounds? Are they careful in calling for testimonials from persons who come to reside in the parish? Do the elders take all discipline upon themselves without the minister? Or do they labour to carry things factiously, or by plurality of voices, contrary to God’s word, and the laudable acts of the presbytery, provincial or General Assemblies? 5. Have the elders subscribed the Confession of Faith? And are they well affected to the government, worship, and discipline of this church? 6. Have the elders and deacons their distinct bounds assigned them for their particular inspection? 7. Does your session always appoint a ruling elder to attend

presbyteries and synods? 8. Are the deacons faithful in their office, in collecting and distributing all the kirk-goods, and in having a care of the sick poor? After all these queries are over, the minister and elders are to be severally encouraged or admonished as the presbytery sees need.* The foregoing list of queries contains some which would now be reckoned of doubtful propriety, and omits others of great and obvious consequence to be proposed. But such as it is, we may recognise in it a plan of operation which we would do well to re-ad opt in its essential provisions while we carefully denude it of collateral abuses. This return to former usage is in fact commenced. Different presbyteries have set on foot a profitable correspondence with their respective sessions; and it is to be hoped that these initiatory steps will terminate in a matured and well-digested scheme for directing and stimulating the devotedness of the eldership from one extremity of the land to the other.

It is an excellent arrangement which has been lately introduced of inviting all the elders in a Presbytery to some of its meetings, that they may join in its devotional exercises, hear a word of exhortation on their proper duties, and confer together on matters of practical and general interest.

The great apostle of the Gentiles, who addressed the Ephesian elders convened by him at Miletus, would have looked with profound interest on these kindred

* Collections by Steuart of Pardovan, Book i. Tit. xiii. pp. 51, 52.

assemblies, and would have been stimulated by the occasion of them to bring into requisition his utmost power and utmost influence on behalf of its object. That apostle is gone, but his Lord reigns; and though ascended up on high, he speaks the more authoritatively as speaking from heaven. He addresses us in his word; and we shall do well to inquire, through its pages, Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do? He speaks to us in his providence; and we should not be unobservant of the signs of the times. The duties of the eldership are, indeed, at all times urgent. They have an essential and abiding importance which can be sparingly affected by temporary considerations. I am aware, too, that so far as passing events may be acknowledged to create special claims, every epoch has its own peculiar exigencies and resultant obligations. Without, however, exaggerating the distinctive consequence of our own day, we may find in it ample stimulus for a diligent discipleship. Our large towns are becoming every year larger, and the augmenting vice and misery of their poorer population cause serious disquietude to a considerate philanthropist. A spirit of discontent and jealousy pervades no small section even of the better-behaved and more comfortably situated labourers—producing a disrelish for all existing institutions, civil and ecclesiastical, and indisposing for the salutary control of religion itself. Not a few of our congregations consist mostly of handloom weavers, whose reduced and disabled condition it is most painful to contemplate. Meanwhile, error is active. Every species of delusion, addressing itself

to popular prejudice, is indefatigably propagated. Popery extends itself on the continent, and there glories in the recovery of its lost conquests. The same anti-christian system gains the ascendancy in England, and advances under colours more dangerous from being more insidious.

There are compensating and cheering considerations. We see them in the ecclesiastical state of Scotland. Different views are entertained of the disruption which has lately taken place in the National Church; but on all hands it will be admitted to have added another, and one of the most influential, to our Evangelical and Presbyterian denominations, and to have quickened the zeal of the Establishment itself. If that section of the church to which the writer belongs do its part in the drama of providence, these fellow-labourers will be fellow-helpers. Live coals, when brought in contact, will burn the brighter for burning together. But, on the other hand, unfavourable contrast will be as injurious as honourable competition would be beneficial; and if we be not stimulated, we shall soon be superseded by the energetic action of other denominations. At the same time there are interests at stake, and events in prospect, which sink all merely denominational considerations. "Who," says a distinguished minister and professor, lately deceased—"Who can contemplate the character and aspect of the present times, or the present condition and prospects of the church and of religion in our country, and not discern much that is fitted to arouse both ministers and private Christians from that state of compara-

tive lethargy in which they have long indulged, and which is the natural consequence of a lengthened period of external peace? 'We can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; how is it that we do not discern the signs of the times?' 'Coming events are casting their shadows before.' The present is pregnant with the buds and blossoms of the future. It might almost seem that all nature is desiring with unwonted ardour, and expecting with unwonted confidence, some new and unexampled 'manifestation of the sons of God.' If 'all creatures are not sighing to be renewed and calling on the Prince of Peace to come forth from his royal chambers,' all things, both in the political and the religious hemisphere, are in a state of feverish excitement, of unusual commotion, giving tokens most unequivocal, of vast, and it may be hoped, of beneficial changes. The Supreme Ruler has recently 'shaken the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and all nations;' now he is 'shaking the heavens,' and while the hearts of those who are interested in the perpetuation of ignorance, and misrule, and injustice, are 'failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth,' the friends of freedom are confidently anticipating its triumph; and many at least of the friends of religion are expecting not less confidently that 'the daughter of Zion will soon arise and shake herself from the dust, loose herself from the bands of her captivity, and put on her beautiful garments;' emerge from her present state of comparative obscurity, and burst on the gaze of the astonished nations, 'fair as the moon, resplen-

dent as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.' Still farther, an unwonted spirit of prayer for the effusion of Divine influence is appearing in numerous districts of our country, and already 'drops have fallen from heaven,' and produced partial and local revivals. And may not these be regarded as precursors of 'a plenteous rain to refresh the languishing heritage of the Lord'—as auspicious presages, indicating that soon 'the Spirit will be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.' ”*

These are bright anticipations, and ultimately sure, but they are not likely to be immediately realised. According to present appearances, we must pass through much gloom before we enter millennial glory, and fight a hard battle before we be decked with the trophies, and enriched with the spoils of final victory. Are we in a befitting condition, then, to meet the juncture? Have we put on the whole armour of God that we may be able to stand in the evil day; and having done all, to stand? I fear not. That there is much true piety in our churches is readily and joyously conceded. We see it in the holy life, we see it in the peaceful death, of many of their members. There is much true piety in our churches; but there is also much of undoubted and inexcusable apathy. Too many follow a course which compels us to stand in doubt of them; and the more decidedly good have, in many instances, a very inadequate im-

* Address to Elders, by Robert Balmer, D.D., p. 15.

pression of their true responsibility. I do not reiterate the complaint, that the former days were better than these. A fair comparison of the present with the past would present, in some views, improvement, and in others, deterioration. But, without estimating the collective character of the change, it is too certain that antecedent and existing usage, both exhibit a lamentable discrepancy with the standard of revelation. Look at the measure of visible saintship with which multitudes, called Christian, content themselves! Mark all they do bearing even the semblance of religious profession! Note how far the day is occupied otherwise than it would be if there were no God, no judgment, no eternity at all! A short prayer in the morning, and another at night; an occasional remark on death in the sight of its desolations; a stated appearance in the church on the Lord's day, with now and then a pittance to a religious object,—these elements nearly exhaust the amount of discernible godliness. Was it for this, then, that Christ died? and in such slight modifications of constant and devoted secularity, can he see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied? Are these professors of religion travellers to Zion; and is this their preparation for its glorious services? Is it thus that Christ is honoured in his people, and his religion vindicated in its efficiency? Have we, in such agents and such actions, the appointed and congenial instrumentality for the world's conversion? The questions answer themselves, and the answer covers us with confusion. 'O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and

mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts, and from thy judgments: O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day: O our God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies.* If we are sincere in presenting such confessions and supplications, they will be accompanied with active endeavours, in humble reliance on God's blessing, to escape from acknowledged sins, and achieve a true and thorough reformation. Personal piety will be advanced; and, with it, relative fidelity and usefulness. Christians will not look every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. The office-bearers of the church especially, knowing that office has been assigned them expressly for the benefit of others, will engage all its powers in serving their generation by the will of God. They will seek first to operate on the church, for that is their immediate charge; and they will not rest till Lebanon be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest; till the deaf shall hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness; till the meek shall increase their

* Dan. ix. 4, etc.

joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

Our Presbyterian churches possess great resources. That the Established Church has great pecuniary capabilities will not be disputed, as it retains, next to the Episcopal Church, the wealthier portion of the community, and numbers among its adherents a far greater portion of the church-going population. The exertions of the Free Church have made it impossible to question its plenitude of means. Indeed, the history of its beneficence is highly instructive. The National Church was supposed to be doing great things before the late disruption; and yet the Free Church has not only replaced national endowments by spontaneous contributions for the maintenance of its own ordinances, but has contributed more in a state of separation, for missionary objects, than the Establishment supposed itself equal for while it continued in its integrity.

But even the minor bodies of Presbyterians could do much if they were disposed. The Reformed Presbyterians, or Covenanters, form one of the smaller sections of them; and, of late years, they have conducted missionary operations on a liberal scale. The Secession and Relief churches are, in proportion, much stronger. To them many talents have been committed, for which they are the more responsible. We may not think so if we compare them with wealthier denominations, or if we view the classes whence their members are derived relatively to other and richer grades of the community. But the pecu-

niary means of these religious bodies will appear great if we compare them with those of the primitive church, in regard to which an apostle said, 'Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath prepared for them that love him?' Yet we do not find that the church, as then subsisting, was prevented from undertaking or prosecuting any good work owing merely to pecuniary straits. Estimate, also, what our churches might do for religion by the amount which their members expend on personal or family comforts, and we shall discover no want but of mind and will.

When I speak, however, of resources, I would not remark on money alone, or chiefly. Here are hundreds of thousands professing godliness, who have placed themselves under our inspection, and who look that we declare to them the whole counsel of God. What intellectual—what moral stores are here, all avowedly placed at the foot of the cross! If the principle of dedication to Christ were fully carried out—if our people were not only missionary congregations, but congregations of missionaries, every one striving to be useful in his own sphere and own manner, then what good might not be accomplished? These resources it is the duty and the privilege of elders to bring into application. If certain eleemosynary funds were given them in charge, they would think it dreadful to keep back one farthing of them from its charitable destination. But if the beneficence of a congregation be intercepted by the apathy of its overseers

—by the supineness of those functionaries who were appointed to prompt and regulate that beneficence,—is there not a breach of trust, outwardly different, perhaps, but essentially similar in its character? Elders are bound to promote the well-doing of a church; in all the measure, then, that they might accomplish this end, and do not, are they not responsible for the deficiency? It is not said that a church will do all that is recommended by the members of its session; but it is meant and maintained, that the means of usefulness within a congregation are, to a great extent, at the disposal of those who are over it in the Lord; so that a congregation cannot be inactive and its eldership be innocent. Let elders, then, not think their work done till they have set others—till they have set all others a working. Let them look on the rich in the congregation as the custodiers of its funds—on the children and youth in a congregation as arrows for the hand of a mighty man, and rejoice to have a quiver full of them—on the mature and strong in the congregation as an available agency for arduous enterprise, where energy and discretion are both essential to success—on every gift and grace of every church member as a vessel, both fitted and intended for the Master's use!

That a new and nobler reformation is required before millennial glory be attained is painfully obvious. Why, then, should it be deferred? Let us set our hearts on it, and plead with God to have it now, and look, and live, and labour for its coming. The power must be from on high; for the zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall perform this. But the Spirit works by

means; and by what means more suitably than by the constituted authorities in his church? The consummation, holy brethren, is, under God, in your hands: believe it; and all things are possible to him that believeth.

The father of an afflicted son, who was a lunatic, and sore vexed with an unclean spirit, brought him to the disciples, and they could not cure him. Afterwards, the disciples came to Jesus apart, and said, 'Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief; for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you.* Let these and similar assurances embolden you to act with a zeal and fortitude becoming the work which you perform, the God whom you serve, and the inheritance you anticipate. 'Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.†

Have done with those apologies which incredulity suggests. The old may not say, 'I am excused by age from novelty of movement, and have no elasticity of mind or body for these modern ameliorations.' A spring-time will be the more marked that the veteran oak puts forth its leaves, and renews its youth in the exuberance of its foliage. The work will be the more manifestly of God, when grace stimulates the fire where nature would let it languish,

* Matt. xvii. 20.

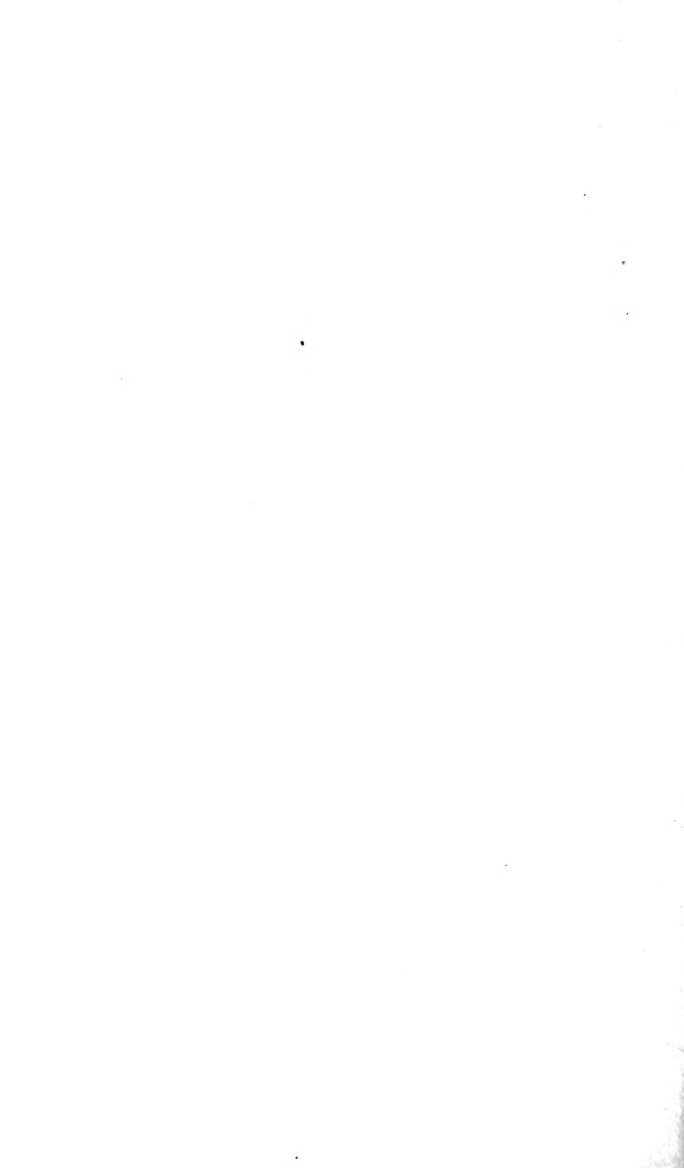
† 1 Cor. xvi. 13.

and guides to new fields of Christian achievement where habit and association commend the beaten track. What a comfort were it to these aged servants of Christ, to see this revival of his cause both begun and prospering in their hands—to see the sun rising on Zion when their own sun is going down—to see not only their children's children, but peace upon Israel! The youthful among our elders may not say, 'It were presumptuous in us to stir in these matters.' We vindicate the appointment of such to the office, on the principle that the church needs not only the wisdom which years teach, but the valour and enterprise which youth inspires. That the argument is sound, it lies with them to demonstrate—to prove, not by words, but by deeds, by infusing a freshness of fervency into all our operations. The apostles, when chosen to the apostleship, were almost all young men. Consider what they did, and be followers of Christ, as ye have them for examples!

There is not a little to discourage us in present prospects. The decline of Protestantism, and return to Papal error, in England, is particularly appalling. But show us that Presbytery reforms itself, while Episcopacy matures and multiplies its corruptions, and we shall not fear the aggressions either of prelati- cal or papistical intolerance. Give us an eldership succeeding to the spirit and to the labours, as they do to the plainness of the apostles, and we cede all that remains of apostolic succession to the eulogists of its virtue.

What, then, is to be done? I have answered the

question already; and I would have all whom I address to answer it for themselves. Let each take counsel in his own soul, and earnestly and prayerfully deliberate with himself what he might do which he is leaving undone for the bringing again of Zion. Let elders take up the subject in session assembled. Let session communicate with session, and those in one Presbytery with those in another, till all our eldership be as one man in elevating Christian practice to scriptural principle. Begin such measures, and suspend them not till something good, till something great emerge from this movement, till God overrule it for establishing Jerusalem, and making her 'a praise in the earth.'



APPENDIX.

NOTE A, p. 22.

JEWISH SYNAGOGUES AND PRIMITIVE CHURCHES.

WE are so accustomed to contrast the Old Testament and New Testament economies, that we can scarcely think of any Jewish institutions presenting a close resemblance to gospel worship. The impression is correct as regards the temple ritual. Some, indeed, have found an argument in the Aaronic priesthood for modern hierarchies ; but the very statement of such an opinion suffices for its confutation. They will have the high priest a type and predecessor of their mitred prelates. By this showing we have a type superior to the antitypes ; for, however bishops may push their pretensions, they cannot elevate themselves into equal importance with Aaron ; and, instead of many prior emblems for one coming reality, as is usual in the typical representations of scripture, we have one shadowy high priest for a whole multitude of substantial dignitaries. The idea is preposterous. Why, to lessen its absurdity, not say at once that the one high priest prefigured one goodly bishop, the bishop of the imperial city, and that the homage due to Aaron must now be dutifully tendered to his

holiness the Pope! The succession of high priests foreshadowed only Christ, who has no successor; and all their sacrifices have given place to that single sacrifice of himself, by which he hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified. To no purpose, then, do we look into the ceremonial law for an exemplification of orders and services afterwards appearing under the dispensation of the Spirit. But, though all be diverse from Christian institutions in the temple; though we witness there another and incompatible system waxing old and vanishing away, we discover very much to recal them by exact and striking resemblance if we pass into the synagogues. When, or in what circumstances, these religious edifices were first erected, cannot be certainly ascertained. Their date is, with some probability, referred to the epoch of the Babylonish captivity; and, if this opinion be correct, they exhibit a remarkable fruit of sanctified affliction. With sorrowing hearts did the remnant, surviving disastrous war, leave behind them their beloved Jerusalem a heap of ruins, and filled with the dead bodies of slaughtered relatives, to close their days of adversity, and deposit their mortal remains, in the remote land of imperious enemies. They reached Babylon, — a splendid sight to Gentile visitants, but a melancholy spectacle to Jewish captives. ‘By the rivers of Babylon,’ they tell us, ‘there we sat down; yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land!’ But though they would not sing the songs of Zion at the dictation, and for the amusement, of adversaries; they soothed each other in their exile by engaging in the exer-

eises of social devotion. When they could not pray in Jerusalem, they prayed towards it. The pious father uplifted the voice of supplication amid his assembled family and neighbours, or the expatriated prophet gathered around him the dispersed of Israel, and instructed them in the principles of God's lively oracles. By degrees such meetings became more stated and general, and the management of their affairs displayed more of regular organization. When the Jews returned to their native land, the system was farther perfected. Places of worship were erected for the assembling worshippers ; and so numerous did these synagogues at last become, that four hundred and eighty of them are understood to have been in Jerusalem alone when it was destroyed by the Romans !

It is interesting to know that these synagogues, both in the communication of instruction and the administration of discipline, had a close similarity to the first Christian churches. So marked and decided were the features of agreement, that the Gentiles were often slow to recognise any difference between them, and reprobated the Christian churches as being Jewish synagogues in disguise. Many able writers, and among these several distinguished Episcopalians, are of opinion, that little is said in the New Testament about church government, just because the apostles adopted a system already in existence, and therefore perfectly understood. Bishop Burnet says, ' This parity of customs betwixt the Jews and Christians was such, that it made them be taken by the Romans, and by other more overly observers, for one sect of religion. Any that will impartially read the New Testament, will find that when the forms of government or worship are treated of, it is not done with such architectural exactness as was necessary if a new thing had been instituted,—the

apostles rather speak as those who give rules for the ordering and directing of what was already in being.* ‘It is probable,’ says Archbishop Whately, ‘that one cause—humanly speaking—why we find in the sacred books less information concerning the Christian ministry and the constitution of church government than we otherwise might have found is, that those institutions had less of *novelty* than some would at first sight suppose, and that many portions of them did not wholly originate with the apostles. It appears highly probable—I might say morally certain—that wherever a Jewish synagogue existed that was brought—the whole or the chief part of it—to embrace the gospel, the apostles did not there so much form a Christian church (a congregation, ecclesia) as *make an existing congregation Christian*: by introducing the Christian sacraments and worship, and establishing whatever regulations were requisite for the newly-adopted faith, leaving the machinery, if I may so speak, of government unchanged. . . . It is likely that several of the earliest Christian churches did originate in this way; that is, that they were *converted synagogues*, which became Christian churches as soon as the members, or the main part of the members, acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah.’ † The idea here thrown out by the Archbishop, that a number of the primitive churches were just converted synagogues, is not much countenanced by scripture or general history. It appears from the inspired records that, though Jews were converted to the Christian faith in almost every locality where the gospel was preached, these converted Jews bore a small proportion to the unconverted, who were only the more exasperated by such desertions from their ranks, and incited to oppose the cause

* Observations on the 1st and 2d Canons, p. 84. Glasgow: 1673.

† Kingdom of Christ, p. 108.

of Christ with the fiercer hostility. But, suppose a majority in some synagogues had become Christians, it is not likely that the minority, aided as they would be by their brethren without, would have allowed the heretics, as the Christians must have been considered, to obtain possession of the edifice in which they had jointly worshipped, without such a desperate struggle as Christians in those days shrunk from encountering, for the mere acquisition of property: and, if the Jewish converts left their own place of worship, and associated with other converted Jews, or with christianised Gentiles, in providing new accommodation, and forming together a new assembly, such a church could, with no propriety, be termed 'a converted synagogue,' continuing in all respects what it was, excepting in the subject of its belief. The Archbishop has cited no evidence from history that Jewish synagogues ever became Christian synagogues; and I am not aware that any such proof is to be found. But whether his idea of synagogues being converted, and retaining their old membership and machinery in the new connection, be admissible or not, it indicates a thorough conviction in the mind of the learned writer, that the Jewish synagogues and Christian churches had a close resemblance to each other; and, to this extent, he is supported in his views by Philo, Josephus, Vitrिंगa, Selden, Voetius, and a whole host of learned authorities.

We assume, then, as an incontrovertible fact, that the constitution of the Christian churches, if not identical with that of the synagogues, was exceedingly similar. Whence could this similitude arise? Did Christianity draw upon Judaism, and did the apostles adopt institutions as furnished to their hand by the Rabbies? This is the common explanation. The likeness is explained by direct borrowing; and the apostles are vindicated

for making this free use of existing arrangements by the necessity which was laid upon them of making every allowable concession to Jewish habits and predilections. "The apostles," says the author last quoted, "we know, acted on the rule of 'becoming all things to all men,' that is, of complying with men's habits, and avoiding all shock to their feelings, as far as this could be done without any sacrifice of principle, or detriment to the great objects proposed. It is incredible, therefore, especially considering that, for several years, the only converts were persons frequenting the synagogues—Jews, or devout Gentiles—that they should have utterly disregarded all the existing and long-reverenced institutions and offices which could so easily be accommodated to the new dispensation."* That the names of offices were transferred from the one economy to the other is readily admitted; for Christianity did not introduce or invent a new language; but that the synagogue system was adopted by the apostles in order to please the Jews, is a conclusion which I am not prepared, unqualifiedly, to subscribe. My reasons are these:—

1. There is no evidence that the synagogues were of Divine institution; and if they were not so, the adoption of their constitution into the Christian church would be the highest honour ever put on merely human inventions. A temporary permission, after the gospel was introduced, to observe Mosaic ordinances which were Divinely originated, is not a case by any means parallel. I am aware that synagogues have been represented by some as of Divine institution, and that Bishop Stillingfleet has referred, in vindication of this view of them, to the words, 'Six days shall work be done; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, *an*

* Kingdom of Christ, p. 109.

holy convocation.' It has been also said, that these places of worship were, no doubt, planned and regulated, in the first instance, by inspired prophets. But when we look into the Old Testament, and see with what particularity ceremonial usages are there prescribed, while we find in it no directions at all about the synagogues, we are led to doubt if both had their places assigned them in the same manner under the former dispensation. It is one thing to elicit a constructive warrant for synagogues from ancient revelation, and another thing to plead its authority for the details of their constitution and management.

2. The principle we have already laid down, of Christ giving the best constitution to his church, does not permit the control of other principles, such as accommodation and expediency.

3. It is generally admitted by learned men, though denied by a few of them, that the first institution of deacons is recorded in the sixth chapter of the Acts. That this opinion is just, I have endeavoured elsewhere to show when treating of the deacon's office. In what circumstances, then, was the office of deacon introduced by the apostles? Had their design been to adopt the synagogue system, the whole would have been entire from the first; but the Christian church had not this office from the first, and the apostles did not introduce it till they were led to do so by a recorded emergency.

4. The apostles are careful to state, in other cases, where they made concessions for the sake of conciliation; but they never claim any credit with the Jews for being so accommodating to them as to retain their synagogue government and worship.

5. Some of those authors who speak of the synagogue system as having been 'adopted' by the apostles, insist, at other times, that the constitution of the primitive churches was exactly what

it needed to be in itself. Dr Miller, for example, alleges that 'the organization and service of the synagogues were of a moral nature in all their leading characters, proper to be adopted under any dispensation.'* He quotes a saying of Dr J. Edwards, that 'if there was no such office (as that of ruling elder) mentioned in the scripture, we might reasonably wish for such a one, it being so useful and serviceable to the great purposes of religion' (p. 134). He also quotes John Francis Buddæus as saying, that without some such office, it is wholly impossible to maintain pure morals and sound discipline in the church of God' (p. 91). Now, if the gospel system be thus proper, thus useful and serviceable, and even so necessary, that the maintenance of pure morals and sound discipline, in the absence of one of its offices, is not possible, why suppose the system adopted on any other ground but that of its own recommendations? Instead of saying that the Christian churches borrowed their government from the Jewish synagogues, would it not better accord with these quotations to say that both had, in their constitutions, those great provisions *which must, in the nature of things, be resorted to*, in order to attain the ends of spiritual instruction?

6. The sameness of the names proves only resemblance, and not derivation. A British subject, on discovering a new country, would probably call its chief magistrate a King; but it would not follow that either of the countries borrowed its monarchical institutions from the other.

This last consideration recalls me to the point in connection with which all this seeming digression has been gone into—that the elders of the primitive churches had, in all likelihood, the

* On the Office of Ruling Elder, p. 35.

same sort of functions as the elders in the synagogues, since the resemblance of the functions is the only reason for the transference of the name. The Christian office-bearers were never called Priests. Why? because their work was not that of the priesthood. But they were called Elders. Why? because they did the same sort of work which the ecclesiastical elders among the Jews were accustomed to perform. Every synagogue had a number of elders. And for what object, then, were they appointed? Was it to persuade and dissuade?—and when they had said all they could say for or against a certain line of conduct, had they exhausted the extent of their appointment? Did these elders merely prepare cases, and then submit them, so prepared, to the decision of the general membership of the synagogue? To assert anything of the sort would be to contradict an accumulated amount of historical testimonies. The elders were called rulers; and that they did rule, is undeniably demonstrable. Mr Horne says of these rulers of the synagogue, that ‘they regulated all its concerns.’* Schleusner tells us in his Lexicon, that ‘by the order and command of this officer all things in the synagogue were transacted, and that the conducting of all things in the church decorously, and according to the institution of the fathers, was committed to his care.’ He mentions that the same functionaries had the power of excommunicating, and, in fine, of deciding causes pertaining to the religion of the Jews.† Vitranga has shown largely that they were honoured with a variety of titles, such as bishops, presidents, etc., all implying not merely a personal elevation, but authoritative sway. By the concurrent testimony of all the greatest masters of Oriental antiquity, the

* Introduction to the Critical Study of the Scriptures, vol. iii. p. 253.

† See his Lexicon on the word *Ἀρχισυναγωγός*.

rulers of the synagogues heard complaints, and adjudicated on them ; decided on the admission and expulsion of members, and took cognizance not merely of ceremonial observances, but also of moral behaviour. The strong presumption, then, is, that the Christian elders had like powers, especially as they received the same name on the very ground of similarity in functions. At all events, the Jews would be led, by all their usages and associations, to attach such a meaning to the word ; and, if the apostles did not design it to be so understood, why did they use it at all, any more than the term *priest* ? and why, above all, did they not protect from misapprehension and abuse by explaining the new sense of an old designation ? The only sufficient explanation is, that the same word was used in substantially the same sense : that the Christian elders had like charge of the churches as the Jewish elders had of the synagogues, and that the latter were ecclesiastical rulers equally as the former. If there was any difference, it certainly did not amount to extinction of rule ; or the word Elder, in its established acceptance, would have been utterly inappropriate.

The similarity between the synagogues and primitive churches is important, not only as showing that the first Christian elders were rulers ; but also, that only some of them were public teachers. This latter point is noticed in the section of the work to which this note relates.

NOTE B, p. 159.

REMARKS ON QUINTILIAN.

Having cited Quintilian once and again in connexion with personal piety, it may not be improper to offer a remark or two on his theology and ethics. His work 'De Institutione Oratoria,' from which the quotations are made, is an admirable treatise on its professed subject, and has been abundantly useful to later writers on rhetoric and belles lettres. A Christian reader, however, is principally surprised and pleased with the frequent expression of high moral sentiment, communicating important reproof and admonition to those furnished with means of instruction of which the Roman author was ignorant. On the other hand, while some passages recal, and seem to rival revelation, there are others which must have condemned, in all just conception, any treatise pretending to celestial origin—attesting the reasonableness of our conviction, that the fishermen of Galilee eluded those errors and follies only by supernatural direction.

The chapters in Quintilian's work which lead him to speak most directly on divine subjects are two, of which the leading propositions are, 'Non posse oratorem esse nisi virum bonum : ' and 'Cognoscenda esse oratori quibus mores formentur.' In these portions of his treatise, obligations are enforced on Roman advocates that may well startle the slumbering watchmen on Zion's walls. 'The gift of speaking,' he declares, 'if it have fallen to the evil, is itself to be accounted an evil ; for it makes those worse to whom it belongs.' How potent the following representation (though enfeebled from being translated) of sin, as cherished in the mind, obstructing the discharge of duty ! 'If too

much care of the fields, and over-solicitude about domestic affairs, and the pleasure of hunting, and days devoted to shows, greatly detract from studies (for all time perishes to this engagement that is given to another), what efficacy shall we ascribe to cupidity, avarice, envy, whose weakest ruminations trouble our very sleep, and the scenes we contemplate in our night visions? for there is nothing so enslaved, so incongruous, by so many and diversified passions hewed and lacerated, as an evil mind. Even while it is plotting, it is distracted by hope, cares, effort; and when crime has been committed, it is tortured by anxiety, remorse, and apprehension of all penalties. Where, amid these, is room for letters, or any good engagement? Certainly not more than for fruits in ground already occupied by thorns and brambles.'

The following observations on dissimulation are rather long to be quoted, but they are too good to be withheld:—'One will certainly persuade others the better that he has first persuaded himself; for dissimulation, guard it as you will, betrays itself, nor will the power of speaking be ever such that it shall not falter and hesitate so often as the words are at variance with the mind. But a bad man must of necessity speak otherwise than he thinks. Honest speech will never forsake the good, nor (as shrewdness is also their characteristic) will they ever fail in discovering the most suitable topics to insist upon. Such discourse, although it may be devoid of meretricious ornament, yet possesses a natural and inherent grace; and whatever is ingenuously, is also eloquently spoken. Wherefore, let our youth, nay, all, of whatever age—seeing no time is late for righteous purpose—direct their aim and effort to this end with their entire souls.'—Do not these extracts almost persuade us that he was a Christian? and do not Chris-

tian ministers and elders feel reproved by a pagan's delineation of excellence to which they have imperfectly attained? But, as before hinted, there are other passages which bespeak erring unguided humanity. The only sentence of the two chapters which makes mention of a God at all, declares that 'nothing has been given to men which brings them nearer to the immortal gods than virtue.' To commend virtue is commendable, supposing its true nature understood; but, apart from this, we have in the preceding words the doctrine of polytheism, or a plurality of gods. There is no mention of any obedience, any love, trust, reverence, gratitude, 'as due to Divinity itself; the virtues and the vices, the motives and the ends specified, have all exclusive respect to men. The grand incitement to the love of letters, so much extolled, is expressly avowed to be the 'love of praise;' and it is asked in continuation, 'can we suppose, then, that wicked men have any regard for praise?' Far juster is the question of a different teacher—'How can ye believe, who receive honour one of another?' Some men are declared to be virtuous by nature, and the perfection of virtue is pronounced accessible to personal exertion. In a word, general veracity is strongly applauded; and one of its recommendations is declared to be, that it will gain credit for our statements even when we find it necessary to falsify. The occasional necessity of falsehood is then vindicated at length, on the principle of doing evil that good may come! How comes it that the penmen of the scriptures, so much less qualified personally, have presented us with doctrines and morals as much superior to these as the heavens are high above the earth? The only sufficient answer is, they were 'holy men of God, speaking as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.'

NOTE C, p. 184.

MODES OF ELECTING AND ORDAINING ELDERS.

Considerable diversity of practice prevails among Presbyterian churches in the modes of electing and ordaining elders. The usage of the Secession Church in these matters may be learned from its 'Rules and Forms of Procedure.' The document so entitled declares, that 'the right of electing elders is vested solely in the members of the congregation, who are in full communion,' (p. 48.) This regulation is prohibitory of any voting for rulers who are not members of the church; and the reasonableness of this prohibition is sufficiently obvious. A country has lost its independence when the power of appointing to its official trusts is usurped by foreigners; and if the statement hold good of earthly states, it is no less applicable to the Redeemer's kingdom. The circumstance of being a seat-holder, can create no claim to such dictation; for what affluent profligate may not pay this secular price of spiritual sway, and then lord it over a society with which he has no real connection!

While the regulation just cited forbids all extrinsic interference with the church, it gives the right of electing to every one within its pale—to all who are members of the congregation in full communion. The suffrage may not be confined to the session, or to male heads of families. Scripture either shows that the right of choosing office-bearers is vested in the membership of the church, or it emits no voice upon the subject; and every curtailment of this Christian privilege is, in all the measure of it, an exemplification of patronage. We must beware, then, while we pronounce patronage anti-scriptural and sinful, of practising it ourselves.

The same authorised publication tells us that ‘no fixed number of elders is required, but the number is regulated by the circumstances of the congregation. Two, however, along with the minister, are required to constitute a session. The number of elders to be chosen is fixed by the session if there is one, or if there is none, by the presbytery.’

On various accounts, it is impossible to fix the number of elders which each congregation should have, or even the numerical proportion of the rulers to the ruled. What if a congregation decreased, would the elders, becoming supernumerary according to the prescribed ratio, be dismissed? Or what if a congregation increased, and elders were elected in due proportion to its increase, but declined to accept the office? But though the number of elders cannot be expressly or proportionally fixed, a sufficiently accurate estimate may be attained to warrant a Synod or Assembly in issuing wholesome regulations on the subject, and taking care that its counsels are practically respected. By such a measure as this great abuses might be corrected, for many congregations have three or four elders, where they should have a dozen or twenty.

In regard to the manner of choosing elders, the rules now remarked upon say:—‘At the meeting for election, a discourse is generally delivered suitable to the occasion. The moderator of the session presides, the session-clerk officiates as clerk; and after full opportunity is given to any member to propose candidates, the names of these candidates are read over, and the votes are taken, either by a show of hands, by calling the roll, by ballot, or otherwise; and the individuals, to the number previously fixed upon, having the greatest number of votes, are declared to be duly elected. In some congregations where there is a divi-

sion into quarters, it is usual, previously to the election, to hold a meeting of the quarter for which an elder is wanted, for the purpose of proposing a list to the whole congregation, with whom, however, the election rests.'

In this representation, the nomination and election are supposed to take place at the same meeting. But a different course is both allowable and preferable. How can a congregation hear certain persons proposed for sacred office this minute, and next minute choose between them with dutiful consideration? In electing a minister no harm may result from such expedition, because ministerial candidates are almost necessarily in the view of the congregation; but private members of the church, possessing rare and excellent gifts, may never have been heard of beyond a small section of their fellow-worshippers, till they are put on the elders' list; and if the election be forthwith gone about, no time is allowed to ascertain their qualifications. It is much better that the nomination take place at one meeting, and, when time has been allowed for the congregation to learn the character and standing of the persons nominated, that a second meeting be held for having the election consummated.

It is provided in the same rule, that votes may be taken by ballot. In some cases, the members of a congregation are allowed, after the nomination of elders is completed, to take a list of the persons nominated away with them, and bring it back with certified marks attached to the names of the candidates whom they prefer. One important advantage attends this plan—that congregations who act on it are found to vote very numerous for their ruling elders. To this element I have attached, in the text, a very high consequence, and perhaps it is decisive of the question of form. Yet it has its disadvantages. It tempts

to the use of undue influence in recommending candidates ; and though advices to vote for such an one, or such another, may be given and taken in any circumstances, it is easy to see that these commendatory hints will have a special power when the parties—perhaps a father and son, perhaps a master and servant—are alone in private, and the nomination card is before them, awaiting subscription. How would the plan work in the election of ministers ? Would it not, in that application of it, be infallibly productive of electioneering importunities ? And why should not the effect be the same in the case of the eldership ? So far as I can see, no answer can be given, except that the same interest is not felt in the election of elders. But if it be so, should we not rather strive to bring up the interest of our people in the discharge of this duty, than adapt our measures to undesirable indifference ? The points of distinction also, between teaching and ruling elders, have been too much multiplied already, and it is a pity that a different mode of election should be added to the number. These remarks I make with all deference, and not without a measure of dubiety. Possibly enough may be urged on the other side, to convince me that I am wrong. But I confess that my prepossessions are strongly in favour of open and public voting, and that I would be sorry to see another way adopted as more excellent, without an imperative necessity.

Sometimes elders leave the congregations in which they have officiated. How are their services to be secured for the congregation to which they next attach themselves ? The question is variously answered by the practice of different Presbyterian denominations. The ‘ Regulations for conducting the business of the Relief Church ’ say—‘ Elders removing from one congregation to another, may be admitted into the session of the congre-

gation where they take up their residence ; but, in such cases, the session proposing to receive them shall cause notice to be given to the congregation, that they have been ordained, and that they will be received, if no valid objections are made to their life or doctrine.' By this regulation, the election, in such cases, is vested in the session. The people are allowed, no doubt, to object ; but the session may overrule their objections as not ' valid,' and the right of so objecting is ceded to the members of the church, in all cases, after an election has taken place. Much may be urged on behalf of this arrangement. It is a pity that the church should lose the services of efficient elders, merely because, under the leadings of Providence, they change their place of residence ; and elders already in a church are much more likely to learn the character of other elders coming to it, than are the body of the people. But still the principle of a society choosing its own functionaries, appears somewhat compromised by this mode of procedure. The Secession Church has, therefore, decided—by a too close adherence, some may think, to the letter of its principles—that ' Ruling elders coming into a congregation from other parts of the church, although received into full Christian communion, cannot be admitted into the session, unless regularly elected by the voice of the congregation. When they are so elected, being already invested with the office of the eldership, the act of ordination is not repeated, but in other respects the rules of procedure are the same ; and for the satisfaction of the congregation, they publicly answer the questions in the formula, before being inducted into the exercise of office. Ruling elders retain their office for life, except when their demission is accepted, or they are deposed.'

Having spoken of the election of elders, I may add a few

words on a kindred subject—the manner of ordaining them. That they ought to be ordained, or regularly and solemnly set apart to their important functions, is conceded by all Presbyterians, but they differ on the point of setting them apart by prayer alone, or by prayer and imposition of hands. A deed of the Secession Synod has left it optional with sessions to follow either of these modes. We are all of opinion that the ordination of ministers should be solemnised by the imposition of hands; and why not also that of ruling elders? It is our duty to make all the distinction which scripture has made between these office-bearers, and *no more*. Where is the biblical warrant, then, for observing this solemnity in the one case, and not in the other? I can discover none; and if we are to invent marks of inferiority for the elders who rule well, because they do not also labour in word and doctrine, we need not marvel that our people take us at our word, and extend to these office-bearers a very secondary deference. If these observations have any force, they lead to the conclusion, that the mode of ordaining ministers and elders should be one and the same. ‘The imposition of hands,’ says Dr Miller, ‘as a constituent part of ordination, is an old and impressive right. It was, notoriously, a familiar mode of designation to office, through the whole of the Old Testament economy. It is, if I mistake not, universally acknowledged to have been employed in ordaining all the elders of the Jewish synagogue. We find it is used in every ordination without exception, the particulars of which are detailed in the New Testament history. And even in setting apart the deacons, nothing can be more explicit than the statement, that it was done with the ‘imposition of hands.’ So far, then, as we are bound to reverence and follow ancient, primitive, and uniform usage, I know

of no solid reason why it should be omitted in any case.* The same writer says, in a foot-note belonging to this chapter of his work—‘ It is worthy of remark, that our Independent brethren, at early periods of their history, adhered more closely to the scriptural method of ordaining ruling elders and deacons than even Presbyterians. See the Cambridge Platform, chapters vii. and ix. See also a Confession of Faith adopted by some Antipredobaptists, (to the amount of 100 congregations,) in England and Wales in 1689 ; and ratified and adopted by a Baptist Association, met at Philadelphia in 1742, chap. xxvii. Also a ‘ Short Treatise on Church Discipline,’ appended to it by the latter, chapters iii. and iv.’

These, it may be said, are matters of mere form, and possess no essential consequence. I am not speaking of them as all-important, and I readily allow that mutual forbearance should be exercised respecting them. Nevertheless, they have their own consequence. Independently of their intrinsic moment, they indicate certain habits of thinking, and confirm the impressions from which they are derived. Were the office of ruling elder to be assimilated in such particulars to the ministerial office, this would tend to bring it into similar estimation.

* Office of the Ruling Elder, chap. xiii.

NOTE D, p. 190.

EXPOSITION OF 1 COR. IX. 13-23.

All the explanations which I have seen of this verse in its connexion, appear to me very unsatisfactory. 1 Cor. ix. 13-23 : 'Do ye not know, that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things; neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me; for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily, that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel. For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.'

Our translation, it will be observed, represents the apostle as saying, (v. 18,) ‘What is my reward then? Verily, that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.’ By this rendering, the apostle’s reward was to consist in preaching without charge, that is, in getting nothing! It is only by a supplement that this most improbable sense is brought out of the words. The precise rendering of them is, ‘What is my reward then, in order that (*ἵνα*) when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel?’ The apostle then shows, in the succeeding verses, that he was abundantly justified by his conduct in putting such a question. He had not abused his power to obtain money or homage of any sort, but had accommodated himself to prejudices, as if he had been a servant or slave, rather than a free citizen. Having thus shown, parenthetically, the reasonableness of the question, he answers it, I think, in v. 23: For what reward do I pass through all this self-crucifixion? ‘This I do for the gospel’s sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.’ The whole passage, beginning at v. 13, I would thus paraphrase—

‘Do ye not know, that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple, and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?’ Provision is made, by the Mosaic economy, for the maintenance of the priesthood who conduct its ceremonial. ‘Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.’ The support of a gospel ministry, by the New Testament church, is just as much a Divine ordinance as was the support of the Aaronic priesthood by the Old Testament church. ‘But I have used none of these things.’ I have not availed myself of my right to tem-

poral supplies, in requital for my spiritual services. 'Neither have I written these things that it should be so done unto me.' I have not stated my claims now with the view of acting upon them any more in time coming than in time past. The enemies of the gospel are eager to wound it through my conduct, and if they found any pretence for saying that I made a gain of you, they would denounce the whole scheme of mercy as a pecuniary speculation. In these circumstances I am determined to forego my rights, and still to preach the gospel gratuitously; 'for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.' When I speak of glorying, it is not on account of preaching the gospel, by itself considered, but of preaching it without price. 'For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel.' The case is different as to making the gospel without charge; 'for if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward.' If I spontaneously relinquish pecuniary remuneration, it must be in the view of some compensating benefit; 'but if' I preached for nothing 'against my will,' independently of my will, then I would have no credit in sparing you. On that supposition, I am equally bound to preach, and to take nothing for preaching, and have no room to boast my personal determination in the matter; 'for a dispensation'—an imperative appointment—is committed unto me. But such is not the case. Though I am bound to preach, I am under no obligation to decline carnal things from those to whom I sow spiritual things; therefore, if I relinquish my dues, I must be giving up one good in expectation of another. 'What is my reward, then?' What reward have I in prospect, 'in order that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel? For

though I be free,' etc., instead of exercising my freedom, I have acted as if I were every one's servant. 'And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.' I make all these sacrifices, and submit to all this servitude, to promote the cause of the gospel in your hearts and lives, and consequently rejoice in your rejoicing on the great day of God.

This view of the passage I proposed many years ago, in an anonymous communication to the Theological Magazine, which was then conducted, I believe, by the present able editor of the United Seccession Magazine.

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* It is hoped that these notices will not be considered greatly out of place, if they be found useful. They are gleaned from Watt's *Bibliotheca Britannica*, Orme's *Bibliotheca Biblica*, Jones' *Biographical Dictionary*, Maunder's *Biographical Treasury*, and various other works, as will be seen from the accompanying references.

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Martyr, Peter, a celebrated Reformer, whose family name was Vermigli, was born at Florence in 1500. He was originally an Augustine monk, and became an eminent preacher, and prior of St Fridian's, at Lucca, but having read the writings of Luther, Zuinglius, and other Reformers, he renounced the Romish faith, and found it necessary to quit his native country. He then, on the invitation of Edward VI., came to England, and was made professor of divinity at Oxford, and canon of Christ Church. But in the succeeding reign he was obliged to leave the kingdom, on which he went to Switzerland, and died at Zurich in 1562. His wife, who had been a converted nun, died at Oxford, and in the reign of Mary her remains were taken up and buried beneath a dunghill, but when Queen Elizabeth came to the throne they were reinterred in consecrated ground. Peter Martyr was the author of many works on divinity, including commentaries on some parts of the Old and New Testament, and is said to have excelled Calvin in erudition; his personal character has also been represented as extremely amiable -	36, 50

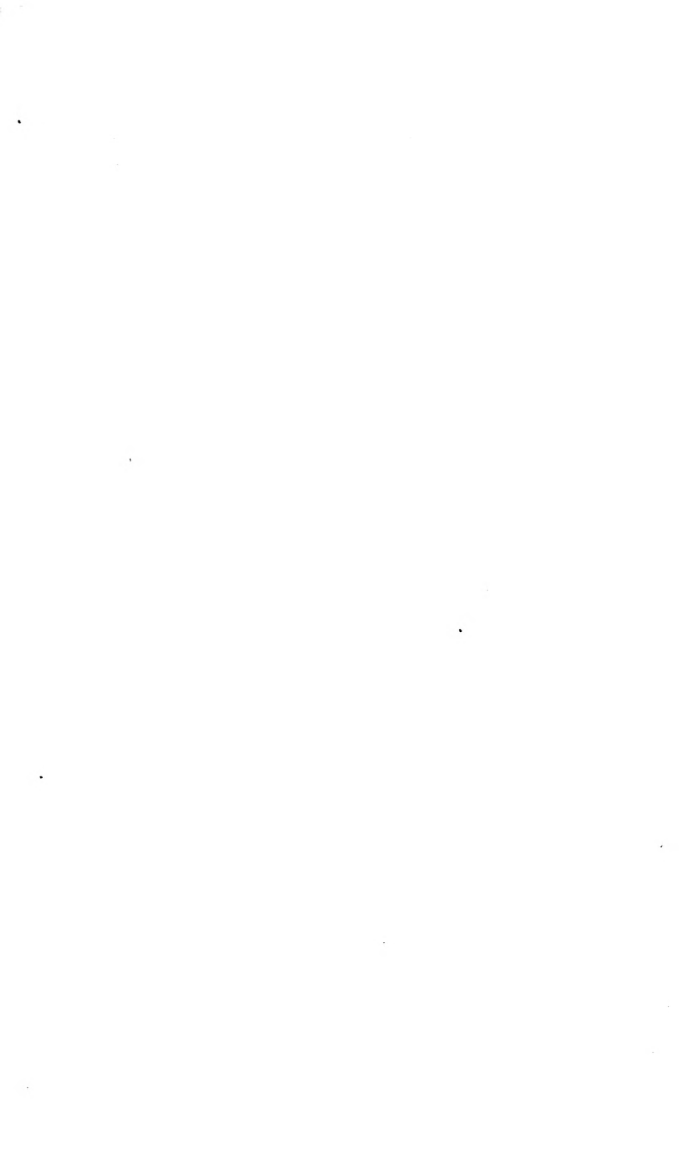
- Mason, J. M., D.D., of New York. 'The late Rev. Robert Hall,' says the Rev. J. Blackburn, 'who united in his own person the qualities attributed to his friend in a higher degree than most of his contemporaries, and who enjoyed a long and personal acquaintance with Dr Mason, has described him as one of the brightest ornaments of the Western hemisphere' - - - - - 26
- M'Crie, Thomas, D.D., an eminent biographer and divine, born at Dunse 1772, died 5th August 1835. His parents, says a writer in the Edinburgh Encyclopædia, belonged to the class of Seceders known in Scotland as Antiburghers, and he was educated with a view to the ministry in that persuasion. Towards the end of 1795, he was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Kelso. In the beginning of next year he became minister of the Second Associate Congregation of Antiburghers in Edinburgh; and in this pastoral relationship he continued for upwards of ten years, evidently with the sincere attachment of his people. He was one of five ministers who felt themselves constrained to resist and protest against what they considered to be a spirit of innovation on the part of the Synod, while engaged in the revival of the Judicial Act and Testimony. In 1806, Dr M'Crie and other three protestors constituted themselves into a separate Presbytery of jurisdiction, and assumed the name of the Constitutional Associate Presbytery. His learning was both profound and extensive, as he was not only skilled in what are called the learned languages, but was conversant with most of those of modern Europe. Still, with all his natural love of literary pursuits, he kept such employment in subservience to his duty as a diligent and faithful minister of Christ - - - 161
- Miller, Dr Samuel, Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government, Princetown, New Jersey. The Glasgow edition of his work on the 'Office of the Ruling Elder' has an excellent introductory essay by Professor Lindsay of the Relief Church - - - 39, 41, 232

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Minutes of Session - - - - -	139
Ncal, Daniel, minister of the gospel in Jewin Street, London, an eminent dissenting divine, and the historian of the Puritans, was born in London 1678, died 1743 -	55
Neander, Dr Augustus, ordinary Professor of Theology in the University of Berlin. Dr N. is of Jewish extraction. He was born at Gottingen, January 16, 1789, and spent the greater part of his youth at Hamburg. Having renounced the Jewish faith and embraced Christianity, he began his academical studies at Halle in 1806, and concluded them in Gottingen under the venerable Planck. He received his present appointment in 1813. He is the author of a number of works which display vast erudition. The most important of these is his 'General History of the Christian Religion and Church.' The 5th vol. was published in 1841, bringing down the history to the year 1294 10, 28, 84, 85, 86	
Nowell, Alexander. Watt speaks of him as the last surviving father of the English Reformation; born about 1507. In 1551 he was installed prebendary of Westminster, and in the first Parliament of Queen Mary he was returned for Loo, in Cornwall, but the election was set aside because he was a clergyman. In 1560 he was made dean of St Paul's. He was prolocutor of the convocation in which the articles of religion were settled; and he published his greater and lesser Catechisms in Latin, the latter being an abridgment of the former. He is supposed to have written most of the Church Catechism. He died 1602 - - - - -	51
Number of Elders in the primitive churches a proof that they were not all public teachers - - - - -	22
Offenders, expostulation with, by Elders - - - - -	115
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Origen, surnamed Adamantius, from his assiduity in labours and firmness under persecution, a father of the church, and one of the most learned ecclesiastical writers, was born at Alexandria 185, of Christian parents, who early	

- instructed him in religious knowledge and in the sciences. At the age of seventeen he lost his father, who was beheaded for his profession of Christianity. He then supported his mother and brothers by teaching, till he was appointed professor of sacred learning in the church of Alexandria. Explaining scripture too rigidly, he put into practice the saying, 'There be some who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven.' In the persecution under Decius, he was thrown into prison and put to the torture. After a time he was released, and resumed his labours. He died in 254 - - - 24, 48
- Owen, John, D.D., characterised by Watt as the most eminent and learned of the Nonconformist divines, born 1616, died 1683. See *Memoirs of*, by William Orme 31, 55, 89
- Pareus, David, a German divine, born in Silesia 1548, died 1622. His expository works are very numerous, and were long highly esteemed on the Continent. They were all collected together, and published several times, in folio, at Geneva and Frankfort. He was a decided Calvinist; and by some sentiments thrown out in his *Comments on the Epistle to the Romans*, regarding kingly authority, he so enraged James I. that he ordered the work to be burned by the hangman. The University of Oxford also condemned it - - - - - 42
- Piety, as a qualification of Elders - - - - - 156
- Potter, Dr John, archbishop of Canterbury, a celebrated antiquary, critic, historian, and theological writer, born 1674, died 1747 - - - - - 48
- Prayer, importance of personal - - - - - 166
- Prayer Meetings - - - - - 133
- Primitive Churches had a constitution - - - - - 9
- Quintilianus, Marcus Fabius, an illustrious Roman lawyer, rhetorician, and critic, born about the year 42. Mr Jones thus sums up his life and character:—He taught rhetoric at Rome, under Galba, at the expense of the government, with the highest reputation, and formed many excellent

orators, among whom was the younger Pliny. After having taught it for twenty years, obtaining leave of Domitian to retire, he applied himself to compose his admirable book, called 'Institutiones Oratoriæ.' This is the most complete work of its kind that antiquity has left us; and the design is, to form a perfect orator, who is accordingly conducted therein, and furnished with proper instructions, from his birth even to his death. It abounds with excellent precepts of all kinds, relating to manners as well as criticism; and cannot be read by persons of any age but with the greatest profit and advantage. Quintilian lived to be 80 years of age - - - - -	159, 223
Randolph, John, born 1749, graduated at Oxford, and in 1783 was elected to the regius professorship of divinity. He was successively bishop of Oxford, Bangor, and London. After holding the last-mentioned diocese for two years, he died of apoplexy in ——. He was the author of a number of learned works - - - - -	52
Reasonable, office of Ruling Elder shown to be - - - - -	62, &c.
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Selden, John, one of the most learned men of the 17th century, born 1584, died 1654 - - - - -	217
Servetus, Michael, a very ingenious and learned Spaniard, born at Villa Nuova, in Arragon, 1509. He was a physician by profession, but after a dispute and a lawsuit with the Faculty at Paris, he devoted himself to the study of Divinity, and became a polemical writer against Calvin and the Trinitarians. By a sentence of the magistrates of Geneva, he was burnt alive in 1553 - - - - -	161
Soundness in the faith, as a qualification of Elders - - - - -	172
Stewart, Walter, of Pardovan - - - - -	199

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Stillingfleet, Dr Edward, bishop of Worcester, born 1635, died 1699, eminently distinguished for his polemic writings. His work, entitled 'Origines Sacrae, or a Rational Account of the Christian Faith,' is considered one of the ablest defences of Christianity - - -	26, 28, 218
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Thorndike, Rev. Herbert, died 1672 - 16, 26, 30, 41, 61	
Timothy, 1st Epistle to, chap. v. 17 - - -	43
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" " of the sick - - -	107
Vitringa, Campegius, one of the most learned and elaborate Dutch theologians, Professor of Divinity and Ecclesiastical History in the University of Franeker, born 1659, died 1722 - - -	217
Voetius, or Voet, Gisbert, a Dutch divine and able opponent of the Cartesian philosophy, born 1589, died 1676 -	217
Waldenses had Ruling Elders - - -	50
Wardlaw, Ralph, D.D. - - -	135
Whately, Richard, D.D., archbishop of Dublin 59, 81, 85,	216
Whitby, Daniel, an English divine, author of more than forty works, full of talent and learning; but the most considerable is his paraphrase and commentary on the New Testament, which is still the principal commentary used by the English clergy. His work on the Five Points debated between Calvinists and Arminians, is also very celebrated, and is considered the ablest defence of the Arminian system. At the close of his life he inclined to Unitarianism; born 1638, died 1726 - - -	43
Whitgift, Dr John, archbishop of Canterbury in the times of Queen Elizabeth and King James I., born about 1530, died 1603, - - -	50
Zanchius, Jerome, a celebrated divine and Reformer, born at Bergamo 1516, died 1590 - - -	50



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