

IX

4175

J49

1907

Library of the Theological Seminary,
PRINCETON, N. J.

Presented by Prof. B. B. Warfield, D.D.

BX 9175 .J46 1907

Jennison, Joseph F.

The superintendency in the
early Scotch church



THE SUPERINTENDENCY

IN THE

EARLY SCOTCH CHURCH

REV. JOS. F. JENNISON



THOMAS & EVANS PRINTING CO.
BALTIMORE, 1907.

THE SUPERINTENDENCY IN THE EARLY SCOTCH CHURCH

All forms of human organization tend in time to become developed. As new circumstances arise, as population grows denser, and the relationship of society become more involved, the modes adapted to an earlier period become inadequate. In the State, and in the Church, methods insensibly conform themselves to a new order of things; machinery is modified, and new and more complicated instrumentalities for the work are secured.

In all such cases the tendency is to develop along old lines. Systems of polity grow in the direction of their leading characteristics—according to the great principles which they embody: in the state as monarchical or republican, in the church as Independent, Prelatical or Presbyterian. Where changes are made not in harmony with the fundamental principle of any system these modifications are soon sloughed off and discarded, but where they are in accordance with this they become enduring.

In our own Church, to meet the vast changes in new and old localities, the modes of working have been almost

transformed. Incorporated Boards have grown up, and the tendency is to increase them. Permanent committees have been appointed, commissions for special objects have been authorized, and they seem to be growing in number and scope. Woman's work has been initiated and developed, and in manifold ways our system has adapted itself to the needs of the present age.

Still, however, all thoughtful Presbyterians are growingly conscious that some important wants are not yet supplied.

With individual pastors taxed to the utmost, what means shall we employ to reach the outlying masses, who, as shown by reliable statistics, are steadily drifting away from the Church? How shall we provide oversight, or even occasional ministrations, for sparse populations and hopeful fields? So, too, for the wise counsel and guidance for churches in trouble? For the transference of pastors, where the best good of all might be most profitably consulted by changes amicably arranged? To avoid the ills of prolonged vacancies, and the crying evil of hungry candidature for every desirable position, as the Elders of our churches could testify?

For all these, and other needs, many of our wisest and best men have openly confessed that our methods are inadequate, and that great waste and loss result.

Since, then, any modification of the polity or methods of our beloved Church must be in accord with its own

fundamental conceptions, and along its own chosen lines, where can we turn with more hopefulness than to the history of the Church of Scotland, at one remove the "mother of us all," and from her experience gather suggestions which may help us to solve some of those important and pressing problems that meet us in our work.

It may be suggestive to revive the too-often forgotten records of the past, and to recall the experiment of the Superintendency made in the early years of that Church by the advice of John Knox himself, to meet some of these very needs to which allusion has been made.

When the kingdom of Scotland emerged from Romanism, about the middle of the Sixteenth century, under the lead of the reformed clergy, and with the cooperation of a nobility most of whom were impelled by the fear of God, a peculiar condition of things existed. Fully one-third of the landed estate of the realm had come into the hands of the Papal hierarchy, and this having been confiscated, now one-third of it was set apart for the maintenance of religion.

Great spiritual ignorance and superstition prevailed, and there were but very few of the old clergy qualified and disposed to carry on the work of reformation. Providentially, John Knox was raised up for the emergency. After considerable experience in the work in Scotland as a reformed Romanist, and in England and

Geneva as a clergyman, he returned to his own country in 1559, and had become the pastor of St. Giles in Edinburgh.

At the desire of some of the leading spirits, he and his associates hastily drew up a code of doctrine and discipline. This was adopted by the Scotch Parliament in August, 1560, and is now known as "the First Book of Discipline."

In accordance with its provisions, the first General Assembly of the Church of Scotland met at Edinboro' in December, 1560. The whole number of its members, including ministers, representatives of the universities and Elders, was about 40—and of these only 12 were efficient ministers.

Under the guidance of Knox its first work was a careful survey of the spiritual destitution of the realm, and an earnest effort to supply the need. Here the great Scotch Reformer's chosen plan, as outlined in the First Book of Discipline, was heartily accepted and put into operation. The kingdom was divided into ten districts, and to each a Superintendent was appointed, though for various reasons, especially the lack of suitable men and of any adequate support, there were never over *five* in actual service.

Of the 12 ministers in the first Assembly, seven were appointed to churches in Edinboro', Glasgow, St. Andrews and the larger towns, and five were assigned as Superintendents.

For the exigencies of the present these latter were taken as found, but for the future the greatest care should be exercised. Each must have previously served a two-years pastorate, and then full opportunity afforded for any personal objections as to character or ability.

Of the duties of Superintendent, preaching was the most important, and this not less than three times each week, and usually in destitute places. They should travel through their entire bounds, remaining in any one place only long enough to organize and establish a church. As occasion required, Superintendents should convene Presbyteries and preside over them.

A little later it was enacted that General Assemblies should be made up of those holding certain defined positions, and such ministers as the Superintendents should choose in their Diocesan Synods, and bring with them, "being men of knowledge, and able to reason and judge of the matters that should happen to be proponed."

And so, too, that nothing should be moved in the Assembly that Superintendents might and ought to determine in their Synods, they were also to plant churches wherever practicable, supply them with pastors, and certainly with Exhorters and Bible Readers.

All these they should carefully examine as to life and ability, and, aided by the ministers of their districts, induct pastors into office.

So, too, they should watch over the doctrine, diligence

and behavior of their clergy, assistants and school-teachers, and give especial attention to the instruction of the youth. This was peculiarly needful, as the old faith had left the people in so deplorable a condition. Morals were at a low ebb, ignorance generally prevailed, and many ill-qualified priests were seeking a livelihood in the new church—and somewhat later we read in Knox's "Book of the Universal Church:"

"Ain Minister or Reader that taps aill, bier or wyne, and keeps an open tavern, should be exhortit by the Commissioners to keep decorum"—(1576).

On reasonable grounds Superintendents could suspend, depose or excommunicate any: the sentence to hold good till the next meeting of the Assembly.

They might also transfer pastors from one church to another, and with the cooperation of the Synod assign their stipends: directing the Assembly's Collectors to distribute the thirds of benefices among them.

Superintendents should also seek to compose any church difficulties within their bounds, and their advice must be received and respected. All their official acts were reported to the next General Assembly, and when approved were valid and final.

Superintendents were subject to the same discipline as other ministers, and their office was held during the good pleasure of the Assembly.

For their support a regular allowance in kind was appointed; so much meal, beer, provender, etc., together

with 600 marks* in money: the whole affording a very respectable living for that period, being fully equal to that of the judges of the Court of Sessions of the time. (Cf. Knox, Hist. Reform., 489.)

This scheme of a Superintendency was probably suggested by Knox's experience in England, and until his death, in 1572, he gave it his fullest support.

From 1560, then, to 1580 this method of administration was the law of the Church. The Superintendents were able and effective, and were held in very high regard.

They often represented the Church in its dealings with the Queen or Regent, and documents are still upon record showing the honorable position they held in this respect.†

Perhaps the most earnest and the ablest among the first appointees was Superintendent John Spottiswoode. The others were John Willock, of Glasgow; John Erskine, of Angus; John Wynram, of Fife, and John Carswell, of Argyle.‡

On account of the difficulty of obtaining and support-

*The Scotch Mark is estimated at 13½d. English, and 600 marks would amount to about \$162.00.

As money of that period possessed nearly five times its present purchasing power, this would equal something over \$800.00.

†Cf. Spottiswoode—197.

‡Cf. Book of the Universal Kirk, 1.13—See the Forms used by Knox in inducting these Superintendents—Book of Forms.

ing such permanent officers, we find the Assembly repeatedly appointing ministers to act as temporary Superintendents, or Commissioners, as in the cases of Hay, Lindsay, Row, etc.

These were invested with all the powers of that office, and frequently their time of service was extended from year to year.†

Aided by the wise and energetic ministration of such men the Church greatly prospered, so that the original 12 ministers of 1560 had by 1567 increased to 252, while there were also at work some 467 Bible Readers, and 154 Exhorters, many of whom were in training for the fuller duties of the ministry.

Several causes, however, were combining to bring this system of Superintendency to an end:

1st—The great increase of ministers and Churches rendered it less needful, as the ordinary agencies would now suffice; 2nd—as the court favorites came more and more to covet the Church's thirds of confiscated revenues, and were even setting up Tulckan Bishops of their own, to draw from this source, there was very great difficulty in obtaining any adequate amount from this, the sole support of the Superintendents.

Much friction consequently ensued. Not wishing to be involved in any mercenary contention, these servants of the Church were often but poorly provided for, and

†Cf. Calderwood—Notes 12—Minutes of Assembly 1571.

in 1571 many of them served "upon their own charges."

As Mr. William Row, son of Superintendent Row, tells us, these officers of the Assembly "did with much difficulty embrace the office, and much urging quhairin wes to be seene nothing but *onos*, not *honos*, povertie and pains—no preferment and riches, and therefore qhen they were required to lay that employment aside, they quote it gladly and cheerfully."*

The most effective cause of the disuse of this system arose, however, within the Scotch Church itself. Here some contended that it was a wide departure from the Geneva Model; that it was not in full accord with the genius of Presbyterianism; and especially that some were ready to employ it for the re-establishment of Prelacy.

There were, indeed, some resemblances to Prelacy in this system. The name Superintendent was only another form of Bishop, or Overseer. Already before this time the title Bishop had become largely disused in England during the reign of Edward VI, and that of Superintendent employed. Hence it was that Knox, from his residence there, naturally adopted this term.†

Then, too, at that time Superintendents were both in

*William Row—"Addition to Mr. John Row's History."

†Cf. McCrie—"Life of Knox," 2387.

ecclesiastical and civil documents usually co-ordinated with Bishops.†

Their districts, like those of the Bishops, were called Dioceses.

So, too, they were invested with ecclesiastical authority for transferring the ministry to fields within their bounds, administering discipline, and to some extent fixing church penalties.

Hence, many Episcopalian writers have regarded these Superintendents as real or quasi Bishops, and have adduced this experience of the Scotch Church as an admission of the necessity of such an office and a tribute to its value.

Thus Robertson says that "Knox did not deem it expedient to depart altogether from the old form." Russell, the biographer of Spottswoode, affirms that "the Reformers introduced a species of Episcopacy, under the name of Superintendency."

Even the Presbyterian Campbell, in a lecture on Melville, declares that "the Church of Scotland had been launched, with Knox's approval, on a modified Episcopacy."

There was, however, a real and a very marked difference between the conception of a Bishop and that of a Superintendent.

†Cf. Acts of Assembly, August 7, 1574.

The latter was regarded as of the *same order* of the ministry with his brethren, and was subject *to the same discipline*. He was elected to the Superintendency, but he was not *ordained* to it, while the Bishop was held to be of a different and higher order.

The Superintendent was appointed to act during the pleasure of the Assembly, while the Bishop held office for life.

The first and most important duty of the Superintendent was to preach, while this was but a secondary matter with the Bishop.

The official acts of the former were always to be reported to the Scotch Assembly, and only when approved did they become valid, while those of the Bishop were final.

Some of the best writers of Scotch history have consequently held that these two offices were essentially different, and that the restrictions under which the Superintendents were laid were totally incompatible with the position and authority of the Episcopate.*

The growing sentiment of the Scotch Assembly, however, was steadily coming to regard the Superintendency as out of accord with Calvin's view of Presbytery, and as an entering wedge for the possible re-introduction of Papacy.

At the same time, also, the natural jealousy of com-

*Cf. Dr. Cook—"History of the Reformation"—p. 388.

mitting large authority to any one man had very considerable weight.

In 1574 Andrew Melville came over from Geneva, and having accepted the Principalship of Glasgow University, he thereby became a member of the General Assembly. From the very first he totally disapproved of the Superintendency, and especially because he thought that powerful court influences were at work, seeking an excuse and a means of establishing Episcopacy, as more subservient to royal purposes.

In 1575 John Drury, a friend of Melville, protested in the Assembly against the lawfulness of such an office, and procured a resolution affirming the parity of the entire ministry.

In 1578 the Second Book of Discipline, largely inspired by Melville, and totally abrogating this whole system of Superintendents, was adopted by the Assembly, and then being finally ratified by the Scottish Parliament, it became the law of the Church in 1580.

Thus after an experiment of 20 years Knox's Superintendency was abolished, and Melville's agency in this work is commemorated in the descriptive term applied to him by his ministerial brethren, as "Episcopomastix," the bruiser or destroyer of Bishops.

It must be clearly evident that this effort of the early Scotch Church to meet the exigencies of its condition, by the agency we have been considering, was made under

great disadvantages. With but few available ministers at first; with a precarious and insufficient support, and continually hampered and thwarted by adverse royal influence, there was no fair field for effort.

Could this experiment have been tried under more favorable auspices; had better provision been made for pecuniary support, and had the powers of Superintendents been limited in accordance with stricter conceptions of Presbyterian polity, it is possible that the Superintendency might have become a permanent institution, and that thro' the Church of Ireland, our more immediate ancestor, we might have inherited a mode of working which would have secured vastly greater practical efficiency to our own Church, in conserving its interests and in extending the Kingdom of Christ.

This general system was afterwards earnestly advocated by Archbishop Usher, who hoped that the English Parliament of 1640 would adopt it as a solution of impending troubles.

This modified Episcopacy was warmly approved by a number of prominent divines in the Westminster Assembly, among whom were Twisse, Gataker*, Palmer and Temple, and when, at the coming of Charles II, in 1660, an effort was made to settle the ecclesiastical affairs of the

*Cf. Schaff—Herzog. Eucyc., Article "Westminster Assembly."

kingdom, Richard Baxter, and other kindred spirits, gave this plan their full sanction.

On the Continent it was practically endorsed by the employment of Superintendents in Lutheran Prussia.

Our own Church also approaches this method by the employment of Synodical Superintendents of missionary work, especially in the newer West, where considerable latitude of power and discretion is often given to these useful officers of the Church.

It is the strong conviction, then, of some, that a system similar to the Scotch Superintendency, in which the office was guarded from any resemblance to Prelacy, and strictly conformed to Presbyterian conceptions, and especially defined as a *Commission* for the wise and responsible doing of certain needful things; it is the full conviction of some that by the revival of this office we might find a solution of some of the problems that confront us, and of a condition that weakens us.

If in each Synod a man could be chosen, universally respected and trusted, whose judgment was ripened by experience, and whose impartiality was recognized by all—if such a man, of genial manner and earnest, Christian life, were invested with this office for a term of years, to be the counsellor of churches and ministers; to be the repository of all information in this respect, and empowered to locate unemployed men in vacant churches for a

brief, definite time, his action being subject to the approval of the Presbytery within whose bounds it occurred; and if also the Superintendents of the Synods were in correspondence, as occasion required, or possibly could they meet annually for conference, and make suggestions to the General Assembly, then an efficient system might be inaugurated, which would be a very great advance over the vague and merely advisory methods thus far employed.

This subject of the Superintendency was brought to the consideration of the Synod of Virginia of the Southern Presbyterian Church in 1866, at a time when such an agency was greatly needed, but it was not adopted.

It is not strange that Knox's system unmodified should be distasteful to strict Presbyterians, but the plan here suggested, giving no independent ecclesiastical power to the Superintendent, and being based upon the conception of a Commission, is not open to any such objections.

The power thus entrusted would not only be limited, but revocable at any time, responsibility located, and many excellent and most desirable results might be secured, a great waste of ability prevented, relief brought to many a worthy minister of Christ, and large benefits assured to the Church and the community.

FINIS.



A BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY.

ACTS OF THE SCOTCH PARLIAMENT.

Ed. Jno. Skene.

WORKS OF JOHN KNOX—

History of the Reformation in Scotland.

The First Book of Discipline, 1561.

The Book of Forms.

The Book of Common Order.

Ed. D. Laing.

KNOX, JOHN—Book of the Universal Kirk of Scotland. 1560-1618. (Maitland Club), Glasgow, 1671.

STEWART, WALTER of Pardovan—Collections, &c., of the Church of Scotland, 1709.

SPOTTISWOODE, JNO.—History of the Scottish Church and State. 1655.

CALDERWOOD, D.—History of the Church of Scotland, 1575-1651. Edinb., 1842-9.

ROW, W.—History of the Kirk of Scotland, 1558-1637.

PETERKIN, ALEX.—Introduction to the Records of the Kirk of Scotland—Edinb. 1838.

DUNLOP, JNO.—Collections of Scotch Confessions—Edinb. 1819.

KIRTON, JAS.—Secret and True History of the Church of Scotland—From Restoration to 1678. Edinb., 1817.

MCCRIE, THOMAS—Sketches.

—————Life of John Knox.

—————Life of Andrew Melville.

CAMPBELL, C.—Scottish Divines (Melville; Knox) St. Giles Lectures—3d S. Edinb. 1883.

HETHERINGTON, W.—History of the Church of Scotland—Edinb. 1852.

CHAMBERS, ROBT.—Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotchmen, 1847.

EDGAR, ANDREW—Old Church Life in Scotland—2d Series—1885-6.

LYON, C. J.—History of St. Andrews—Edinb. 1843.

COOK, GEO.—History of the Reformation in Scotland—Edinb. 1811.

ROBERTSON, W.—History of Scotland.

TYTLER, P. F.—History of Scotland, 1866.

STEPHEN, W.—History of the Church of Scotland—2 vols., 1894.

Article 'Presbyterianism,' Encyc. Britanica (Superintendents).

STEWART—History of Scotland.

GRUB, GEO.—Ecclesiastical History of Scotland—Edinb. 1861.

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 01021 8156