



**CONGREGATIONAL
INDEPENDENCY THE CHURCH
POLITY OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT
Ralph Wardlaw**





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RALPH WARDLAW



Quinta Press





Quinta Press, Meadow View, Weston Rhyn, Oswestry, Shropshire, England,
SY10 7RN

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CONGREGATIONAL INDEPENDENCY

THE CHURCH POLITY
OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT.

CONGREGATIONAL INDEPENDENCY

IN CONTRADISTINCTION TO

EPISCOPACY AND PRESBYTERIANISM:

THE CHURCH POLITY
OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT.

BY

RALPH WARDLAW, D.D.

“THERE IS A PHILOSOPHY WHICH IS ENJOINED ON US REGARDLESS OF THE SCRIPTURES OF GOD:—IT CONSISTS IN USING THEM AS THE TOUCHSTONE, FOR TESTING ALL THE OPINIONS AND MAXIMS OF MEN.”—MELANCTHON.

GLASGOW:

JAMES MACLEHOSE, 83 BUCHANAN STREET.

TORONTO, C. W.:

PUBLISHED WITH THE SANCTION OF THE PROPRIETORS

OF THE
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ANDREW HAMILTON.

1864.

TORONTO:
PRINTED AT THK GLOBE STEAM JOB PRESS,
25 KING STREET WEST.

DEDICATORY PREFACE.

TO THE DEACONS,
AND TO THE
OTHER MEMBERS, OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ASSEMBLING IN
WEST
GEORGE STREET CHAPEL, GLASGOW;—

BELOVED FRIENDS AND BRETHREN,

You are well aware of the position in which providence has been pleased at present to place me. Eminent medical authority, threefold and unanimous, has put its veto for a time on my official labours, both public and domiciliary. Such authority, giving its verdict on previous knowledge and careful examination, I have felt myself warranted, and even bound, to regard as, with sufficient clearness, indicative of the divine purpose. With a corresponding unanimity, and with all the cordiality of along-attached people, so gratifying to a pastor's spirit, you have superadded your peremptory interdict—the interdict of sympathising love—to that of the physicians. We have thus, under the influence of a common conviction, bowed together to the will of heaven. I thank you for your sympathy;

I thank you for your prayers, in the closet, in the family, and in the sanctuary. They will be answered,—faithfully and graciously answered.—That is sure. But in what way, we must leave it with our covenant God himself, in his wisdom and love, to determine.

In these circumstances, when close study and mental excitement have been specially prohibited, it may seem strange that I should be sending to press a volume necessarily, to so great an extent, controversial. The truth, however, is, as some among you are aware, that a large proportion of the following sheets has been lying by me in manuscript for a good many years; so that, all that they required being (to no inconsiderable extent I admit) alteration and enlargement, it occurred to me that I might accomplish a long-cherished purpose, and fulfil a long-due promise, without any such over-tasking of the mental powers as could be at all prejudicial; or, if at all, assuredly far less prejudicial, and a thousand-fold less distressful, than would have been a sentence of absolute inaction. I am thankful to God for having spared me my mind, and thankful to my physicians for not having entirely forbidden me the use of it.

But enough,—and more than enough. I could not, however, but feel, that I owed, and owed espe-

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cially to you, some such explanation. I have only to add my fervent prayer,—a prayer to which you will all subjoin your hearty Amen!—that this dispensation of divine providence,—by the regret which it has occasioned on my part (if even regret be a legitimate feeling in regard to what is the Lord's doing), and the sympathy it has elicited on yours, may have the effect of still more closely tightening the bond of love between us;—and that, in your



present interesting and trying position, the great Head of the Church may by his grace enable you, “with all lowliness and meekness, and forbearance and long-suffering,” to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;” and may “set in order” amongst ybu “the things that are wanting,” in such a manner as shall prove for his own glory, in union with your and your children’s edification, and the world’s benefit!

But, apart altogether from present peculiar circumstances, to whom could a work of this kind be more appropriately inscribed, than to brethren among whom, by the grace of God, I have been carrying out its principles into practice for a period now approaching to five-and-forty years? To those principles I am desirous to settle and strengthen your attachment. While holding, in common with other evangelical denominations, the essential soul-

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saving doctrines of grace, and feeling this “one faith” uniting you with your fellow-believers in thenf all, you are distinguished from them by that particular church-polity, the scriptural authority of which it is the object of these sheets to establish. Now, to the true disciple of Jesus, when he is practically pursuing any course, there is nothing that I can imagine to impart a sweeter satisfaction, than to have the conviction fully settled in his mind that what he is doing is the will of his Divine Master. His way is then clear, and his step firm. And in a church of Christ, it will just be in proportion as its members are thus enlightened, that the pastor’s work, in the administration of rule, will be straight-forward and easy. When by his people the laws according to which he is to govern are distinctly understood, conscientiously approved, and, for the Master’s sake who has prescribed them, heartily loved,—he knows what he is doing:—at every step he announces, he can make his unflinching appeal—



“I speak as to wise men,—judge ye what I say:”—the appeal finds an immediate response:—and all goes forward unitedly and prosperously.—May the volume now commended to your patronage contribute to this happy result; and may future pastors, whom the Lord may appoint over you, reap, along with yourselves, the pleasant fruit! Thus will your

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attachment be not to man merely, how worthy soever of it, but to God,—not to the servant merely, but to the Master; an attachment manifested in a faithful adherence at once to his doctrines and to his laws. And now, a single word respecting the volume itself; that the extent of purpose embraced by it may be distinctly understood, and that none, among yourselves or others, may expect to find in it what it is not intended to contain. First of all, then,—be it remembered, that to historical and critical erudition it makes no pretension. The only history to which it at any time refers is “the Acts of the Apostles;” and the only criticism to be found in it is of infrequent occurrence, and of the simplest character. Had the case been one that depended, at every turn, on minute etymological and exegetical distinctions, I should have felt my ground too narrow and tremulous to warrant confidence. All that I have aimed at, and all, therefore, that my readers have to look for, is a plain, straightforward Bible argument; requiring no more, in order to a clear apprehension of it, than an ordinary amount of discriminative sagacity, and of its patiently thoughtful application.—Then, with regard to the contents of the volume. For reasons assigned in the introductory chapter, I have confined myself, in the sources and grounds of my argument, exclusively to the scriptures. And of

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the topics which even within this limit might have found a legitimate place, there are several, which,

although included in my original plan, I have not introduced, because any approach to a satisfactory discussion of them would have extended the treatise to an undesirable length. Let it be understood, then, that I treat only of the great primary articles of distinction between the three prevailing forms of ecclesiastical government,—the episcopalian, presbyterian, and independent,—especially the two latter. The subjects alluded to, as designedly omitted, are such as these,—creeds and confessions,—the popular election of church-officers,—the nature and ends of ordination,—the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper,—the times and modes of worship,—the reciprocal duties of the officers of the church to the members, of the members to the officers and to one another, and of officers and members to the surrounding world. These are topics, the discussion of which, without any undue dilatation, would fill another volume. Some of them may be incidentally touched upon, (as in the remarks on the office of deacon, and on the nature and extent of church power); but they do not, unless in the way of obvious sequence, come within the scope of the present treatise.*

* The duties of the pastoral office are discussed in various works;

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It is right for me to add, that subsequently to my having given intimation of my design to my publisher, I met with the announcement of its being the intention of Dr. Pavidson, Professor of Biblical Literature in the Lancashire Independent College, to take up the same subject, on a more extended scale, in the thirteenth series of the Congregational Lecture. I will not deny that by this announcement my desire to get forward was stimulated. I am as far as possible from regretting the coincidence. The two volumes will come before the public together, and quite independently the one of the other. Slight

discrepancies between the eminently learned lecturer and myself there may, and in all probability will, be: but I am pretty confident they will be no more than slight; and the" comparison of the reasonings of the one with those of the other may serve the better to establish the more essential principles of both.

—of which a large proportion and rich variety of the *cream* may be found in—"The Christian Pastor's Manual, a Selection of Tracts on the duties, difficulties, and encouragements of the Christian Ministry: Edited by Dr. John Brown, Edinburgh," &c.—The valuable Tracts here selected are from Rev. Drs. Doddridge, Watts, and Erskine, and Rev. Messrs. Jennings, Booth, Mason, Bostwick, Newton, and Cecil.—And on the duties of the members of Christian Churches, I may recommend "Christian Fellowship, or the Church Member's Guide," by the Rev. John Angel James:—and portions, particularly Section V. of "The Church of Christ considered, in reference to its members, objects, duties, officers, government, and discipline," by the Rev. Dr. Payne.

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In conclusion, I have only to repeat "my heart's desire and prayer" for your personal and social prosperity,—for your growth in grace, and your establishment and progress in "every good word and work," and to subscribe myself,

Beloved Friends and Brethren,

Yours in christian and pastoral affection,

RALPH WARDLAW.

GARTHAMLOCH, NEAR GLASGOW,

15th Nov., 1847.

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CONGREGATIONAL INDEPENDENCY

THE CHURCH POLITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS.

OUR inclinations and our convictions of duty are not, although they ought to be, always in harmony. Had they been so in the present instance, the following attempt at a condensed view of the New Testament constitution of churches of Christ would not have been so long delayed. I have for many years been urged to the task by my brethren; have all the while been strongly impressed myself with the importance of such a *desideratum* being supplied; and have made, I fear, not a few promises, which have lain unfulfilled. Ever, as something else has come in my way, has the work been deferred. And now that I set about it, it is still more from a sense of duty, seconded by the urgency of others, than from any change of inclination, which would decidedly lead me in another direction.—Let not the reader mistake me, as if this disinclination arose from any misgiving in my mind as to the validity of my ground on the subjects I

am about to discuss. Without entering into any egotistical statement of the causes, I shall satisfy myself with saying that this is far from being one of them. I am conscious of no such misgiving. There may not be—it is not to be expected that there should be—the same amount and the same clearness

of evidence on every point;—but, with regard to all that is essential in the constitution, offices, and discipline of the churches, I am satisfied that in the New Testament alone there is quite a sufficiency of proof, in facts and precepts combined, for the conviction of any understanding, actuated by an ordinary measure of simplicity and candour.

In what I have thus stated, there are two things I wish to be noticed.—I. I have said there is a sufficiency of proof “*in the New Testament alone.*” I am quite aware, to what an extent appeal has been made by the abettors of different systems to the history of the church in the period immediately subsequent to the apostolic:—nor am I disposed to undervalue this line of argument, in support of my own views, when regarded simply as corroborative of the deductions from the sacred record itself. I waive it, however, for two reasons:—*First*, because my object is brevity and condensation; and *secondly*, because I am anxious to maintain the impression on the reader’s mind that there is *no need* for going beyond the New Testament;—an impression which is, invariably perhaps, in some degree or other, enfeebled, and a suspicion introduced of our being ourselves somewhat doubtful on the point, when we do betake ourselves to the corroborations of ecclesiastical history.—At all events, it is my determination not to go, for any of my arguments, out of the Bible.

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I shall take what I find there; and what I cannot find there I shall seek nowhere else. Were I ever so learned in antiquity, I shall resist every inducement to make use of such materials in the present treatise; of which the one and only purpose is, to find and to show, in regard to the subject of it—“what saith the scripture.”—Subsequently to the latest date of the inspired canon of the New Testament, there is little or nothing sure. The tide of innovation, from the many tainted fountains of “the love of this present

world” and the self-conceit of human wisdom, set in so very early, that, were we left to gather our knowledge of the constitution and observances of the apostolic churches from the existing documents of any period after the close of the apostolic age, it would be a fruitless attempt to make out any thing certain, any thing consistent. My motto, therefore is,—and I shall keep myself sternly to it,—THE BIBLE, THE BIBLE ALONE.*

* “Every thing in short pertaining to this appeal” (the appeal to the ancient lathers) “is obscure, uncertain, disputable, and actually disputed,—to such a degree, that even those who are not able to read the original authors, may yet be perfectly competent to perceive how unstable a foundation they furnish. They can perceive that the mass of Christians are called on to believe and to do what is essential to Christianity, in implicit reliance on the *reports* of their respective pastors, as to what certain deep theological antiquarians have *reported* to them, respecting the *reports* given by certain ancient fathers of the *reports* current in their times, concerning apostolical usages and institutions!” Archbishop Whately, “Kingdom of Christ delineated,” &c., p. 137.—“When Haller was done, Ecolampadius entered the lists, and pressed Dr. Esk so closely, that he was reduced to the necessity of appealing to the mere usage of the church. “Usage,” replied Ecolampadius, “depends entirely for its force, in our Switzerland, on its consistency with the constitution. Now, in matters of faith, THE BIBLE IS THE CONSTITUTION.”—Dr. Merle D’Aubigné’s Hist. of the Reform., Book XI., Sec. XIII. Account of Disputation at Baden, 1526.

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2. I have represented the New Testament evidence as consisting in “*facts and precepts combined.*” This proceeds upon a principle, too self-evident to bear dispute. What was actually done under apostolic direction, has the same force of authority with an express command to do it,—the force, that is, of the authority of Christ. As we cannot suppose the Apostles speaking in one way and acting in another, or any thing to have been done under their eye, relative to the order of the churches, but what was according to their injunction,—*fact* becomes the same as *precept*,—*example*, as *law*.

I might take up, as many have done before me, strong grounds of *a priori* probability, that under the New Dispensation the Church of God would not be

left entirely destitute of any divinely sanctioned constitution of internal government. There can be no unlikelihood greater. I cannot, indeed, take up, on this point, the ground which some have occupied, when, proceeding on the Apostle's comparison of *Christ* and *Moses*, and rightly assuming that the former must "in all things have the pre-eminence," they have argued that there must be a constitution for the New Testament Church, as minutely perfect, and as distinctly laid down, as that of the Old, because, without this, Christ would not have been, as he is affirmed to have been, *as faithful as Moses*:—"who was faithful to Him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house:"—"Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant,—but Christ as a Son over his own house." Heb. iii. 2, 5, 6.—In this mode of reasoning, it is, I think, forgotten, that *faithfulness* bears direct relation to a *commission*; so that, if the commission be exe-

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cuted to the full extent of its different charges, according to the intention of Him from whose authority it emanates, it is executed with faithfulness; and there would be a violation of faithfulness, were the agent intrusted with the commission to *go beyond* its limits, as well as were he to fall short of them. The question, therefore, would evidently remain to be asked and answered—What, in this department, was the extent of Christ's mediatorial commission? As the divinely appointed prophet and king of his Church, *was it a part of his commission* to frame and to reveal such a constitution?—to ordain, definitely and permanently, the offices and the laws of his spiritual kingdom? We assume, as a point beyond question,—which it would be blasphemy to dispute,—that whatever was included in his commission has been faithfully done. We are thus, therefore, brought at once to the question of *fact*. Does the New Testament *actually contain* what we

are in quest of—a clearly defined model of church government,—or does it not? While I am far from questioning the validity and conclusiveness of many of those arguments by which the improbability has been maintained of the absence of all specific instructions on a subject so manifestly important, and which it would be so hazardous to leave to the various and ever-shifting dictates of human discretion;—yet nothing can be plainer, than that to this *question of fact* we must ultimately come. So that all such arguments are, to a great extent, useless either way. Let them be ever so specious, and apparently sound and incontrovertible,—yet if they cannot be sustained and borne out by an appeal to fact,—if, after having, with the force of seeming demonstration, proved the

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probability, we fail in the attempt to show its realization,—our reasonings, how plausible soever, are discovered to have involved a fatal fallacy:—and if, on the other hand, we can demonstrate the existence of the thing required;—if we succeed in showing, that in the New Testament there are really to be found sufficiently clear and definite intimations, by precept and example, of the character and constitution of christian churches;—such demonstration supersedes of course the entire argument of previous probability. Thus the proof of probability is of no avail, if we cannot make good the fact; and when we have made good the fact, such proof ceases to be of any material use.—I prefer, therefore, coming at once to the inquiry, *whether the New Testament does or does not contain such explicit statements as we require.*

It is of great consequence, however, that we should bear in mind the necessity and the duty of taking divine instructions in the form and manner in which it has pleased God to give them.—It is a characteristic of the divine word in general, that neither truths nor precepts come before us there in systematic order. There is no formal digest or classification, of either

doctrines or duties. For the wisest reasons, his people are left to gather both from a careful perusal of the entire document, and comparison of its several parts. It belongs to us, not to dispute the propriety of the method of instruction; but, humbly and confidently assuming it, to "seek, that we may find." Had there been a formally arranged system, we should all have been in danger of using it in the spirit of favouritism; of having our *pet* portions of it, and neglecting the rest. When we have to gather truth and duty from a comparison of historical inci-

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dents, of approved and disowned examples, of direct precepts, and of indirect but obvious implications, the necessity is laid upon us of a careful collation of the whole, in the spirit of simplicity and candour.—For my own part, I am satisfied, that there is little real difficulty in the case, where these principles are in exercise. I am well aware, however, that christian brethren, of other denominations, may say the same—nay have said it and will say it—in behalf of their respective systems of church-order; and I have nothing to ask of my reader, but the calm and impartial exercise of a judgment that defers implicitly to divine authority,—“trembling at God’s word.” If the result of the exercise of his judgment, in such humble and candid investigation, shall be his arriving at a conclusion different from mine, I shall not think the less of him for this; but, conceiving him to be entitled to the same charity on my part which I claim for myself on his, shall extend to him the right hand of fellowship, as one who, though differing from me as to the form or the act which our common Master requires, is rendering him the conscientious obedience and homage of a spirit as submissive as my own to what it believes to be his will.

With regard to the importance which should be attached to the subjects of our present investigation, there are two extremes:—the extreme of *light indif-*

ference, and the extreme of *unforbearing bigotry*. In the former of these extremes are those fellow-christians, who affect to treat all questions about the external order of the church as matters comparatively so trivial as to be unworthy the serious interest of the spiritual mind; matters of "doubtful disputation," which serve only to divide the people of God,

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and of which the right settlement, were it attainable (which they take for granted it is not), would hardly be worth the trouble it cost to arrive at it; the mere "tithing of mint and anise and cumin." To the many fellow-christians who think and talk thus, we would suggest:—1. That their favourite reference to the "tithing of mint and anise and cumin," as contrasted by our divine Master with the "weightier matters of the law," is a very unfortunate one for their purpose; for they forget, that that highest of all authorities, while he says of the latter—"These ought ye to have done," adds respecting the former, "*And not to leave the other undone.*" It was the neglect of the admittedly *more* important, not the scrupulous observance of the *less*, that constituted the crime reproved.—2. Genuine love will be desirous to know *all* the will of the Master who is the object of it. It will not be satisfied with knowing and doing the greater and more prominent parts of that will; but anxious to ascertain and to conform to it in even the minutest points. It can never be a legitimate exercise or indication of love, on the part either of child or of servant, to make light of any intimation, how slight soever, of a parent's or a master's will. Could they make good the *ground* that Christ has given no intimation of his will on the subjects in question, but has left them entirely open, they would be right; but true love will not take that for granted, without serious and solicitous inquiry.—3. On the supposition that Christ, by his Spirit, *has* given instructions on these points, is there no *presumption* on

the part of those who make light of them? Ought not the settled principle, on which all his faithful subjects proceed, to be,—that *whatever he has thought*

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it worth his while to command, they should think it worth their while to obey?—I believe not a few are thus presumptuous from mere inconsideration; of whose characters presumption is very far from being a general feature. They find christians distinguished by deep and exemplary piety in all denominations of evangelical professors;—and, seeing the various schemes of external church order thus manifesting their compatibility with the existence and exercise of such piety, which they justly regard as “the principal thing,” they draw the hasty conclusion that their respective claims to adoption are not worth the trouble of examining. The conclusion I have called hasty. It rests on premises as superficial as they are limited and partial.—4. By such believers it is forgotten, that *ends* are effected *by means*; and that the importance of the latter is to be measured by that of the former. External institutes are put out of their proper place, when they are regarded as ends in themselves:—but they are means to ends. The ends are individual edification, and the increase of the church; and, if these are admitted to be important ends, it will follow that the value of the means is in proportion to that importance. The one regulates the other. And, while this position will not be disputed, neither, surely, will another,—that if Christ *has* instituted means for these ends, his people should seek in earnest to ascertain them,—in the firm conviction, that *his must be the best*:—we might go further, and affirm them the *only truly suitable* means for the ends in view.—In this, as in everything else, it becomes us to lay our own wisdom at his feet, and in the true spirit of self-renunciation, “become fools that we may be wise.”—This is no

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more than what is due to him, both on the ground of his supreme authority, and on that of his unerring intelligence:—and it is due to him, not in cases only where we might be disposed to doubt, but even where our own sagacity would, with little or no hesitation, have dictated the contrary.—Our duty, beyond all question, is *implicit deference*.

It seems reasonable that christians should consider themselves bound by the authority of the inspired ambassadors of Christ, in matters of this description, as well as in others. Yet it is surprising on what flimsy and light pretexts many shake themselves loose from such obligation, even when they have granted that the constitution of the apostolic churches is to be found in their writings. They allege that it was only the constitution *for that time, and for existing circumstances*; and that it was wisely left subject to modification, as expediency, guided by subsequent changes in the condition of the church, might dictate.—But this is surely, to say the least of it, hazardous ground. There is not, on subjects such as this, a more dangerous word than *expediency*. It unsettles everything; it settles nothing. It means whatever any mind may be pleased to affix to it; and, being thus a word of *all* meanings, becomes a word of *no* meaning. Surely the people of God, aware of the extent of the heart's deceitfulness, and of the variety of Massing influences to which, through that deceitfulness, their judgments are subject, should be jealous of a sentiment which allows such free scope to human discretion in regard to divine institutes; a discretion, which may be as varied in its dictates as are the varieties in the constitution, education, and habits of human minds. They who know themselves (as all

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believers should) will not wish for the liberty.—When Dr. Whately says,—“What is left to men's *discretion*

is not therefore meant to be left to their indiscretion," he says what I should hardly have expected his own discretion would have allowed him to say. Unless there be some admitted standard of discretion, it is manifestly untrue. Whatever is left to men's discretion is inevitably left as much to their indiscretion. Who is to draw the line? What to one man is the very perfection of discreet and wise policy, is in the eyes of another the very madness of its opposite. And alas! all experience testifies (and a sad amount of the testimony there has been) that of all subjects whatever the very last that should be left to human discretion are those which relate to religious observances! Discretion! When men leave the bible, where are we to find it? We cannot, therefore, be too jealous of the "power to decree rites and ceremonies" claimed for "the church" in the twentieth of the thirty-nine articles of the Southern Episcopacy, even although qualified by the restriction that what is ordained must not be "contrary to God's word written." It is a most hazardous latitude of freedom, when it is pronounced competent for the church to ordain whatever to its discretion may seem for edification, provided the divine word has not forbidden it. Look to history, and see how boundless and mischievous the licence to which the admission of such a power has given rise. The wretched detail most impressively teaches us, how much safer we are, in such matters, with the maxim—that the inspired word should be understood as interdicting whatever it does not, by precept or example, sanction.—Even those who plead for the licence, plead for it in terms

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which show their impression of the hazard of evil to be stronger than that of the promise of good. "The circumstances of men and things," says Dr. Campbell, "are perpetually varying, in respect of laws, civil polity, customs, manners:—these, in every society, give rise to new regulations, arrangements, cere-

monies; these, again, insensibly introduce changes in the relations of different classes and ranks of men one to another, exalting some, and depressing others." Sometimes alterations arise from a sort of necessity. A particular measure may be expedient at one time, and in certain circumstances, which is inexpedient at another time, and in different circumstances. But it is equally certain, on the other hand, that changes *do not always spring from prudential considerations of fitness. As little can we say that they are always for the better. They more frequently result from the unbridled passions of men, favoured by circumstances and opportunity.*"*

What is thus said of changing circumstances in the church's history requiring corresponding changes in the church's constitution of government, may sound plausibly; but if even plausibility does belong to it, it is plausibility and no more.—Let the following simple considerations be duly weighed:—1. What, in point of fact, was the state of things in the apostolic age itself? Was there no diversity in the existing forms of civil government, and in the manners and customs that were prevalent, in the different countries in which christian churches were then planted and organized? Had the apostles confined their labours to Judea,—making converts, gathering

* Lect. on Eccl. Hist., vol. I., pp. 248, 249.

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churches, and instituting christian ordinances, among Jews alone, it might have been surmised that what was adapted to the peculiar character and circumstances of the chosen people, would not be suitable for the Gentile nations. But it was not so. There were Gentile churches as well as Jewish. There were churches, not in Palestine alone, but in all the districts of Asia, in Macedonia, in the states of Greece, in the capital and provinces of Rome. Yet, as in all places the same truth was the means of the

conversion of sinners, so was the same order instituted in all the “churches of the saints.” Nowhere is there to be found the remotest intimation of any difference. “So ordain I *in all churches,*” was language which, so far as appears, the apostle who uses it could, with equal truth, have applied to every institute whatsoever in the frame-work of the primitive ecclesiastical polity, as to the one particular of which at the time he was writing.* What, then, tire we to make of the allegations we hear from many, about the necessity of some accommodation of that polity to national institutions, and popular predilections, in the different countries where the gospel might be introduced? In point of fact, the apostles felt no such necessity, nor ever thought of any such accommodation.—2. The reason is obvious. Churches of Christ consisted everywhere of the same materials. They were composed of converted sinners,—sinners saved by grace, renewed by divine truth in the spirit of their minds, enlightened and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and separated from the world that lieth

* 1 Cor. vii. 17. See also 1 Cor. iv. 17. 1 Cor. xi. 16. 1 Cor. xiv. 83. Tit i. 5.

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in the wicked one, to be a “peculiar people” unto God. Now, this being the case,—the church being a body *per se*, an association of spiritual people, united on spiritual principles, for spiritual ends, altogether distinct from the kingdoms of this world, and entirely independent of them,—it follows, that the same constitution,—the same ordinances and laws,—which suited it originally, must suit it always, and everywhere. As no change of time, place, or circumstances can alter the scriptural nature of a Church of Christ, so no change of time, place, or circumstances can ever render any change in its government and discipline *necessary*; nay, if we believe in the divine adaptation of its original constitution, no such change

can in any case be even *beneficial*.—3. It may be further observed, that that constitution of the church's government bids fairest to be the true one,—in other words, has most of “the witness in itself” to its being scriptural,—which *is* thus capable of subsistence, and of effectuating its divine ends, in every country, and under every variety of national polity. This independence of the world,—this capability of reduction to practice in all its places and in every age,—without a question ever requiring to be asked about existing political institutions,—is one of the marks by which we might, *a priori*, expect the government to be characterized of a community so entirely spritual and distinct from the world as the church, according to the New Testament, is. There must have been some change in men's conceptions of *what a church is*, before they could surmise the necessity, under any circumstances, of alterations in its scriptural constitution.

On the subject, however, of adherence to New

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Testament precedent, we are frequently met, *in limine*, with an *argumentum ad hominem*,—an argument which is aimed, not so directly against our reasonings, as against our consistency.—If you will insist on a strict conformity to the practices of the first churches, (it has often, in substance, been said) why not follow out the principle in every thing? The question is a fair one. We frankly meet it. There are *three points*, which are usually adduced in evidence of our inconsistency;—in evidence that our own practice is subversive of our theory;—that our principle is thus proved by ourselves to be an extreme and untenable one.—These are—the *community of goods*, the *kiss of charity*—and the *washing of the disciples' feet*.—On no one of these will it be necessary to dwell long.

1. The *first*,—the *community of goods*,—may be admitted to have most in it of plausibility. But it will not bear examination. Its existence, even in the

first church at Jerusalem, we more than doubt; and its obligation on other churches, and in after times, we distinctly deny. By a community of goods is to be understood—a universal renunciation of personal property, and the throwing of all that belonged to individuals into a common stock. Now, respecting this supposed state of things, observe—*First*:—The phrase in Acts ii. 44, “and had all things common,” may fairly be considered as of equivalent meaning with that in chap. iv., 32, “Neither *said any of them that aught of the things he possessed was his own*, but they had all things common.” In the latter, indeed, of the two passages, both the phrases occur together, and the one is explanatory of the other. The import will thus be, that, in the peculiar circumstances in which the believers were then placed, such was the

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prevalence of mutual love and generous sympathy, that all, instead of selfish appropriation of what belonged to them, *held their property as a common good*—“ready to distribute, willing to communicate,”—each considering it as “non sibi sed toti.”*—*Secondly*: As to the sale of “lands and houses” by their proprietors, converting them into money for the purposes of charitable distribution; in whatever extent the words—“as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet”—are to be understood as intimating the practice to have prevailed,—we have the clearest evidence that it was an entirely voluntary and spontaneous act, free to all, but obligatory on none. The proof of this is as decisive as proof can be, in the words of the apostle Peter to the deceitful Ananias—chap. v. 4, “Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” It necessarily follows, that, even had there been such a community of goods as is generally imagined, it was the result, not of any divine precept or binding institute, but a free-will

agreement, dictated by the warm and generous emotions and impulses of Christian affection.—But that there really was no such thing, we appeal for further evidence—*Thirdly*, To the statement of chap. vi. 1, “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.*”—It is manifest, that, on the hypothesis of an absolute community of

* “Not for himself but for the community:”—accommodating this portion of the poet’s line.

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 goods, the “daily ministration” must have been a distribution, day by day, not to the needy amongst the thousands of converts composing the church, but to all those thousands together, as rendered, by the universal cession of their property to the common fund, alike needy!—a distribution to the whole multitude of the members of their daily pittance of money, or their daily ration of provision!—Now such a thing is in itself inconceivable,—we might almost say impracticable; and the mention thus made of the neglect of the Grecian *widows*, shows with sufficient clearness, to what descriptions of persons the distribution did, in point of fact, extend.—A large fund was then required, on account of the circumstances of loss and destitution to which the believers were exposed by their profession of the gospel.—*Fourthly*: All the exhortations subsequently addressed, in the apostolic Epistles, to the churches of Christ, make it manifest that, if such a state of things did exist in the mother church at Jerusalem, it was not intended as a permanent divine institute; for in point of fact, it did not exist elsewhere, or in churches subsequently formed.—The distinction between the rich and the poor pervades these inspired documents; appropriate exhortations being addressed to each: a distinction, which the supposition of a community of goods at

once destroys. Quotations on such a point would be superfluous. The distinction is not merely assumed, but in many instances strongly marked. And this is true of Jerusalem, as well as of other places. "We find Paul receiving contributions from the Gentile churches for "*the poor saints*" who were there, as a conciliatory expression of their sympathy in a period of prevailing destitution:—and on the *Hebrew*

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christians as well as others he lays the injunction—"To do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." Rom. xv. 26. Heb. xiii. 16.—*Fifthly*:—Such a state of things as a proper community of goods supposes, would have laid the gospel open to objections of no fanciful or trivial kind. Had such "*cessio bonorum*" been obligatory on all who embraced the profession of the faith and joined the community of the faithful, it would infallibly, and to an incalculable extent, have been productive, not only of difficulties and obstacles in the way of such profession and such union, but of perplexities the most embarrassing in regard to the use and disposal of property, and the rights and obligations, domestic, civil, and mercantile, which the laws and usages of different countries had associated with it: an interference with these, out of all harmony with the general character of evangelical institutes.—*Sixthly*: It may be remarked, that such a community of goods, by reducing all the members of the church to equality, would have annihilated one of the tests of principle. It would have thrown the whole trial of its sincerity and force upon the *first profession*,—upon the transition of the sinner from the world to the church. But the continued existence of different secular conditions amongst the members of christian churches, is no less manifest in point of fact on the very face of the record, than it is beneficial in its operation; as at once giving scope for the exercise of mutual love, and affording a touchstone of its sincerity,

a gauge of its amount, and a means of its promotion. There is no sufficient evidence, then, of a community of goods having existed even in the church of Jerusalem, but probabilities amounting almost to

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certainty against it; and there is more than sufficient evidence that it was not obligatory, and that it had place nowhere else.

2. The *Kiss of Charity*.—With no man of ordinary powers of thought, and of any candour at all, will it be necessary to spend much time or argument on this point.—It is quite true, that the Apostle Paul says to the believers at Borne—Rom. xvi. 16, “Salute one another with a holy kiss;” and that he uses the same terms to the church of Corinth—I Cor. xvi. 20; 2 Cor. xiii. 12, and to the Thessalonians—I Thes. v. 26. It is true too, that Peter gives a similar injunction, in different terms—I Pet. v. 14, “Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity;” that is, of love.

Such is the foundation of what some have been pleased to dignify with the title of the *ordinance of salutation*, and have insisted on its being obligatory *congregationally*—in the “public assemblies of the church.—Observe, then, concerning it,—the very connexion in which the words occur, in the first, for example, of the passages cited, should have been enough to preclude the possibility of so strange a conclusion. The idea of an *ordinance* involves that of *continuance* or *permanence*. But the injunction stands in the midst of a number of salutations which he desires to be offered to different individuals, whom he names. Did he mean by these, then, that the church were to continue, stately and permanently, in the practice of saluting Aquilas and Priscilla, Epenetus, Mary, Andronicus and Junias, Tryphena and Tryphosa, and all the rest of them? I need not answer the question. Every person of common sense instantly sees and feels the sheer absurdity of such a supposition. And yet, there is just the same amount



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of reason for assigning permanence to these, and exalting them into stated observances during the lives of the individuals, as there is for doing this in regard to the mutual salutation of one another enjoined, in general terms, upon the brethren.—Suppose I were to allege the apostle's meaning to be, that on their receiving his letter, and reading the assurances of his love for them, they should, in the way mentioned, express their mutual affection to each other, and their united attachment to himself; could any one prove that he meant more? Would not such interpretation make this injunction of a piece with the others?—But—

2. There is no sufficient evidence of even so much as this being intended,—this mutual salutation when the epistle was read in public:—for there is no evidence of *publicity being intended at all*.—The prevailing mode of friendly salutation varies in different countries, and at different times. There and then, it was a kiss on the cheek. The christians would have occasion to use it to one another in their daily intercourse, and at special times of meeting; as, in all cases in which there is nothing inconsistent with propriety, or of injurious tendency, it is custom that must regulate such matters among christians as among others. Ought the apostles, then, to be understood as meaning more,—or can any proof be adduced that they did mean more, than that christians, in their salutations of each other, should bear in mind their character and profession; that their reciprocal salutation should be “a *holy* kiss,” and a “kiss *of love*.” That is, that it should not be the expression of mere ordinary courtesy or even of mere ordinary friendship, but that, “as becometh *saints*,”

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it should be the token of a sincere, fervent, and pure affection, in their spiritual relation?—The idea that



all that is addressed, in the form of injunction, to a collective body behoves to be done by that body in its collective capacity, is one which no man will maintain who is desirous to have or to keep a reputation for common understanding, as might readily be shown from analogous cases, were it worth the pains.

3. I only add, what is also of itself decisive,—that the anomaly is too flagrant to be at all admissible, of anything being designed to be a permanent ordinance in the church, respecting which there is not the most distant intimation, either in the form of precept or of example, as to *when*, or *where*, or *how*, it was to be observed. Ask, *how often*, or *on what occasions*, ordinary or special, the ordinance is to be attended to?—No one can tell.—Ask, *in what manner* it should be done when it *is* done,—whether the salutation is to be simply *passed along from one to another*, or whether *each must salute all*.—No one can tell. All is perfectly indefinite,—not one point explicit, so as either to assure the professed observer that he is obeying legitimately, or to render inculpation for neglect capable of being brought home to the offender.—Surely this can never be an institution of Christ.*

III. Still less necessary will it be to spend time with the *washing of the disciples' feet*.

* The notions which by some have been broached about this ordinance of public and promiscuous kissing, hold out a temptation, such as it requires a little self-denial to resist, to some small indulgence in the ludicrous; of any sense of which, as well as of the ordinary proprieties and decencies of social life (of which the churches of Christ should be the last scenes chosen for the violation) its advocates must be most potably devoid. But the temptation must not be yielded to.

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It is true, that when our divine Lord and Master had performed, with lowly dignity, this act of menial condescension to the twelve, when assembled with them at the paschal table for the last time, and about to take his final leave of them, he said, on resuming his seat,—“Know ye what I have done unto you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so

I am. If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, *ye also ought to wash one another's feet*:—for I have given you an example, *that ye should do as I have done to you.*”*—This is true:—and what of it? I pity the man, who can be either so senseless or so heartless, as to regard this act of “the Lord of glory” as a mere *example of feet washing!* It has been said, there is often but a short step from the sublime to the ludicrous.—When considered as an *emblematic action*, embodying the inculcation of a great *moral principle*,—a principle essential to the character of his followers,—the principle of *humble condescending love*,—there is, in the time, the manner, and every circumstance of it,—with the *by* whom and the *to* whom it was done,—an exemplification of the true *moral sublime*. When viewed as a mere pattern of the *opus operatum*, the prototype of an outward observance,—the sublimity is gone; it is lost in the ridiculous. The great lesson taught is, that no believer in Christ should ever feel it beneath him to perform the most condescending act of menial service to any one of his brethren; it being understood, of course, that the act is one which will conduce to his comfort and benefit. Among such acts the washing of the feet may be included, in

* John xiii. 12–15.

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countries and in cases where it is really a refreshment, or where (and this can only arise from its being a refreshment) it has become an act of customary hospitality.—To speak of it as a public observance, or church ordinance, is absolute drivelling; to reason with any man whose mind is so constituted as to be capable of so regarding it, would be to “sow the wind;” and “the whirlwind” of the poor man’s blustering passion is very likely all that would be “reaped.” But, even considered as relating to private life, it is far worse than trifling, to confine

the example to the one particular act. It is to deprive a large proportion of the christian church of its benefit;—in countries, namely, where the act is necessarily a rarity; and in numberless instances, moreover, in which it would be an annoyance rather than a gratification, and in which persons would much rather do it themselves or be without it, than have it done to them by another.*—We are quite sufficiently in danger without the encouragement of such interpretations, of resting in outward acts, and forgetting

* Here too the temptation to the ludicrous is strong. Well do remember my beloved friend and brother, the late Mr. Ewing, when giving me some account of a short preaching excursion in a rural district in Scotland, mentioning, with great glee, and in his own characteristic strain of humour, his arrival one evening at a well known village, fatigued by a pretty long journey on foot, and, ere he retired to rest, requesting water to wash his feet. The simple-hearted woman by whom it was brought,—a member of the independent church in the neighbourhood, intimated, with a sheepish but significant modesty, her wish to show her regard for the Lord's servant, by performing the ceremony for him. "O!" said Mr. Ewing, in telling the incident, laughing heartily, "little did she know; if anybody had but touched, or even brought a finger near, the soles of my feet, I'd have sprung up through the ceiling!"—I need not say he smilingly and courteously declined the well-meant offer of service.

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inward principles; and, when one precise act is specified, of confining ourselves to that one act, fancying that in doing it we are following the example; although we should be disregarding all other acts whatever which the exemplified principle binds us, and which the due influence of it would prompt us, to perform. Such is the unavoidably pernicious effect of regarding this act of the Saviour as ordaining the washing of feet, rather than as ordaining, in principle and practice, universal humility and love. It is just as if a professed disciple, pretending the desire of strict conformity to his Master's will, were to interpret his words—"If any man will come after me, let him *take up his cross* and follow me," as inculcating the duty of carrying on the shoulder, as the badge of discipleship, two transverse bars of wood. That would

be a very convenient and easy way of evading all the varieties of self-denial included in “the offence of the cross.” Equally convenient and easy is the evasion, by the literal and limited interpretation, of the obnoxious lesson of kind and lowly condescension to even the least and meanest of the Saviour’s followers, manifestly designed to be conveyed in the act of washing the feet of his twelve disciples.—It may be worthy of notice, as a general remark, that when such evasions are practised, and *acts* are substituted for *principles*, the act will come to be performed in a way that fosters the very contrary principle to that which it was meant to exemplify.—Witness the mockery of conformity to Christ’s example, in the Pope washing the feet of his Cardinals!

I might have mentioned a *fourth* particular—which has sometimes been cast in our teeth, as a failure in the application of our own principle:—Why,—it has

⁴¹ been asked, seriously or tauntingly,—Why have not you your *love-feasts*?—The answer is simple. There is not, in the New Testament, anything whatever that either indicates their nature, or establishes their authority. The language of Jude—in the only passage that can be construed into an allusion to them—“These are spots in your feasts of love,”—is evidently much too indefinite for the sole ground of a divine institute; leaving us, as it does, in complete uncertainty even as to *what the feasts are* to which it refers. There is not the slightest evidence in the passage of their being feasts observed by them *in their church capacity*; there being no feast of that description, so far as appears, but one,—the *Lord’s Supper*. How, then, can that be imitated, which is neither enjoined by precept, nor distinctly exemplified in practice?—The idea that in 1 Cor. xi. 17–22, the abuses of which the apostle complains were in these supposed love-feasts, observed antecedently or subsequently to the Lord’s Supper, and not in the Lord’s Supper itself,

is not only a mere conjecture,—it is, I conceive, inconsistent with the plain and obvious meaning of the terms in the passage. The idea has arisen from a charitable incredulity that the church at Corinth could have fallen into an abuse so monstrous. But the charity, it is to be feared, is misplaced. The very strong language of the apostle, not in the verses quoted only, but in the whole subsequent context, may well convince us that the abuse reprehended was indeed a monstrous one; even nothing less than the conversion of that simple and spiritual observance, under the perverting influence of misapprehension, carnality, and party-spirit, into a common meal, and making it the scene even of intemperate eating and

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drinking!—and it has, I think with justice, been observed, that the language of the apostle, in exhorting with the erring church—“What! have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not?” may be fairly interpreted as involving a *prohibition* of such feasting in the assemblies of the churches.*

The question respecting the necessity of a *plurality in the pastorate of each church*, may be noticed hereafter, under its appropriate head.

I shall close these introductory observations by remarking, that the maxim so judiciously laid down, and so successfully applied, by Dr. Paley, in the department of the evidence in physical nature for the being and perfections of God, should not be forgotten by us in regard to the discoveries of divine revelation;—namely, that “true fortitude of understanding consists in not suffering what we *know* to be disturbed by what we *do not know*.”—Our not being able, with certainty, to explain the use of the *spleen*, can be no reason for our hesitating about the use of the *eye*, and its manifest and perfect adaptation to the purposes of vision.—In like manner; if, in the New Testament we can find, with satisfactory clearness,

the great outlines in the constitution and government of the churches of Christ, the obligation of what we do discover ought not to be affected by our not being able, from the same authority, to solve every difficulty, and to answer every minute question, respecting times and modes, and circumstantials of worship, which either a sincere or a factious curiosity may be pleased to suggest.

* Orme's Catechism, Sect. II. Quest 17.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH, AND NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES.

SECTION I.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS.

IT was once my intention to have introduced here a general view of the constitution of the *Jewish Church*, under the Old Dispensation, or the THEOCRACY. I have laid aside this intention, for two reasons. In *the first* place, it is not necessary to the object of the present treatise; which I am unwilling, therefore, to encumber with matter that is at all extraneous, or to swell to an inconvenient size. And *secondly*, recent discussions on the great question of Ecclesiastical Establishments, have, to a very considerable extent, involved the points relative to the great and essential distinctions between the church under the Old and the church under the New Testament Economy:—and, having taken my share in that all-important controversy, I shrink, sensitively, on different accounts, from repetition.—I waive, therefore, the entire range of such disquisitions; the nature of the Theocracy, or Sinaitic covenant; the constitution and ordinances of the church, when under that covenant; the union of the Church and the State *then*, and the lawfulness

or unlawfulness of any alliance between the Church and the State *now*; with other topics of kindred

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character. I would only observe in general, that a radical change in the constitution of the church under the reign of the Messiah was prophetically announced by those “holy men of God who spoke as they were moved by the the Holy Spirit;”—and that, after our Lord had finished his work, ascended on high, and fulfilled his promise to pour out his Spirit upon his apostles, to “lead them into all truth,” thus investing them with the authority of his accredited “ambassadors” and vice-gerents on earth, these prophetic announcements were verified in point of fact; the constitution of the New Testament church being settled on principles, and after a model, as widely different as possible from those of the church of Israel. The leading characteristics of the New Economy were *spirituality, universality, and simplicity.*

I. SPIRITUALITY.—We speak, of course, comparatively. The old economy was not entirely carnal, nor is the new entirely spiritual. The reason assigned by the Saviour for the necessity of God’s worship being spiritual,—namely, that “God is a Spirit,” is a reason peculiar to no period; nor, indeed, can we imagine him who “searcheth the heart and trieth the reins of the children of men” to have ever been satisfied with service in which the “inner man” had no part. But still, under the former dispensation there was a vastly larger amount of externality, than there is under the latter. It was a typical and preparatory dispensation; and the observance of its typical institutes constituted its prescribed worship. It was thus characteristically, though by no means exclusively or essentially, carnal. The outward type had a spiritual meaning; and to the really acceptable observance of the institution in which it was wrapped



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up, a state of heart in accordance with the import of the type was requisite. It was in vain that the worshippers “drew nigh to Jehovah with their mouth, and honoured him with their lips,” while they “removed their hearts far from him.”*—But, as I have said, there was a great amount and variety of outward observances. As contrasted with the state of things that was to follow, it “stood only in meats and drinks, and diverse washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on the worshippers until the time of reformation.”†—Yet neither is the system of worship under the new economy entirely spiritual;—so spiritual, I mean, as to be confined exclusively to the heart, and to admit of nothing that is outward or corporeal. It is just the inverse of the former; it is characteristically, but not exclusively, spiritual; so much, in the comparison, distinguished by its spirituality, as to entitle it to the designation, but not leaving altogether unappealed to the principle founded in the complex constitution of our nature, by which what is external is employed to assist what is internal;—the eye to affect the heart;—what is “touched, tasted and handled,” to convey impressions to the mind, and to confirm and deepen those already existing. He who “knoweth what is in man” has not, under the new dispensation, entirely cast aside this means of gracious influence, but has retained just so much of it as accords with the predominant character of spirituality belonging to the dispensation. It has its outward acts of worship, and its symbolical observ—

* See Isa. i. 10–15. Isa. lxvi. 1–4. Jer. vi. 18–20. Pror. xv. 8; xxi. 27. Psa. lxvi. 18. Amos v. 21–24, 4c.

† Heb. ix. 10.

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ances, both personal and social. But the fewness and the simplicity of these form a striking contrast



to the multiform and costly ordinances of the “worldly sanctuary.”

2. UNIVERSALITY.—I do not by this distinctive point of contrast mean to convey the impression that the Jewish system was, in all respects, exclusive, so that none were admissible to the enjoyment of its privileges but the nation of Israel. It was not so. God’s House was “a house of prayer for all people.” Proselytes from among the surrounding idolaters were more than welcome, on the part of the Divine Lawgiver, to a place amongst his chosen people; and had that people, set down as witnesses for the true God amidst a world of aliens, acted in consistency with the divine intentions, it would have been their aim, instead of wrapping themselves up in the pride of their distinctive privileges, to enlighten the surrounding darkness, and to bring the heathen to the knowledge and worship of Jehovah, and to a participation in the blessings of his covenant.—Still, however, the system was national and peculiar. It was not framed for the world at large, but for Israel. Jehovah chose that people as his “peculiar treasure.” He placed his name in Jerusalem. There was his tabernacle,—there his temple. Strangers were made welcome to incorporate themselves by circumcision, as individual worshippers, with the “holy nation;” but the system itself was one which did not admit of transference. It was localized in Judea. It was not competent for any other people to institute its rites of worship among themselves. They might individually, worship at a distance the God of Abraham; but it must be “towards his House at Jerusalem.”

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Yet, in this distinctive and peculiar system there was “no respect of persons with God.” Though he had “chosen Israel,” the choice had an ultimate view to the world at large. The system, though itself restricted, was introductory to one that was to be universal. The types and shadows were for the

Jews; the spiritual import of those types and shadows was, in common with the Jews, for mankind. The prophecies relative to the new economy were given and recorded in Israel; the new economy itself was for the whole world. The christian church was not, like the Jewish, to be national, but to be composed of believers out of all nations; these believers, though confined within no circumscribed locality, but scattered over the face of the earth, being united by a spiritual and permanent bond. The spiritual people, and “the better country even the heavenly” of which they are the heirs, and of which many of them have taken possession, were typified, respectively, by the “Israel after the flesh,” and the earthly Canaan, the land of promise, the “land flowing with milk and honey.”—And the constitution of this spiritual church, unlike that of Israel, is framed for universality. The spiritual character of its worship fits it for such universality. Its temple is not on earth, but in Heaven; and Heaven bears the same relation to all the earth alike. Over the whole earth, by the spiritual subjects of the new dispensation, “all one in Christ Jesus,” the God of salvation may be worshipped “in spirit and in truth,”—all turning their eyes and their hearts to the temple above, where “Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.”—And while the spirituality of the new economy fits it for being universal, there is another of its

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attributes which enters also into this adaptation:—
I mean—

3. SIMPLICITY.—This is so appropriate to a spiritual system, that whenever we hear of spirituality, we are prepared to find simplicity. And this quality, accordingly, strikingly pervades the constitution and worship of the church of Christ, as these are brought before us in the New Testament scriptures; and in proportion as, in after times, there has been a departure, in any section of the christian church, from their

original simplicity, there will be found to have been a corresponding departure from spirituality. There is a beautifully consistent harmony between the simplicity of the Saviour's personal appearance on earth, together with the whole manner of his "finishing the work given him to do," and the simplicity of the constitution and ordinances of his spiritual kingdom. In his assumption of our nature, and in his character and doings while in our world, all was divine sublimity; but all, at the same time, was simple and lowly:—

"No earthly beauty shone in him,
To draw the carnal eye."

There was every thing to disappoint the cherished anticipations of the worldly mind; every thing to "stain the pride of human glory," and to show the difference, in the estimate of real grandeur, between the mind of man and the mind of God. The stable of Bethlehem was the place really befitting the incarnation of Deity; not only as being appropriate to the particular purpose for which our nature was assumed, but also as impressing the lesson of the nothingness of all the distinctions of earthly condition, when measured by the infinitude of the Godhead. From

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the beginning to the end of his life, there was an entire absence of all worldly parade. There was a perfect contrast both to the studied magnificence of the princes of this world, and to the external gorgeousness of the Jewish economy.—And of the kingdom which he came to establish, he himself said—"The kingdom of Heaven cometh not with observation"—with outward show—with obtrusion on the senses. Between the history of his life, and the history of the founding of his church after his ascension to heaven, there is a striking and delightful harmony:—and one of the characteristics of both is a divine simplicity,—an unpretending lowliness,—a spiritual anti-worldliness. The Acts of the Apostles

are a suitable sequel to the Gospels; the account of the church, to the account of its founder. There is glory in both; but it is not earthly glory;—it is the glory of principle, the glory of character, the glory of heaven, the glory of God.

The manner in which spirituality, universality, and simplicity characterize the scriptural constitution of the church, will, we trust, be apparent as we advance.

SECTION II.

WHAT IS A CHURCH OF CHRIST?

Words of general import frequently come, in the practice of language, to have definite and restrictive acceptations. Hence it must ever be a very precarious criterion by which to determine the sense of any term at any particular stage in the history of a language, merely to ascertain its etymology, and its strictly etymological import. The application of this

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criterion has led, and cannot fail to lead, to many palpable mistakes. The reduction of a word from a general to a limited and appropriate use may be gradual, and the result of successive circumstances; or it may arise from its happening to be applied, within a particular department, to some one species of the genus which it designates; thus retaining its generic meaning on other occasions, but having a fixed and specific one within that department.—Thus it has been, remarkably, with the word in the New Testament, which we render *church*.^{*} It means, generically, an *assembly*; perhaps, in etymological strictness, a *select* assembly,—an assembly of persons *catted out*, or summoned, for any purpose; but in the *usus loquendi*, it is employed, indiscriminately, for an *assembly*. In this its generic sense, it is applied, in the New Testament history,—(Acts xix. 41)—to the convention at the time of the Demetrian riot at Ephesus, which was a tumultuous concourse of people, of

whom “the greater part knew not wherefore they were come together.”†

* Ἐκκλησία.—In English, we have not adopted the noun; but we have adjectives and adverbs from it, which are as strictly appropriated as the word *church* itself. *Ecclesiastical*, in distinction from civil, denotes invariably what belongs to the *church*:—an *ecclesiastic*, not a man who holds or frequents *assemblies* or *public meetings*, but one connected by office with the *church*.—The word *church* itself has usually been understood to have its derivation from the Greek *κυριακος* to which the Scottish form of the word makes a still nearer approximation,—*kirk*. Archbishop Whately, however, after stating the correspondence between the word *congregation* in the *Old Testament* and the word *church* in the *New*, says respecting the latter—“This, or its equivalent “kirk,” is probably no other than “circle;” i. e. “assembly, Ecclesia.”—“*The Kingdom of Christ delineated,*” etc.—p. 78. Note.

† In the preceding verse—verse 40—it is called a *συστροφη*, or *concourse*; while the word *ἐκκλησία*, which, in the 41st verse, is

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The only inquiry of any real consequence on our present subject, is,—*in what sense, or senses, the word is used in the New Testament scriptures.* It is but a waste and superfluity of critical erudition that does not bear upon this point. It is of little avail learnedly to show what the word *may* mean, when we have it in our power, from the usage of the writers, to demonstrate, with all simplicity and conclusiveness, what it *does* mean.

The word, then, in the New Testament,—when used (as on all occasions it is, and they are very frequent, except the one noticed above) with reference to *social Christianity*,—has *two* significations,—a more comprehensive and a more limited:—

1. In its more comprehensive acceptation, it denotes *the whole body of the faithful,—the entire spiritual “Israel of God.”*—Of this sense of it, we have examples in—Heb. xii. 23, “Ye are come—unto the *church of the first-born*, which are written (or enrolled) in heaven:”*—on which passage it may be noticed that, as distinguished from the “spirits of just men made perfect” subsequently mentioned, the designation probably means the aggregate body of believers

applied to it, is used also in the 39th for the duly convened and

constituted public court, at which causes between plaintiff and defendant were tried,—ἐν τῇ ἐννομῷ ἐκκλησίᾳ—“not,” says Dr. Bloomfield, “a lawful assembly,” but “the regular assembly.” By τῇ κυρίᾳ it is intimated that the present assembly was not such.”

* I have not, with our English translators, taken the πανηγύρες and ἐκκλησία together—the *general assembly and church* of the first-born;” because by some critics of eminence a different punctuation is preferred, according to which the former of the two words is made to belong to the preceding clause, and connected with the “angels.” The discussion of the claims of each arrangement to the preference is irrelevant to my present object.

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on earth; who are “enrolled in heaven,” but are not yet themselves settled there:—Eph. iii. 21. “Unto Him be glory *in the Church*, by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end:”—Eph. v. 23 and 25. “The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of *the Church*:”—“Christ loved *the Church*, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it by the Trashing of water, through the word; that he might present it to himself *a glorious Church*, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish:”—and, in a similar connection, Eph. i. 22, 23, “And gave him to be Head, over all things, *to the Church*; which is his body, the fulness of Him who filleth all in all:”—Col. i. 18, “And He is the head of the body, *the Church*.”—In these latter passages, the *Church* evidently signifies the entire community of the redeemed, in heaven as well as on earth; corresponding to another designation, elsewhere applied to it by the same writer,—“the whole family in heaven and earth”—Eph. iii. 15.* This family, this community, though for the time divided in locality, is one in spirit, and is destined to a union, in “the better country even the heavenly,” perfect, blessed, and eternal.

* Although it is a bible truth that angels are to be united with redeemed men, forming one holy and happy community under Christ as their common Head; yet I see not the propriety of interpreting this passage as if the family in Heaven meant the angels, and the family on earth God’s people amongst men; seeing that, from the time when “righteous Abel” left the earth, the *human* family of God,

consisting of all “washed and sanctified, and justified” sinners of mankind, has been part in heaven and part on earth. By the advocates of an intermediate *Hades*, this of course will be questioned:—but the present is not the place to discuss the point with them.

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2. The more limited acceptance of the word is, at the same time, by much the more frequent in its occurrence. In this acceptance, it denotes *a society of believers in any place*, acknowledging one another in that character, stately meeting together on his own day, in the name of Jesus, for the worship of God, and for the observance of his ordinances; in order to their own spiritual edification, and the promotion of the interests of true religion in the world around them. Of its occurrence in this acceptance, it is unnecessary to quote particular instances. They abound. Bead the New Testament; and you will find no occasion for profound learning or critical acumen, to satisfy you of the uniform consistency, in this respect, of its whole phraseology. When a particular place—a town or city—is spoken of, we have the *church* in that place:—and when a region, or district of country, is referred to, we have the *churches* in that district. Thus we read of the church at Jerusalem, Acts viii. 1; xi. 22—of the church at Antioch, Acts xiii. 1; xiv. 27—of the church at Corinth, 1 Cor. i. 2—of the church at Cenchrea, Rom. xvi. 1—of the church at Philippi, Phil. iv. 15—of the church at Laodicea, Col. iv. 16.—On the other hand, we read of the churches of Galatia, Gal. i. 2; 1 Cor. xvi. 1—of the churches of Macedonia, 2 Cor. viii. 1—of the churches of Syria and Cilicia, Acts xv. 41—of the churches throughout Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, Acts ix. 31—of the church at Ephesus, the church at Smyrna, the church at Pergamos, the church at Thyatira, the church at Sardis, the church at Philadelphia, and the church at Laodicea, as the seven churches of the lesser Asia, Rev. i. 4 and 11:—and, still more generally, we read of

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“the churches,” and “all the churches,” and “all churches of the saints;” where, evidently, societies of the same description, planted and constituted on the same principles, wherever the gospel came and made converts, are intended,—Acts xvi. 4, 5; Rom. xvi. 4; 1 Cor. vii. 17; 1 Cor. xiv. 32; 1 Cor. xi. 16; 2 Cor. xi. 28.

So far as I am aware, no phraseology can be produced from the New Testament, corresponding to that in common use with us, (so common, indeed, that, from the power of habit, we are in danger of forgetting its unscriptural character)—the church of England, the church of Ireland, the church of Scotland, the Dutch church, the Gallican church. Had matters gone on as they began, we should have had, in conformity with the unvarying phraseology of the New Testament, the churches of England, the churches of Ireland, the churches of Scotland, the churches of Holland and of France; as well as of the various counties, shires, provinces, and departments, of each,—the churches of Yorkshire, Lancashire, Lanarkshire, Dumfriesshire, &c,—the churches of Ulster, Leinster, Munster, and Connaught, or of their respective counties;—the churches of the Department of the Alps, of the Pyrennees, of the Seine, of the Rhone, of the Loire, &c.

All this is plain. To the simplest reader of the narratives and epistles of the New Testament, there could be no difficulty in answering either the question, What is *the* church? or the question, What is *a* church?—but for the influence of prepossession and habit.—When *the church* is there spoken of, indefinitely, it means the collective aggregate of believers on earth, or of the saved both on earth and in heaven;

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—and when *a church*,—it signifies any associated section of that aggregate, meeting in one place.

There is no third sense, so far as I can discover, in which the word rendered church, when it has reference at all to the kingdom of Christ, is there used. Other senses, however, have been affixed to it, and New Testament authority has been claimed for them. These, therefore, we must briefly examine.

SECTION III.

UNAUTHORISED USES OF THE WOED CHURCH.

I. Under this head, I have first to notice the designations, of which the use is so common, but so vague,—of the *church visible* and the *church mystical* or *invisible*.—Were these designations to be found in the New Testament, we should feel ourselves under obligation to examine and ascertain the sense in which the inspired writers use them. This, however, not being the case, we are under no such obligation.—I have no objection to admit the distinction between the church visible and the church invisible, as subsisting under the Old Economy, when the Jewish people were, nationally and under the theocracy, the church of God, and when, at the same time, the true spiritual church existed amongst them, consisting of all such as were really possessors of “like precious faith” with Abraham; inasmuch as this is no more than the distinction so frequently insisted upon by the apostle, between Israel after the flesh and Israel after the Spirit,—the natural and the spiritual seed of Abraham. But the national covenant having

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 ceased at the fulness of time, and all succession in nationality having been precluded by the new constitution then given to the church; there may be room for questioning the propriety of the distinctive designations now;—and the more so from the unsettled indefiniteness with which they are employed:—the *visible church*, according to some, meaning “the company of the baptized,” and that company, after the pattern of the Jewish church, consisting of “baptized

nations;”—according to others, with a similar comprehensiveness, only not so directly national, all who profess to hold the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures, and who pass under the common designation of christians;—while according to others still, in no small variety, it is interpreted more or less largely or restrictedly, in correspondence with the laxity or the rigidity of their respective views of christian doctrine and christian communion.

In her nineteenth article,—how far consistently with her own actual constitution and practice I need not stop to inquire,—the Episcopal church of England gives the following definition:—“The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly administered according to Christ’s ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.”—If this is to be understood as meaning, that wherever there is “a congregation of faithful men in which the pure word of God is preached and the ordinances are duly administered,”—there is a portion of the visible church; there does not seem to be much in the definition that is objectionable,—how many soever of the “congregations” of the Anglican Episcopacy, the test, when strictly

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applied, would cut off from the connection with the visible church. Had the language been—“*Churches of Christ are congregations of faithful men,*” &c, it would have been more in harmony with New Testament phraseology; for such, substantially, is the description given by the apostles of those churches to which any of their epistles are addressed.* Had

* Since this was written, I have observed the following note by Archbishop Whately—“Kingdom of Christ,” Ac, p. 116:—“The visible church is,” &c.; but there can be no doubt, I think, that the more correct version from the Latin (the Latin articles appear to have been the original, and the English a translation—in some few instances a careless translation—from the Latin) would have been “A visible church,” &c. The Latin “*Ecclesia Christi visibilis*” would indeed

answer to either phrase, the want of an *article*, definite or indefinite, in that language, rendering it liable to such ambiguity. But the context plainly shows that the writer is not speaking of the universal church, but of particular churches, such as “the churches of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Rome.” The English translator probably either erred from momentary inattention, or (more likely) understood by “Ecclesia,” and by “the church,” the particular church whose articles were before him—the “Church of England.”—So far well. Only his Grace should have recollected that, upon his own showing, “*the Church of England*” is a species of church for which no prototype is to be found in the New Testament. “Generally speaking,” says he, “the apostles appear to have established a distinct church in each considerable city, so that there were several even in a single province, as, for instance, in Macedonia, those of Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Amphipolis, &c.; and the like in the Province of Achaia, and elsewhere.” *Ibid.*, page 105. He elsewhere (page 131) states his conviction that “over each separate church there was appointed by the apostles a single individual as a chief governor, under the title of “*Angel*” (i. e. *messenger*, or *legate* from the apostles), or “*Bishop*,” i. e. *superintendent* or *overseer*.”—and he adds—“A church and a diocese seem to have been for a considerable time co-extensive and identical. And each church or diocese (and consequently each superintendent) though connected with the rest by ties of faith and hope and charity, seems to have been perfectly independent as far as regards any power of control.”—The last observation, the reader will perceive, bears directly on a future part of our discussion.

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they used the designation *the visible church*, I can imagine only two senses, one or other of which must have been attached to it. Here is one of them. The visible church might have meant—the aggregate of these spiritual fellowships,—these “churches of the saints.”—The only other sense in which, in any consistency with the tenor of their writings, I can suppose the phrase to have been used by them,—is, as comprehending all those whose Christianity was visible in their character. The *visible church* would thus be the universal community of *visible christians*:—not, observe, of merely *nominal* christians, but of christians whose character accords with their profession,—who “show their faith by their works.” “When Paul speaks of “all that, in every place, call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours,”—and when he prays—“Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity!”—he gives us his idea of the *visible church*. And, according to

this sense of the designation, there is no such thing, in any strict propriety, as an *invisible* church; inasmuch as, of every genuine believer the faith cannot fail to make itself apparent; so that every one who belongs to the *spiritual* church must belong also to the *visible* church,—what is spiritual in the “inner man” making itself visible in the outer man. True it is, however, that a man may belong to the visible church who does not belong to the spiritual. A profession may be made, and appearances may be assumed, by which the judgment of man may be deceived; the eye of human perspicacity failing to detect either the hypocrisy or the self-deception. And were the designations of *visible* and *invisible*, *external* and *mystical*, always understood with a

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restriction to the difference between *man's* discernment and *God's*;—as meaning no more than that “the Lord knoweth them that are his,” and that of those whom men may pronounce visibly his, there may be not a few whom he sees to be “none of his,”—they would express a distinction which can be questioned by none, and which pervades the bible. But, seeing the designations have not bible authority, and are liable to mischievous abuse, we are safer to keep by the two senses of the word *church* pointed out in the preceding section;—*a Church of Christ* signifying “a congregation of faithful men,”—and *the Church of Christ*, the collective body of his spiritual people.

II. Is the word *church*,—while admitted to mean, in many of its occurrences, a single congregation,—ever used to denote *an association of such congregations,—a number of them, in the same locality, connected by a common government?*—Our episcopalian and presbyterian brethren hold the affirmative. Let us briefly examine the question.

It is not with the government, or system of official authority in the church, that we have at

present to do. An episcopalian, when he contends for the meaning of the word now in question, thinks of a number of congregations in a place as united under a diocesan bishop;—while a presbyterian thinks of the same congregations as under the superintendence of a presbytery. Our simple inquiry now is, whether the sense affixed by both to the word *church*—namely, of a *number of congregations, in one body, and under a common government*, is borne out by satisfactory instances.—The only argument, so far as I am aware, by which the affir-

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mative is maintained, is an indirect one. It is alleged, that in regard to some localities, respecting which the word *church* is used in the singular, the number of the disciples was by much too great to admit the supposition of their constituting one congregation only. This has been alleged of different places. We shall take the strongest case. It is that of *Jerusalem*. There the publication of the gospel began. The success was delightfully great. The terms in which the progressive increase of the church is recorded are very strong. To the hundred and twenty disciples before the day of pentecost, there were added on that day three thousand:—afterwards “the Lord added to them daily of the saved:”*—even so many as “five thousand men” (evidently exclusive of the other sex, of whom the number is not stated) were converted on one occasion:t—subsequently still, “the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly:”—and at a later period occurs the language of James and the elders, to Paul—“Thou seest, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who believe!”—The question is,—*how could such multitudes form only a single congregation?*—The question is a natural and a fair one. In meeting it, I would not be such a recreant to the claims of candour, as to deny all difficulty. I am far from thinking

* Acts ii. 47, "The Lord added to the Church daily *τοῦα σωζομενων.*"

† I am aware that by some the passage here referred to—Acts iv. 4,—is interpreted as meaning that, by the number of converts then added, the previous aggregate came to amount to five thousand. Candour, however, will not allow me to lessen the difficulty of my case by adopting an interpretation which has always appeared to me unnatural, and which, to any one who participates in the joy of heaven over repentant sinners, cannot but be undesirable.

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the case free of it:—nor, at the same time, do I conceive it indispensable, in such a case, that we be able so to explain, as that no difficulty whatever shall be left. We shall see that there is a difficulty more formidable on the other side.—Neither would I lock up my heart, and restrain the flow of pleasure with which every christian must contemplate the widening success of "the preaching of the cross,"—trying, for the sake of an argument relative to the external order of the church, as much as possible to reduce numbers, which a becoming desire for its spiritual extension should rejoice to understand in their most enlarged amount.—But let us see how the case, in regard to our argument, actually stands. Observe,

1. If there were in Jerusalem a number of distinct christian congregations, each with its own office-bearers,—it is surely a very extraordinary thing that, through the entire course of the narrative, or of the epistles, not a single hint of such a plurality should be discoverable. If so it was, is it not natural to conclude that so it would have, been represented?—There was no difficulty in expressing it. Why, then, was it not expressed?

2. We have already seen that, invariably, whenever a place is mentioned, we have the singular—*church*, and whenever a district, the plural—*churches*. Here, then, is a dilemma. If the *church* at Jerusalem means a number of congregations in one,—then does *each* of the churches in Judea mean a number of congregations in one?—and, if not—if *each* of the churches in Judea means *one congregation*, on what principle is

the church at Jerusalem to be interpreted as meaning *more*? If it be admitted,—and how can it be denied?—that each of the churches in Judea means a single

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congregation,—then, if there were many congregations in Jerusalem, why are they not called *churches* too?—Why this distinction between the phraseology regarding a city, and the phraseology regarding a district?

3. In the only account on record of the election and ordination of office-bearers in the church at Jerusalem, the election, agreeably to apostolic decision and order, is *by* the whole body of the disciples, and the ordination is *for* the whole. I refer to the election and ordination of the seven deacons, Acts vi.—On that occasion, “the twelve called *the multitude of the disciples* unto them;” and *to the whole*, when thus convened, they said—“Look ye out among you seven men of honest report and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business”—namely the “serving of tables,” or providing for the poor.—If there were various congregations, why should there not be deacons for each?—and if, as some conjecture, the different congregations were according to the different foreign languages spoken by Jews from different countries, we might ask with the greater emphasis, why, when the complaint which led to the appointment of deacons was by the *Grecians* against the *Hebrews* for the neglect of their widows, why was not this neglect, and the possibility of repeated complaint, prevented for the future, by the congregations of the *Grecians* having *deacons of their own*?—The argument, indeed, from the case in the sixth chapter of the Acts is twofold. We have, first of all, in the fact of their actually meeting in one assembly, a proof that they *could* meet in one assembly:—they *did*,—therefore they *could*,—being a kind of proof which few, one should think, will except against.—And we have, secondly, the fact of the officers being chosen

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by the whole *for* the whole, and ordained *over* the whole.—And this leads me to notice—

4. There is a continuance, throughout the whole history, of the same phraseology about their meeting in one assembly. It is uniform. Without referring to any passages in which it may be disputed whether the reference is to the disciples generally, or to the apostles in particular,—we have, in Acts ii. 44, “All that believed”—that is the hundred and twenty and the three thousand mentioned just before,—“*were together*”;—nor is there the remotest intimation of more congregations than one, when of this company it is said—verse 42—“they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers:”—then in Acts vi. 2, “The multitude of the disciples” called together by the apostles, for a special purpose of common interest, the appointment of deacons:—in Acts xv. 12, at the meeting relative to the point of inquiry and reference from Antioch, “*all the multitude*” keeping silence, and giving audience to Paul and Barnabas, and “*the whole church*” concurring in the resolution to “send chosen men” along with Paul and Barnabas, to Antioch; and “*the brethren*” joined with the apostles and elders in the decision and in the message:—and further on still, in Acts xxi. 20–22, at the very time when James and the elders speak of the “many myriads* of Jews who believed,” we find them saying “*the multitude must needs come together*; for they will hear that thou art come.”

Thus, then, stands *the fact*. There is not one word in the entire narrative, indicating the existence of

* “Thousands” in our English translation; “myriads” in the original.—The passage will come to be noticed soon again.

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distinct congregations;—at every stage of its progress, there are express notices of one assembly;—

this one assembly is called the church;—there can be no doubt of there having been one assembly at the outset, and, since no intimation is given, even to the close of the narrative, of any change in the meaning of the word, important as that change would have been, we must deny the right to *suppose* such a change,—and the more so, that this use of the word church is in agreement with its meaning in all other places.—The *fact*, then, standing thus, how stands the *argument*? We have the fact on inspired record, that “the multitude of the disciples” met together:—we have, in opposition to this, the affirmation of our presbyterian brethren that their so meeting was impossible. Our brethren say, they *could not*:—the inspired historian says they *did*. Here, then, is a balance of difficulties. Suppose we grant that to us there is difficulty in the supposition of numbers so large coming together in one stated assembly;—the difficulty is surely not less in supposing an inspired writer to affirm as a matter of fact what was an impossibility, and what therefore, as an impossibility, never took place!—Between these two difficulties I dare not hesitate. It is a hazardous thing to place conjectural impossibility in opposition to recorded fact; especially when the authority recording it is that of inspiration. The course, surely, which, in such a case, most becomes us, is, since we cannot deny the fact, to consider whether there be any circumstances by which the difficulty it seems to present may be removed, or at least mitigated. This is clearly the natural and proper procedure. If our presbyterian brethren smile at our credulity in believing that the

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many thousands could meet in one place for the ordinary purposes of their worship,—we cannot exactly return the smile; we rather look grave to see them treating that as credulity which is no more than the belief of the divine record. We take the fact as we find it, and believe, that, if we only had more infor-

mation, the difficulty would disappear, and the conviction follow that it was a difficulty *only to us*. Further than this I do not feel myself bound to go. It is not necessary to my argument that I should solve the difficulty, and make the possibility of such numerous assemblies obvious. I have already disowned the heartless course of trying to make the numbers of converts as small as possible. But still, there *are* considerations, in mitigation of the difficulty, which it would be wrong to overlook.

1. We have seen, that the inspired historian does, on various occasions, mention the assembling of "the whole multitude" of the disciples in Jerusalem in one place. On these occasions the fact is stated, without the remotest hint of any difficulty existing. The probability, therefore, is, that there existed none.

2. It is matter of notoriety, that the Jews were accustomed to assemblies of vastly larger numbers of people, even on ordinary occasions, than we are; and that the precincts of the temple admitted of such assemblies. We need not go to Josephus, or any other uninspired authority, for this. We may take one of the very passages in the Acts of the Apostles, that is usually adduced against us, as sufficient proof of it—Acts iv. 4, "Howbeit, many of them who heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand."—Our brethren twit us with the question—how could these five thousand,

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and the previous three thousand, and the many that continued to be "added unto them," meet in one place? But what, I would ask in return, must have been the number of the congregation addressed by Peter and John on this occasion, when in that congregation, the *male converts alone* amounted to five thousand! There is not the least likelihood, that this "five thousand" was any more than a comparatively small fraction of the entire auditory; while that auditory might be a fraction no larger of the

vast aggregate of people that were wont to crowd to Jerusalem at the public festivals;—an aggregate, according to the Jewish historian, amounting, with the resident inhabitants, to from two to three millions. And yet this vast auditory, the preceding chapter informs us, was collected in “the porch that was called Solomon’s.” A stated assembly, therefore, even of many thousands, though strange to us, might have, and probably had, little in it at all extraordinary to them.

3. Without feeling either need or wish to diminish the number of converts belonging to Jerusalem, it must not be overlooked that the impression would be a very erroneous one, were it conceived that on all occasions where numbers are mentioned, they include only resident inhabitants of the city. It was otherwise at the very outset; the audiences on the day of pentecost, when the three thousand were converted, consisting of Jews “out of every nation under heaven.” The mention made too of “many myriads of believing Jews,” in Acts xxi. 20, has reference to the time of a public festival, when, being “all zealous of the law,” this very zeal, and the anxiety to show it under their new profession, would bring

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them from all Judea and from their more distant residences. There is no evidence,—there is everything the opposite of evidence,—that these “myriads” were meant to include only the members of the church in Jerusalem.

But, be these things as they may, they are mentioned, not as being at all necessary to my argument.—That argument lies in the short compass already stated. The narrative repeatedly and expressly affirms of “the church in Jerusalem,”—“the multitude of the disciples,”—“the whole multitude,”—that they came together in one place, that they met in one body: surely it cannot be necessary to my believing this, that I should be able to tell with cer-

tainty *where* and *how*; to ascertain the place, and prove its suitableness and convenience! On the authority of the Book which contains it, I am prepared to believe greater difficulties than this; being persuaded that it is one which arises solely from deficiency of information,—and that deficiency itself from the difficulty not having been felt by the writers, but being one of after times and other countries.

When a difficulty has been once assumed, nothing is easier than to theorize upon it, to almost any extent. The same difficulty has been started with regard to *Ephesus*. In that Asiatic city, the narrative in the Acts informs us, the ministry of Paul was signally successful. After the record of one of his miracles, and of the disgraceful failure of an attempt at imitation, it is added:—“And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of

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them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.” Acts xix. 17–20. “Compare with this,” it has been said, “the facts that they had then no large public buildings for divine worship;—that the pagan authorities were too jealous of their own fostered superstitions, and too powerful, to allow the believers in Jesus of Nazareth to carry on their worship in one large company in the open street;—and ask, what must have been the consequences to the christians? Where and how could their increasing multitudes have worshipped the Lord their God?” &c.*—“Thus,” it is added, “*a multiplication of congregations* was rendered inevitable. This is the first step.”—And a first step should be a sure one, when so much is to be made of it. This

multiplicity of congregations furnishes, very conveniently, a *diocese*; and the “angel of the church of Ephesus” becomes a *diocesan bishop*. And then it follows, that since there is an angel to each of the other six churches in Asia, each of these churches must needs have been a diocese too, with a diocesan bishop over the inferior clergy of its more or less numerous congregations. So that there is nothing wanting to complete the system of episcopacy, but an archbishop of Asia, comprehending all the seven under his archiepiscopal jurisdiction,†—And all this

* M’Neile’s “Lectures on the Church of England.”—pp. 37, 38.

† Mr. M’Neile, indeed, with much adroitness, turns the absence of such a dignitary over the bishops of the Asiatic dioceses into an argument against *poper*y:—“In his (our Lord’s) address to seven angels of seven churches in Asia, we have his sanction for the subdivision,

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is inferred, without the least hint of doubt or difficulty, although of all the seven cities, which were the localities of the seven churches in Asia, not one is so much as mentioned in the inspired narrative, excepting Ephesus;* so that we are absolutely without the slightest information about the introduction of the gospel into any one of them, or of the amount of its subsequent success. But from the solitary case of Ephesus the conclusion is drawn, that in each of these cities, as well as there, there was the same difficulty of accommodation for the augmenting multitude of converts, the same subdivision into various congregations, and the same union of these congregations in one church or ecclesiastical diocese.—How very much from how very little! How very little, even as to the one case of Ephesus itself! That there were more believers there than could assemble in one place, is an affirmation resting on no direct ground, but only on hypothetical difficulties, of whose

the geographical subdivision, of episcopal superintendance; and more than this, we have the foreseen usurpation of a primacy, or universal bishop over the whole church, pointedly condemned. There is an angel over all the pastors in *Ephesus*: this excludes independency.

There is not an angel over all the pastors in *Asia*:—this excludes popery?”—Were the seven churches in the lesser *Asia* “*the whole church?*” How should the absence of an “angel over all the pastors in *Asia*” “pointedly condemn” only “a *universal bishop* over the *whole church?*” Did it not equally condemn an archbishop over any section of the church?—the archbishops of Canterbury and York, equally with the Pope of Rome?

* *Thyatira* indeed is mentioned in Acts xvi. 14, but only as the place to which Lydia, then resident at Pbilippi, belonged. In the narrative of the progress of the gospel it is not found.—*Laodicia* too is mentioned in Paul’s epistle to the Colossians, as a place which had received the gospel, and where there were believers; but of the first preaching of the truth there, and the number of the converts, we have no record.

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amount very different estimates may be formed by different minds. All the direct evidence lies the other way. We have seen that the ordinary use of the word *church* is for a single congregation; and that there is no certain instance of its signifying an association of such congregations:—and to this may be added, that when Paul summoned “*the Elders*” of this church to meet him at Miletus, he addressed them all as *bishops*; not one as bishop, and the rest as the clergy of his diocese, the pastors of their respective congregations,—but all under the common designation of bishops,—Acts xx. 28,—fellow-presbyters and fellow-bishops of the same church.—The only instance in which any of the other seven churches of *Asia* is mentioned elsewhere than in the book of Revelation, is certainly not one that favours the notion of its having consisted of a variety of congregations, but evidently, on the contrary, that of its having been a church in the ordinary use of the word. It is Col. iv. 15,16—“*Salute the brethren who are in Laodicea,*—and when this epistle is read *among you,* cause that it be read also *in the church of the Laodiceans.*”

There is only another instance which I have seen alleged in proof of the word *church* having the sense of a number of associated congregations. It is 1 Cor. i. 2, compared with 1 Cor. xiv. 34.—In the former of these passages, it has been said, “*the church of God*

which is at Corinth” is addressed collectively; and yet, from the latter, that church appears to have consisted of more than one:—“Let *your* women keep silence in *the churches*.”—To this it is sufficient to reply—That the two epistles to the Corinthians, though addressed, no doubt, primarily to the church

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in Corinth, happen, both of them, to have much more general inscriptions;—that of the second being “to the church of God which is at Corinth, with *all the saints which are in all Achaia*;”—and that of the first more comprehensive still,—the most comprehensive, indeed, in any of the epistles, either of Paul or of the other apostles—“to the church of God which is at Corinth, *with att that, in every place, oaU upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours*.”—It is surely no matter of wonder, that in such an epistle he should be found speaking at one time more restrictedly, and at another more largely and generally. That the church at Corinth itself consisted of but one assembly, is sufficiently clear, not from the correspondence merely of the use of the word when so understood with its ordinary use in other places,—but from the express language of the epistle respecting the meetings of the church. Thus, in the very connexion in which the words under consideration occur, we find, at verse 23,—“If therefore, *the whole church be come together into one place*, and all speak with tongues, and there come in the unlearned or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?”—These words have obvious reference to the meetings of the one church at Corinth;—while verse 34, refers to the churches in general, as included in the more extended address of the epistle.—Thus, too, in 1 Cor. xi. 17, 18, 20, “Now, in this that I declare unto you, I praise you not, that ye *come together*, not for the better, but for the worse:—for, first of all, when ye come together *in the church*, I hear that there be divisions among you:—when

ye *come together*, therefore, *into one place*, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper;" &c.—In speaking of un-

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authorized uses of the word church, I have not thought it worth while to notice the application of it, now so common with us, *to places of worship*. The passage last mentioned is the only one in the New Testament where there is the slightest possibility of its being so understood. Their "coming together *in the church*," however, will by no reasonable critic be so interpreted. There is no evidence of the word having so early come to be used in this acceptation. The meaning plainly is, their coming together *in assembly*,*—in their *collective* or *church capacity*;—the same as when it is added, in the 20th verse, "when, therefore, ye come together *into one place*." No word here of different congregations. There is one church—one assembly.

III. I mention, thirdly, as the last but not the least important of what I conceive to be unauthorized uses of the word *church*—the application of it to the *office-holders of the church apart from the brethren*,—or, as it is usually expressed, to the *church representative*.

That the word *church* means, in some of its occurrences, the congregation of believers independently of its officers, is clear. When it is said, Acts xiv. 23, "They ordained them elders in every church," nothing can be more evident than that the churches in which these elders were ordained were churches previously to their ordination. There was "something wanting" in them, which was thus "set in order;" but in each case the body of believers constituted the church; the "elders" (whatever was the office designated by the term, a point to be afterwards dis-

* ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ. The article is rejected by the principal critics. Not that even this is at all necessary to the sense in which we understand it

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cussed) being chosen by the church, and ordained over it.—Now it does not seem very likely, *a priori*, that the same word should be used to denote not only the body of believers apart from their officers, but also their officers apart from them. We ask for examples of this use of the word in the New Testament. We are directed to Matt, xviii. 15–17. In this important passage, our Lord lays down the law for his disciples in cases of private trespass,—of one of them having aught against another. The law itself does not come under our present notice. We have now to do only with the last step in the process—“Tell it unto the church;” and even here only with the question—What is meant by *the church*, to which lies the final appeal?

In answer, then, to this inquiry, I would, first of all, observe, what seems a fair rule of general criticism,—that in any particular passage, a word should be understood in the sense in which it is commonly used, unless reasons of necessity, or, at the least of strong propriety, can be shown for understanding it otherwise. We have formerly pointed out the two senses of the word church that are prevalent in the New Testament,—namely, the universal spiritual community of the faithful, and any particular congregation of believers. It is needless to spend time in showing that, in the passage under review, it is not in the former of these senses that the word is used. It seems, then to be a fair and reasonable sequence, that it ought to be understood in the latter,—unless a third sense, *established by usage*, can be pointed out, and cause shown why it should in this case have the preference. Can such a third sense, then, thus established, be produced? Unless it can, we are entitled

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to regard the affirmation that such third sense is its sense here as no better than a *begging of the question*;

unless another point can be made out,—namely, that there is in the nature of the thing what precludes the possibility of its ordinary sense being its sense here.—We observe, then,—

1. That, while no previous proof is attempted of the word *church* meaning in other instances the representative officers of the church,—*neither can any necessity whatever be shown for so understanding it here.* Is there anything whatever contradictory, impracticable, or even involving the smallest difficulty, in the idea of telling the matter to *the particular christian society*, with which the parties—the offended and the offender—stand connected? Certainly, nothing. It is done amongst independents, when they act up to their principles, every time such cases occur. There is not the remotest pretence of difficulty, in practically following out the direction according to Dr. Campbell's candid rendering of the words—"acquaint the congregation with it." And it is remarkable, that he prefers the word *congregation* here to *church*, for the very reason of its rendering what he conceives the proper meaning the more explicit. Dr. M'Kerrow, too, in his Prize Essay on the office of Buling Elder, makes the same candid admission with Dr. Campbell:—"I consider it a fair interpretation of the word 'ἐκκλησία' in this passage, to view it as descriptive of a *christian* assembly, an assembly of professing christians. In this sense, the term is generally, though not always, to be understood in the New Testament. I am aware that some limit the term in this place to an assembly of office-bearers, and consider it as equivalent to the word

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session or *presbytery*. Others extend the meaning of it to all the members of a worshipping society, and consider it as equivalent to the word *congregation*. This latter meaning is the one, which, after a careful examination of the authorities on both sides, I am inclined to adopt."—pages 42, 48. This, I say, is

candid. I am sorry I cannot say the same for what immediately follows:—"But the question occurs,—What kind of congregation does it denote?—not certainly a congregation *without rulers*; but a congregation consisting of two classes of persons, namely, the private members and the elders. The scriptural proof in support of this statement, I shall afterwards more fully adduce."—In adducing it he did a very useless thing. Who ever denied his position? My friend surely knows better, than to suppose independents to understand the *church* or *congregation* here as meaning the brethren, *without* and *independently* of their office-bearers. No, certainly. For although, in such special cases as when the apostles and evangelists are said to have "ordained elders in every church," the word has this meaning, the churches being in existence before the elders were set apart over them; yet they understood the word *church* as signifying, strictly and properly, *a christian society organized with its appropriate officers*, according to the mind of Christ, and as fulfilling its functions accordingly.—I am glad, therefore, to find Dr. M'K. thus, inadvertently, (to use the very convenient term of our Scottish Church Courts) *homologating* independency. This leads me to mention—

2. That in the passage *a rule of duty* is prescribed. Now, the very first and most essential requisite in such a rule, is *explicitness and precision*.—Could any—

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 thing, then, have been easier, had such been our Lord's meaning, than to have mentioned the presbytery, or the rulers of the congregation, as the court of final appeal? Why use the single word *church*—*ἐκκλησία*—in a sense that was even ambiguous, when all ambiguity might have been at once, and so easily avoided?—The first and the second steps of the process are stated with all imaginable explicitness. On the supposition of the word *church* being used

in its ordinary acceptation, so is the last:—but not otherwise.

3. I am aware, that a good deal has been made of a supposed allusion to *the Jewish synagogues*, and to the constitution and practice of discipline in them.—As to this, I would observe—

First, that the allusion is at best little more than conjectural,—doctors in theology of high repute strenuously denying it, whilst others as strenuously maintain it;—and that it is hazardous, and can never be satisfactory, especially in a matter of authority and of duty, to build much upon conjectures, and points of “doubtful disputation.” Whatever probability there may be supposed in the conjecture, there is no certainty: and the obligation of what rests upon it cannot be distinctly and imperatively felt. No ground of probability can be previously established, that the constitution of christian churches would be modelled after that of Jewish synagogues. Yet unless such previous probability can be made good, it is very obvious that the argument from the alleged allusion halts. For observe:—to determine whether there be such allusion at all, and how far it reaches, we must first, in our own minds, have ascertained the point of fact respecting the actual

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constitution of these churches. But, when we have once ascertained this, the supposed allusion becomes useless. We find out the allusion by first finding out the point itself which the allusion should have helped us to discover. We discover the allusion from the fact, and then prove the fact from the allusion.—And, further, when we have found out the conformity so far as it at all exists, we have no liberty or right whatever to press that conformity one jot beyond the boundary fixed by the record of apostollic precept and example.—But,—*Secondly*, it is on the ground of this very allusion that Dr. Campbell translates it here “congregation.” He

shows that the Hebrew word, in the Old Testament, which is rendered in the Septuagint by ἐκκλησια, “is used in two different but related senses”—the one, “a whole nation, considered as constituting one commonwealth or polity; in which sense the people of Israel are denominated *πασα ἡ ἐκκλησια Ἰσραηλ* and *πασα ἡ ἐκκλησια Θεου*: the other a particular *congregation* or *assembly*, either actually convened, or accustomed to convene, in the same place.” “In this sense,” he continues, “it was applied to those who were wont to assemble in any particular synagogue; for every synagogue had its own ἐκκλησια. And, as the word συναγωγή was sometimes employed to signify, not the house, but the people, these two Greek words were often used promiscuously. Now, as the nature of things sufficiently shows, that our Lord, in this direction, could not have used the word in the first of the two senses above given, and required that every private quarrel should be made a national affair, we are under the necessity of understanding it in the last, as regarding the particular

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congregation to which the party belonged. What adds great probability to this, as Lightfoot and others have observed, is the evidence we have that the like usage actually obtained in the synagogue and in the primitive church. Whatever foundation, therefore, there may be, from those books of scripture that concern a later period, for the notion of a church representative; it would be contrary to all the rules of criticism, to suppose that our Lord uses this word in a sense wherein it could not then be understood by any one of his hearers; or that he would say *congregation*, for so the word literally imports, when he meant only a few heads or directors.”*—*Thirdly*, the word for *church* (as Campbell, indeed, in the above citation, hints) when it was used of the synagogue, never signified the *rulers of the synagogue*. There was a distinct and appropriate term for them,

which, had it been our Lord's intention that the then future government of his church should be a representative one, and that complaints were, by aggrieved parties, to be laid before the rulers of the churches alone, and by them decided, he most assuredly would have used. That appropriate word was *the presbytery*:—and if it be said, that “Tell it unto the church” or assembly, might be used for “Tell it to the presbytery,”—we reply, it is not, to say the least of it, very likely, that a figure of speech, of doubtful import, would be used in a rule demanding explicitness and clear intelligibility. Who would ever think of saying to a presbyterian, Tell it to *the congregation*, when the idea intended to be conveyed was, Tell it to *the session*?

* Campbell on the Four Gospels:—Note on Matt xviii. 17.

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I am unable, for my own part, to see the necessity for any such allusion. Dr. Campbell says—“I know no way of reaching the sense of our Lord's instructions, but by understanding his words so as they must have been understood by his hearers, *from the use that then prevailed.*” But this proceeds on an assumption which cannot be admitted,—namely, that the instructions which were given by our Lord, during his life-time on earth, must all have been distinctly apprehended by his disciples at the time. Now, this was not, by any means, the case, with regard to his *doctrines*;—and why must we conceive it to have been the case with respect to the future *constitution of his kingdom*,—or the *laws* of the churches of which that kingdom was to consist? Why not regard our divine Master as then speaking for *the future*, and in this as in some other matters, reserving the clear and full understanding of his words till the time when the Holy Spirit was to “lead them into all truth?” That our Lord ought to be regarded as thus speaking for the future,—that is, as laying down a rule for his own

kingdom,—the previous context clearly shows:—the entire discourse and conversation recorded in the chapter having arisen out of the question, in the first verse of it, put to him by his disciples—“Who is the greatest *in the kingdom of heaven?*” We are sufficiently aware, that, when they asked this question, they were very far from attaching right conceptions to their own words,—from having any just notions about the true nature of that kingdom. Why, then, is it to be supposed, that at that time they must have clearly understood the directions given to them about the principles and practices of its future administration? In this way, the precise meaning of

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the words of the Lord will fall to be ascertained from the subsequent record of apostolic practice, and from the counsels given by apostolic authority. A rule is laid down by the Master *prospectively*, for the subjects of his own spiritual kingdom; and the terms employed by him ought to be understood according to the sense in which they are afterwards, by his inspired and commissioned vice-gerents, applied to the constitution and transactions of the New Testament church.—And thus we are still left to inquire, on what occasions *they* are found using the word *church* for the *church's* rulers, or in the sense of a christian congregation, or christian congregations, *as represented in the persons of their office-bearers?* If there was an allusion at all to the synagogues, it is obvious that the extent of the allusion, the amount of conformity meant by it, must be ascertained by an appeal to the subsequent historical records and inspired Directory.

4. Make the supposition, that in the word *ἐκκλησία*—*church*,—there *is* an allusion to the synagogue, and make the further supposition, that by the church is meant its rulers, as the authoritative tribunal of appeal;—let it be specially observed, that, be the allusion what it may, the *ἐκκλησία*, the church, is

the *final* appeal. We are reminded by our presbyterian brethren, that “there was a right of appeal from the determination of the rulers of a particular synagogue to their great sanhedrim, or council of seventy,” and thus the supposed allusion is made one of the stones in the basis of their *courts of review*; so that “as in Jewish courts, it is the elders alone who are entitled to govern a particular congregation, and these again are subject to the authoritative

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review of other courts, who can either affirm or reverse their decisions.”*—Thus, in the simple words “tell it to the church” must be included—not only the figure by which the congregation means the session, but the whole series of subsequent appeals, from session to presbytery, from presbytery to synod, from synod to general assembly. Now, this is most unfortunate. For if there be an allusion to the synagogue,—nay if the *ἐκκλησία* even means the synagogue,—then, whether the judgment was to be pronounced by that *ἐκκλησία* collectively, or by its rulers exclusively,—it is, on either supposition, *enjoined to be final*:—“if he neglect to hear the church—the *ἐκκλησία*,—let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” Where is “the great sanhedrim, or council of seventy,” here? The process stops at the *ἐκκλησία*; and if the *ἐκκλησία* means, allusively, the synagogue,—then not only is there no authority for going higher,—for going, under the same allusion, to the sanhedrim;—there is an express interdiction of every thing of the kind. For it is not pretended that the sanhedrim is included in the *ἐκκλησία*; the supreme Jewish council and court of judgment included in every synagogue.—And where, then, in this passage, is to be found the authority for courts of review in the christian church?

What has thus been said belongs, perhaps, more appropriately to a subsequent branch of our inquiry—the *government* of the church: but thus much

seemed necessary, in reply to the allegation of the word *church* meaning *church representative*, or the rulers without the people.

* Dr. Brown's Vindication of the presbyterlan form of church government—Letter VI. page 99, Ed. 1806.

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But it may be said, I have gone too far in insinuating that in the New Testament there is no other instance of the church meaning exclusively the rulers of the church, from which a warrant can be pleaded for so interpreting it in the passage we have just had under review. There is another referred to. I had not forgotten it. It is an instance, which would not probably occur to many readers of their bibles;—but, *reckerchee* as it is, and requiring not a little ingenious argumentation to make it good, we shall not, on that account, object to it, if we find the argumentation fair and solid, as well as ingenious.—It is to be found in Acts viii. 1-3, “And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.”

An *only* case should be a very obvious and decisive one; especially when much is made to depend upon it. Dr. Brown says—“It” (the word church) “appears even sometimes to mean the office-bearers of the church as distinguished from the members.” Having said this, his “*sometimes*” resolves itself into *this one instance*:—and having adduced it, he adds—“Here, then, is one instance, in which, it would seem, that by the church we are certainly to understand its office-bearers as distinguished from its members.”—The form of expression in the first of

these sentences—“appears *even* sometimes to mean”—evidently implies the writer’s being sensible that,

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if the word ever really had the sense ascribed to it, the cases were anomalous and rare. Had there been another which he could have produced, we should, beyond a doubt, have had it. This one instance, then, we are warranted to regard as, by the writer’s admission, standing unsupported by any other. Even with respect to it—the qualifying terms—“*it appears*” and “*it would seem*”—do not indicate a perfect freedom from hesitation. He employs also, however, the word “*certainly:*”—and we are now to examine the argument by which the alleged certainty is maintained. It is given as follows:—The argument—“that by the church here specified, who were all scattered abroad except the apostles, is intended only the ministers, and not the members, appears to be most probable”—(what has become of the certainty?)—“not only from this, that the ministers would be more readily marked out as the first objects of their vengeance by the enemies of Christianity, and that all those who are mentioned of them who were scattered abroad, as Philip, (ver. 5,) and Simeon, and Lucius, and Manaen (chap. xiii. 1,) were of this description; but that, even after it is affirmed here that *all* the church were scattered abroad *except the apostles*, it is asserted in the third verse, that *a church still remained* different from the former, and a church which Saul persecuted, and the men and the women of which, entering into their houses, he committed to prison. But if *the whole* of the church referred to in verse 1, as we are informed, were scattered abroad *except the apostles*; and if, at the same time it be instantly subjoined that there was still a church after this left at Jerusalem, of which those alone are mentioned who were not ministers; is it not obvious,

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that in the former verse, the church who are spoken of, and are declared to have been *all* scattered abroad except the apostles, can have been the ministers only of that church?*"

What is there to which the aspect of plausibility may not, by a little ingenuity, be given? I cannot but think a system must be somewhat "hard beset and hungry," when, on so vital a point, this is all the support it can find for itself;—when this solitary instance alone can be culled from all the books of the New Testament, in proof of the church meaning the *church representative*,—the *rulers without the members*.—Let the reader observe—

1. How very arbitrary a change in the -sense of the "word *church* is, by this hypothesis, rendered necessary in verse 3, from its use in verse 1. In the latter occurrence of it (that in verse 3,) there can be no hesitation about its meaning:—"As for Saul, he made havock of *the church*," &c. Nothing short of the most imperative necessity is sufficient to vindicate so sudden a transition in the meaning of so common a word; especially when one of the senses assigned to it (that alleged in verse 1,) is a sense which belongs to it no where else. In the present instance, I know of no necessity that can be pleaded, but the necessity of a system pressed hard for support; a species of necessity, which on every side of every controversy is apt to make way for itself, and to pass itself off for something better than it is, where it ought to have no place allowed it, but to be jealously shut out. What ordinary reader, on finding it recorded in the first sentence of a chapter, that

* Brown's Vindication, &c., pp. 89, 90.

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"there was a great persecution of the church in Jerusalem," and in the next (for the second verse here may be regarded as parenthetical) that "Saul

made havock of the church," would ever imagine that in the one case the church meant the elders without the members, and in the other the members without the elders? Would he not, without one moment's hesitancy, understand it in both occurrences as meaning the whole body of believers, including both teachers and taught?—Yes;—and rightly:—for

2. If in the first verse, when it is said "There was a great persecution against the church," the church means the elders exclusively of the brethren,—as it must, if it means anything to the purpose of the argument,—then it must follow, that of this "great persecution" *the elders alone* were the objects. If they are here the church, then they alone were persecuted. The persecution was against "*the church*;" and by means of the persecution "*they*" (the church) "were all scattered abroad." The persecution and the dispersion are co-extensive. They relate to the same persons. If they who were *scattered* were the elders alone, then they who were *persecuted* were the elders alone. There is no avoiding this conclusion. And yet the conclusion cannot be true. It is contradicted by the very nature of the thing;—it is contradicted by the designation given to it, of a "great persecution;"—and it is contradicted by the further description of it which immediately follows in the third verse:—"As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women; committed them to prison." To represent this as if it related to a distinct persecution from that in the first verse,—or

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even to represent it as descriptive only of what was *subsequent* to the scattering of *all* that were the objects of the persecution in the first verse, is most unreasonable. It is manifestly only a statement of *the part which Saul acted* in the *same* persecution. That it was the same persecution, and that Saul, by his characteristic violence, contributed his full share to

the dispersion which it effected, is implied in what is immediately subjoined—"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." The dispersion was the result of the persecution in which "Saul made havoc of the church." This is the more evident, from the connexion of the persecution with Stephen's martyrdom, and the immediate association of it with Saul's name:—"Now Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem." Saul was doubtless one of the originators of the persecution, and one of the most furious agents in carrying it on; and the third verse is only a more detailed account of the manner in which he did so. And accordingly, while the dispersed are said to have been "scattered abroad by the persecution which arose about Stephen," (Acts xi. 19,) it is of *that* persecution that Saul afterwards says—(chap. xxii. 19, 20,) "Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: and when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him."—But

3. While, on such grounds, it seems most unreasonable to pretend to fasten a charge of contradiction upon independents, by speaking of "a church as still

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 remaining different from the former, and a church which Saul persecuted," *after* all the church in the first verse had been scattered abroad,—there is no less unreasonableness in the strictly literal interpretation of the word *all*; as if the phrase "they were all scattered abroad" must necessarily signify, that of those who are mentioned as the objects of the persecution *not one was left behind*.—But every one knows in how very general and indefinite a sense *all* is frequently used. To take a single example. In Matt. iii. 5, 6, it is said respecting the ministry of John the

Baptist—"There went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins?" No man in his senses will ever suppose that there was not an inhabitant left remaining in city or country. Every one understands the meaning simply to be, that the people went out *in very great numbers*. This is the more evident, from the comparative statement given as to Jesus. The disciples of John said to their Master—"Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold the same baptizeth, and *all* come unto him." John iii. 26. And yet in the beginning of the immediately subsequent chapter, it is mentioned as a matter of public notoriety, that "Jesus made and baptized *more disciples than John*."—Why, then, is the *all* to be taken in its strict literality in the instance under consideration? Why should it be understood as signifying more than that the disciples,—both rulers and members, were dispersed *in very great numbers*?—Even if "ministers of the word," or "elders of the church," had been distinctly mentioned, as the antecedent to the statement, there would have been no necessity for

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so understanding that statement as that not an individual was left in Jerusalem. This itself would have been a very unlikely thing; that *they alone*,—they whose immediate and divinely committed trust it was to "take heed unto all the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers," and who could not but feel a special responsibility attaching to that trust, in times when the flock of their charge was exposed to more than ordinary danger,—that *they* should have been, not only the *first* but the *sole* deserters!—they alone fleeing,—and all of them, without exception, fleeing!—"leaving the sheep, and fleeing," and letting "the wolf catch and scatter them!" There is too much in this of the character of the "hireling shepherd," to allow me to admit the supposition.

4. It is alleged, that the particular exception made, in the phrase "*except the apostles,*" favours the idea of "the church" from which the exception is made meaning only the ministers; and that this idea is further countenanced by its being said of those who were scattered, that they "went everywhere preaching the word."—To this we answer—*First:* If the ministers, or pastors, alone were meant, nothing could have been easier than to say so in plain terms;—why suppose the historian to have made a solitary departure from what must be universally admitted to be the established meaning of the word in the entire *usus loquendi* of the New Testament, when it was so easy for him to have said, if he meant it, that *its Elders* were all scattered from Jerusalem?—*Secondly:* Even if it had been proved from other places that the word *church* is at times used for the church's officers exclusively, the present is not an occasion on which it was at all likely to be so used, there being in the case no-

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thing of a *judicial* character to render the *representative* acceptance of it (on the supposition of a government by representation having existed) natural and probable.—*Thirdly:* The phrase "*except the apostles*" is interpreted (like the *all* being scattered) too strictly according to the letter, when it is inferred' from it, that because the apostles were ministers of the word, those from whom they were excepted must have been ministers too. The particle $\pi\lambda\eta\nu$ —here rendered properly enough *except*—is by no means always used with so precise an adherence to the identity in kind of the thing excepted to that from which the exception is made. Thus, in Acts xxvii. 22, we find Paul saying—"There shall be no loss of any man's life among you,— $\pi\lambda\eta\nu$ του πλοιου,—*except* of the ship? Every one sees that to render thus makes nonsense; the ship itself being no part of the men's lives that were on board of it. The meaning is, "but [there shall be the loss] of the ship." Similar is the

meaning here. There was a very general dispersion of the members of the church, and, it may freely be granted, especially of those who, whether by office or otherwise, possessed any notoriety and eminence among them;—but the apostles were not of the number. The exception simply intimates, that, while other brethren of note were compelled to flee, *the most noted of all* kept their post.—*Fourthly*: On the supposition of *the church* meaning, in this or in any other instance, the *church representative*, it must of course include its *entire representation*. But if those who were scattered abroad by the persecution were the ministers or preaching presbyters only, as the record of their “going everywhere *preaching the word*“ is alleged to show,—then an essential part of

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the presbyterian *church representative* was wanting. Where were the ruling Elders? Our presbyterian brethren would not admit a court of *ministers alone* to be their proper church representative.—*Fifthly*: The affirmation that because it is said, in the *fourth* verse, respecting those who were dispersed, that they “went everywhere *preaching the word*,” therefore “the church,” in the first verse must mean exclusively the *official ministry*, is a mere *gratis dictum*—an assumption without proof. It is evident, that we are as fairly entitled to take our explanation of the fourth verse from the first, as our brethren are to take their explanation of the first verse from the fourth; and to say, that since the dispersion mentioned in the first was of “*the church*,” we are from the fourth warranted to conclude, that those members of the church who were scattered embraced, many of them, the opportunities which providence furnished them, of publishing the glad tidings of salvation; and that this was not confined to officially ordained ministers of the word, but included all to whom the Lord had been pleased to impart ability, and especially those “spiritual gifts” which were so plenteously

bestowed in the beginning of the gospel.—But to follow out the line of discussion to which *this* observation leads, would draw me at once into the whole controversy on the subject of *lay preaching*; which would be quite astray from our present drift.

On the whole, I am satisfied that the *church representative*, alleged as one of the senses of the word *church* in the New Testament is as unauthorised as either of the two preceding. Nor should I have considered the plain passage in the beginning of the eighth chapter of the Acts as at all requiring so many

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words, but for the circumstance of its being the only instance adduced in support of this meaning of the term, and therefore demanding to be fully and fairly met. For it is plain, that such texts as Matt, xviii. 17, “Tell it unto the church,” cannot, without the most glaring *petitio principii*, be cited as examples of this meaning of the word, till its having this meaning at all has been otherwise made good.

I shall close this discussion with the following very decided judgment of the same eminent and impartial critic to whom I have before made reference—Principal Campbell:—“I now intend to point out another still more remarkable deviation, a deviation not from the latter, as those now mentioned were, but from the former of the two primitive senses,* whereby the word is applied to the christian commonwealth. Then it means, as is pretended, either the church collective, that is the whole community of christians, or the church representative;—that is, say some, the whole clerical orders, say others, the church judicatories, especially the supreme. And this, I acknowledge, is a distinction that is favoured not only by those of the Eomish communion, but by most sects of protestants also. To many, however, and I acknowledge myself one of the number, it is manifest, that it is no less a novelty than the former, having no foundation in the scriptural usage.”—

“In the use neither of the Greek word in the New Testament, nor of the correspondent Hebrew word in the Old, do we find a vestige of an application of the term to a smaller part of the community, their gover-

* Namely, of the word *church*—*ἐκκλησία*; these two primitive senses being—“the whole christian community, or all those of a particular congregation under the guidance of their own pastors.”

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nors, pastors, or priests, for instance, as representing the whole.”—“I have not discovered one passage in which either *ἐκκλησία* or *κληρος* is applied to the pastors exclusively of the people. The notion, therefore, of a church representative, how commonly soever it has been received, is a mere usurper of later date. And it has fared here as sometimes happens in cases of usurpation, the original proprietor comes, though gradually, to be at length totally dispossessed.”*

* Lect. on Eccles. Hist, vol. 1, pp. 320, 323, 327.

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CHAPTER III.

THE MATERIALS OF A CHURCH OF CHRIST.

THIS is evidently a point of first-rate importance; and on this account, although, in strict propriety, it should have formed the subject of a third section of the preceding chapter, I have assigned it a chapter to itself. It is a point respecting which it ought not to be necessary to say much. And yet it is one, about which so much has been said, that I have been almost afraid to enter upon it, lest, instead of a chapter, I should write a treatise.—We have seen that *a church*, according to the New Testament, is a *congregation*. It seems very naturally and immediately to follow, that a *christian church* should be a *congregation of christians*. And it must not be forgotten, that, in the same inspired book, *christians* is a designation synonymous, in regard to the persons

included in it, with *disciples, believers, saints*. If the church means the whole body of the faithful, A church means a section of that body,—into which, therefore, none ought to be knowingly and wilfully received, but such as give satisfactory evidence of their belonging to the true spiritual community of Christ's people.—Mistakes there *may* be:—perhaps we may go further, and say, that, with men's inability to search the heart, mistakes there *cannot fail* to be. But we lay it down as a position in which the New Testament fully bears us out,—that the nearer a church can be rendered, in the spiritual

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character of its materials, to the church,—so much the more will it be in harmony with the mind of the Lord, and with the great ends of its formation.

Our Lord said to Nicodemus,—“Except a man be born again, he cannot see” (that is, cannot enjoy, or, as he himself explains it in a subsequent verse, cannot “enter into”) “the kingdom of God.”*—The kingdom of God does not, in such a connexion, mean simply *heaven*. It is evidently the same kingdom which John the Baptist and Jesus himself announced in their ministry as “at hand;”—the spiritual kingdom, as to which Nicodemus and his countrymen had formed conceptions so sadly mistaken;—and that kingdom, in its successive stages, of imperfection below, and perfection above. In other words, the kingdom is the New Testament church, on earth and in heaven:—and the sentiment is, that, instead of mere natural descent from Abraham, in which the Jews were accustomed to trust and to glory, a new spiritual birth was necessary

* John iii. 3. I am aware, that by some eminent expositors, to “see” is, in this verse, understood as meaning to have a true spiritual discernment of its heavenly nature; and that they found upon it the sentiment that there is a “seeing,” or discerning, of the kingdom of God, that, in the order of nature, precedes “entering into” it, or enjoying its blessings.—I will not deny that such may be the meaning. But in this Gospel by John, *to see* is used so decidedly for *to*

enjoy,—or rather, I should even say more generally, *to experience*, (for it is applied to *evil* as well as *good*)—that I am more than doubtful of it. Thus in the last verse of the same chapter—John iii. 36, John Baptist says—“he that believeth not the Son, shall not *see life*.”—and in chapter viii. 51, Jesus himself says—“If a man keep my sayings, he shall never *see death*.” I am disposed to interpret “*seeing the kingdom of God*” in a similar sense; as meaning the same with the corresponding phrase in the eighth verse—“he cannot *enter into the kingdom of God*,”—cannot be its genuine subject, and participate in its privileges and blessings,—whether in earth or in heaven.

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to any one’s being a true subject of that kingdom,—a legitimate member of that church. I do not deny that in his words our Saviour had reference to heaven; but I do deny that he had this reference exclusively. The kingdom is one. It is not one kingdom in heaven, and another upon earth:—and nothing, surely, can be more natural and reasonable, than that the two portions of the kingdom, of which the one is the prelude to the other, should, as far as possible, resemble each other in character, so that there should just be a successive transference of its subjects from earth to heaven. Those whom we have no reason to regard as having been “born again,” it seems very strange that we should acknowledge as its subjects here, by admitting them to an outward participation of its privileges, when we know that they can have no place among its subjects there.—And I have now, though with necessary brevity, to show, that the whole tenor, and the most explicit statements, of the New Testament, bear out this conclusion.

I might avail myself, indeed, even of the intimations of the prophetic scriptures, in reference to the peculiar spirituality and purity of the church in gospel times. But it will be better to come at once to the New Testament itself.—And here, I shall pass entirely over the sentiment of those advocates of established churches, who, taking the Jewish church as their prototype, hold that national churches should be co-extensive, in regard to membership, with the nations in which they exist, all the subjects of the government, by birth or naturalization, being mem-

bers of the church; the civil and the ecclesiastical constitution having the same comprehensiveness. It may be admitted, that of all who plead the Jewish

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national establishment as the divine warrant for christian national establishments, those alone are self-consistent, who thus carry out the pattern to its full extent of correspondence. But with the man who can imagine that he finds such a constitution of the christian church in the New Testament, it would be a hopeless thing to reason:—and with him who, whether from the felt deficiency of support from the New he is constrained to go back to the Old, or whether he is content, apart from scriptural authority altogether, to rest on the ground of theory and expediency, it would obviously be necessary to discuss the previous question as to the authority by which such points are to be settled,—the legitimate standard of appeal and decision. On that I have already touched, in the introductory chapter. And indeed the proofs of purity of communion being required by scripture in the churches, will themselves be more than sufficient for the refutation of such a theory.—To these I now proceed.

I shall, in the first place, adduce a few other passages, additional to the one already referred to,—the words of our Lord to Nicodemus—John iii. 3, 6:—and then, secondly, repel objections.

I. I am, first, to adduce passages from the Scriptures of the New Testament.

1. I begin with the account given us of the very first church that was formed and constituted, under the eye, and by the authority, of the Apostles.—I refer, of course, to the Church of Jerusalem. Previously to the day of pentecost, there were a hundred and twenty disciples of Jesus, who, though subsequently to his death they had been thrown into great darkness and perplexity, had had their faith re-estab—

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lished by his resurrection and ascension, and were waiting for the verification of their Master's promise,—“continuing with one accord in prayer and supplication.”—This was the *nucleus* of the first christian church. And when the day of pentecost was fully come, and the apostles, in the clearness and fulness of their new inspiration, proclaimed “repentance and remission of sins” in the name of their glorified Master, who were they that were “added” to this little devout society? They were such as “gladly received the word”—Acts ii. 41. They were in number “about three thousand.” They “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” And what was the character of those who still continued to be added to them? The last verse of the same chapter, literally translated, tells us:—“The Lord added to the church daily *of the saved.*”—Acts ii. 47. Our translation—“such as should be saved”—expresses a truth. Those who *are* saved are, at the same time, those who *shall be* saved; their salvation being, in its largest extent, yet future. But still, salvation is a present thing. All who believe in Christ *are* saved. They are delivered from condemnation, and from spiritual death. And of such the church at Jerusalem—the model of all future churches—was originally composed. “The Lord added” them: He did so, by the grace which converted them, and by the authority which enjoined their union. And thus it continued; those who were added to the church being, such as had first been “added to the Lord.”—Acts v. 14.

2. I notice next *the addresses of the apostolic epistles.*—See Rom. i. 6–8; 1 Cor. i. 2; 2 Cor. i. 1;

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Eph. i. 1; Phil. i. 1; Col. i. 1, 2; 1 Thess. i. 1–7; 2 Thess. i. 1–4.—Every reader, who is in earnest in

his inquiries, will turn to and peruse these passages. And surely the perusal of them should be enough, without a syllable of argument upon them, to satisfy him as to the one point now in question,—namely, of what description of persons the churches were supposed to consist, and consequently, of what description of persons, agreeably to their divinely intended constitution and character, they *ought* to have consisted; it being implied, that, in as far as they were otherwise, they were aside from the divine intention, as understood by the inspired men who thus addressed them. To none but to genuine christians, spiritual converts, regenerate sinners, could the various designations be applied, which, in these addresses, are used:—"beloved of God," "called of Jesus Christ," "saints, or holy," "sanctified in Christ Jesus," "faithful in Christ Jesus," "saints and faithful brethren in Christ," to whom "the gospel had come, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance,"—who showed their "election of God," by their "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope."—Such were the characters, to whom, in writing to the churches of Christ, the apostles addressed themselves. And in the body of each of the epistles many expressions occur, confirmatory of what is thus taught us by their inscriptions and openings.

I might introduce here, indeed, the entire tenor of their contents. The occasional descriptions of the characters of those addressed,—the exhortations, the rebukes, and the warnings, urged upon them,—and the social and reciprocal duties commanded them,—

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all proceed on the assumption of their being *believers*. Let the reader look at Col. iii. 1-4, 9; Col. ii. 5-7; Eph. iv. 1-6; Eph. ii. 19-21; 1 Thess. i, 5-7; Heb. x. 23-25. How do such passages sound, when applied to communities compounded of heterogeneous materials, from the most spiritually-minded

child of God to the most careless and even profane man of the world?—There is, in truth, no understanding of the epistles, unless they are considered as being addressed (as indeed we have seen they actually are) to societies of believers. There are many of the duties enjoined in them, which could not be performed, nor could the motives by which the performance of those duties is enforced, be at all appreciated and felt, except by such characters.

3. The same lesson is taught us by *the expressions of disappointment and grief, on the part of the inspired writers, when, in any of the churches, characters of a different description appeared*, whether by their originally improper admission, or by the defection of those who had previously “run well.”—It is by a most extraordinary perverseness, that the corruptions in doctrine and discipline, which had found their way into the churches of Galatia and of Corinth, have been made use of in evidence that purity of communion is not requisite.—It must be manifest, that the only possible ground on which such a conclusion can rest, is, that these corruptions were not censured, but that the churches in which they were found were, *with those corruptions, just what they and other churches were meant by the Lord to be.*—But who can read the epistles to the Corinthians, and to the Galatians, and for a moment think so? Is not the very existence of such corruptions the source, to the

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apostle’s heart, of bitterness and sorrow? Is it not on account of them, that he writes to the church at Corinth, “out of much affliction and anguish of heart, and with many tears?” Is it not for this that he threatens, if the persuasion of paternal tenderness did not succeed in producing reformation, to “come unto them with a rod?” And does he not, with a heart ready to burst with the emotion of deep concern, tell them of his “fear, lest, when he came among them, he should find them such as he would not,—

and that he should bewail many who had sinned, and had not repented?"—And is it not in the terms of deep distress, as well as of wonder, that he speaks of deflections from the truth among the Galatians,—“fearing, lest he had bestowed upon them labour in vain,”—and “travailing in birth again, that Christ might be formed in them?”—See 2 Cor. ii. 4; 1 Cor. iv. 21; 2 Cor. xii. 20, 21; Gal. iv. 11, 19.—Surely, that christian has not a little need for self-examination, who can contemplate—if not with complacency, yet with unmoved calmness and peace, what went nigh to the breaking of an apostle’s heart! Surely, that which so grieved *him* could not be as it ought to have been, but must have been displeasing to the Lord,—contrary to his will and to his glory.—And this will appear still more, when we observe—

4. That *these evils are expressly condemned, and their correction commanded.*—Paul severely censures the Corinthians, because, instead of “mourning” over such as had fallen into sin, and having them “put away from among them,” they had been “puffed up,” and, in the spirit of mutual jealousy and vain-glory, had retained them. He warns them of their danger, from the natural tendency of evil to diffuse

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itself by contagion, when thus wilfully retained amongst them;—the danger of the “little leaven leavening the lump.” And, with the authority of the Head of the Church, he peremptorily enjoins them to “put away from among themselves the wicked person,”—to “purge out the old leaven, that they might be a new lump.”—See 1 Cor. v. throughout. And to what does this amount, but that, as a church,—as a collective body,—as a section of the church universal,—they should come into conformity to the terms of his epistolary address to them,—as “the church of God which was at Corinth,—sanctified in Christ Jesus,—called,—saints?”—And how does the Lord himself expostulate with those of the churches

of Asia into which similar corruption had crept? Does he not blame them for “having there,”—that is, clearly, for retaining in the communion of the church, “those that held the doctrine of Balaam,” and “the doctrine of the Nicolaitans,”—doctrines evidently associated with practical impurity and idolatrous conformity? Does he not, for these and other evils, warn them, while they “held fast” what was good, to “repent and do the first works?” Does he not assure them, that if they did not repent, he would “come unto them quickly, and fight against” the intruders and offenders, “with the sword of his mouth;”—intimating that this ought by themselves to be rendered unnecessary by their using this sword, as the sword of excision, against them?—And does he not threaten them with “coming unto them quickly, and removing their candlestick out of its place, unless they repented;”—meaning, as the nature of the symbol indubitably shows,—not any privation of privilege and blessing merely, but their extinction as churches:

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—for, since it is expressly said “The seven candlesticks *are* the seven churches,” the removal of any of the candlesticks must signify the removal of the churches represented by them.—These corruptions, therefore, it was their incumbent duty, by the vigorous and impartial exercise of discipline, to remove,—and, as churches,—in their collective as well as their individual capacity, to return to their “first love,” and their first purity, separating themselves from the world and from evil, and putting away from them “the uncircumcised and the unclean.”—See Rev. ii. 14–16; ii. 4, 5, &c.

5. I might multiply passages. I shall content myself with *other two*.—The *first* of themes 2 Cor. vi. 14–18. I refrain from all remarks on the legitimacy of the application of this passage to the marriage relation, and to the intimacies of Christians with worldly men. On the supposition that the words

may with propriety be thus applied, on the ground of their containing a general principle, which it is unnecessary to restrict to any one mode of intercourse with the world;—the obvious question is—Are they to be applied to these subjects, and *not to the communion of the church of God?*—Their primary and direct reference is, it may be admitted, to the evil of believers in Christ having fellowship with idolaters in any part of the service of their false gods. This was a glaring and monstrous incongruity; like the “communion of light with darkness.” But, suppose an inversion of this kind of communion. Suppose the Corinthian believers to have *admitted known idolaters*, the worshippers of these same false gods, to fellowship *with them* in the social ordinances of the church of Christ,—would there, in that case, have

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been no violation of the precept,—no unseemly and incongruous association,—no compromise of the glory of the “one God even the Father, and the one Lord Jesus Christ?” If there was evil in the junction of Christ with Belial, was there less evil in the junction of Belial with Christ?—Let it be observed, that the passage does not speak of *idolaters* merely. The command is, not to be “unequally yoked together with *unbelievers*,”—that is, such as make it manifest that this is their character. Is the indiscriminate mixture, then, of believers and unbelievers, of saints and men of the world, in a church of Christ, an unequal yoking,—or is it not? If it is not, we may well ask, what is? Is it not a “defiling of the temple of God?” Is it not a “touching of the unclean thing?” Is the difference, in this respect, material, whether we go to the unclean thing, or take the unclean thing to us? *Can* Christians be said, with any truth, to “come out from among “unbelievers, and “to be separate,” if they are admitting them to the most sacred and intimate christian communion with themselves?—for such, surely, is the joint participation in the symbols

of the body and blood of the common Saviour and Lord of Christians. It seems, in the highest degree, inconsistent, to apply the passage to other modes of fellowship, and not to this.

The *second* of the two passages is—I Cor. iii. 11–17.—The main question relative to this very interesting portion of Scripture, of whose contents it is impossible for me to “speak particularly,”—is, whether it relates to the system of *Christianity itself*, as consisting of various *doctrines and precepts*,—or to the *christian church*, as composed of *persons*.—That the latter view is the true one seems to me so clear, that

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I can hardly fancy aught but prejudice to induce a doubt of its being so.—The *unity of the figure* requires it. It is not at all of a structure of doctrines the apostle is speaking, but of one of persons. The entire context bears me out in this. “Ye are God’s husbandry; *ye are God’s building*”—verse 9. “Know ye not that *ye are the temple of God?*”—verse 16. “The temple of God is holy; *which temple ye are*”—verse 17. These terms represent the building, with an explicitness which ought to preclude mistake, as one of *persons*.—A building of doctrines, indeed, is a figure of very rare occurrence in Scripture; whereas the other figure is frequent and familiar with the sacred writers.—It ought, besides, to be observed, that there are *two* figures,—the figure of a *husbandry* as well as that of a building. They have both the same application; and they who are not prepared to maintain that, the “husbandry” means a husbandry of doctrines, cannot, with any consistency, contend for the building being a building of doctrines.—To maintain anything like harmony in the latter figure, we must understand the “gold, silver, and precious stones” as representing the true spiritual people of God,—sincere genuine converts, “precious in the sight of the Lord;”—and the “wood, hay, and stubble” as empty professors, ignorant and unrenewed,

having “a name to live while they are dead,”—“a form of godliness, without its power.”

Should any object, that such persons *cannot* be built upon Christ the living and sure foundation;—that none but “living stones” can ever form any part of that “spiritual house” of which He is the divinely laid foundation:—our reply is two-fold.—1. It is not

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of the true, spiritual, universal church that Paul is here speaking,—but of the particular church, or christian society, at Corinth; of which he himself had, in the providence and by the grace of God, “laid the foundation,” by his having been the first to preach the gospel there—verse 10.—And 2. The very same objection would apply, with equal at least, if not even with greater conclusiveness, to the interpretation which applies the passage to the system of divine doctrines—inasmuch as, “the doctrines and commandments of men,” of what kind soever, unsupported by divine authority, can never form any part of that system,—can never have any real connexion or incorporation with “the truth as it is in Jesus,”—any real and divinely acknowledged relation to Christ.—I might add—3. That the system of divine truths does not admit of additions, of any kind;—and the passage, so understood, could have no application beyond the period of the completing of divine revelation by those “holy men of God who spoke”—and who wrote—“as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” Such application of it, from its want of all *explicitness*, has been productive of effects the most mischievous. For, in regard to doctrines and institutions, who is to be the authoritative judge to distinguish between what may be incorporated with God’s truths and God’s ordinances, as “gold, silver, and precious stones,” and what must be refused such incorporation, as “wood, and hay, and stubble?”—Fully aware of the delusive tendencies of the human mind, when allowed any such license, the divine

Author of revelation has ever laid an express and solemn interdict on the presumption that would dare

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to make any such additions. His unequivocal command, respecting his word, has ever been—"Thou shalt not add to it, nor diminish from it."*

The solemn admonition, from verse 10th to verse 17th, clearly relates to the *building up of the church*, and to the materials of which the sacred structure ought to be composed. The apostle encourages the builders to attention and faithfulness in this matter, by setting forth the *reward* which the divine proprietor of the temple had in reserve for such as fulfilled their charge with due fidelity;—the *loss* which the careless builder should suffer;—and the *destruction* that should come upon the workman who, knowingly and presumptuously, "defiled," by the introduction of unworthy materials, "the temple of God." Such appears to be the threefold distinction among the builders. The *careful* and *faithful* should "receive a reward,"—the special reward, it is presumed, of those who "turn many to righteousness;"—the *careless*, *inconsiderate*, and *hasty*, should "suffer loss,"—the loss of this special reward, their work proving superficial and unsatisfactory, not abiding the test;—although they themselves should be saved,—and yet even that with difficulty and hazard:—and the *presumptuous polluter* of God's holy house, his spiritual sanctuary, should be "destroyed,"—becoming the victim of his avenging jealousy:—"If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy; which temple ye are:"—words which should make the ear of every one to tingle, to whom, in any way, it pertains to admit members to the churches of Christ;—and, let me add, the ear,

* Comp. Deut. iv. 2; xii. 32; with Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

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too, of every one who, with a conscious hypocrisy, neither believing, nor feeling, nor living, as the word of God requires, should, by a hollow-hearted and false profession, intrude himself into the communion of God's sanctuary. There shall be a *final testing* of the materials of which christian churches have been reared. The *test* to be applied is, in the passage, figurative, in correspondence with the figure used with regard to the materials:—"The fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is;" fire being the natural and appropriate test of "gold, silver, and precious stones," and of "wood, hay, and stubble,"—the former enduring it, the latter being consumed by it.

I might (I repeat) multiply passages; but I must forbear. It ought not to be necessary. I know nothing which has a better title to be regarded as a self-evident maxim, than that *christian churches* should be *churches of Christians*;—that they should be, what the apostle Paul denominates them,—and denominates them all, intimating their generic character,—"*churches of the saints.*" 1 Cor. xiv. 33.—And yet, scripture has been quoted on the other side. The necessity of pure communion has been controverted on Bible authority! Had there been no such appeal "to the law and to the testimony," we should not have deemed it necessary to take any notice of the mere theories and reasonings of men. But when such appeal is made, it would be an infraction of our own principle, were we to give no heed to the grounds on which it is rested. Let us see, then, what these grounds are.

1. In the *first* place, we have *the case of JUDAS*. There was a traitor, it is alleged, even among the little company that attended the Saviour during his

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ministry:—how much more, then, may we expect to find improper characters in the churches now!—and

this traitor, it is added,—even though Jesus “knew from the beginning who should betray him,”—was present at the first institution of the Lord’s Supper, and partook of it with the rest!—On this last circumstance, indeed, the argument is chiefly grounded.

Now, I might satisfy myself with simply *denying the fact* of the presence of Judas on the interesting occasion in question. I might make my appeal for this to the precise and pointed testimony of the evangelist *John* to this effect,—“He, then, having received the sop, *went immediately out*”—*John* xiii. 30. According to *Matthew*, the pointing out of Judas as the traitor *preceded* the institution of the supper;—and according to *John*, he was no sooner pointed out than he withdrew from the company.—I might show you, that *Luke*, with whose narrative the difficulty chiefly lies,—the detection of the traitor being introduced by him *subsequently* to the scene of the supper,—is less particular about the precise order in time of the incidents related by him, than the rest,—there being other instances as well as this in his narrative, in which he does not adhere with precision to that order. And I flatter myself I could make it sufficiently clear, that Judas had “*gone out*” before the holy supper was instituted.—But the truth is, I am not, and I would not wish to appear, at all anxious to make out this point. I am perfectly satisfied, that the fact was as I have just represented it,—but I am, at the same time, as perfectly indifferent, so far as my present argument is concerned, whether Judas was, or was not, present when the Supper was instituted:—and for this simple reason, that, if his sup-

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posed presence proves anything, it proves a great deal too much,—a great deal more than those who make their appeal to the alleged fact would themselves be willing to admit; and thus effectually defeats itself.

I shall make the strongest supposition possible. I shall suppose that Judas was not only present, but even previously made known as the traitor. What follows? Clearly, if any inference bearing on our practice follows legitimately at all, it must be this:—that we are warranted, nay that, the example being set for our imitation, it is incumbent upon us, it is our duty, to retain in full fellowship with the church of Christ—JUDASES,—*knowing them to be such*;—to retain characters of the same unprincipled baseness,—open betrayers of Christ,—barterers of their interest in him for a few paltry pence,—selfish, avaricious, avowed apostates,—*knowing them to be such*.—It is quite obvious, that this is the only inference that can serve any purpose to the defenders of mixed or impure communion: for, with regard to characters which we *do not know*,—which remain concealed,—an inference would have no bearing upon their object. To speak of retaining *hypocrites* is an absurdity. We cannot, with propriety, be said to retain such characters; the very idea of a hypocrite implying that the real character is successfully covered. And so long as it *is* so covered, there cannot, in the nature of the thing, be either criminality in retention, or warrant for exclusion. The inference must be to *known* characters; and if to known characters, it must further be to characters *known to be as bad as Judas*. Nay, on the supposition that Judas were again, *in propria personâ*, to offer himself to communion,—the exam-

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ple, if it warrants anything, would warrant our receiving him,—our giving him the right hand of fellowship,—our setting him by our side at the table of the Lord,—with the full knowledge that no saving change had passed upon him, but that he continued in all respects what he was, when he “threw down the silver pieces in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.”—If any one revolts from this,—if he shudders at the supposition,—then he must

give up his argument from *Judas*; for this is evidently no more than its legitimate application. If he sneers at it as extravagant, let him prove that it is so.

I might press the legitimate conclusion from the case to a still greater length of absurdity. Jesus, it is granted on both sides, “knew from the beginning, who should betray him.” He knew Judas as well when he *chose him to be an apostle*, as he did afterward. The inference,—if there be any example in the case at all for our imitation, is irresistible:—that we are warranted by the example *to choose such men to the ministry of the gospel, and the pastoral care of the flock of Christ!*—The truth is that the mystery (for such we may allow it to have been) in the conduct of our Lord, in choosing Judas, and retaining him in the number of the twelve, without disclosing his character till it disclosed itself in the end by his diabolical treachery,—knowing him all the while to be “a devil” at heart,—can never be an example such as we are either obliged or warranted to follow, in opposition to the plain and palpable rules for the direction of our conduct, laid down by himself through the ministry of his apostles, and of which we have the authoritative exemplification in the churches constituted under their superintendence.

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2. Beferece is sometimes,—nay, I might say invariably, made by anti-strict-communionists, to certain of our Lord’s parables, which, they allege, teach a different lesson. These are, chiefly, the parable of the *marriage-feast*, and the parable of the *tares of the field*.—An extended exposition of these parables would occupy much more room than can be spared. There is no need for it. It will be enough, to expose the fallaciousness of the conclusions drawn from them on the subject before us.

The former of the two parables the reader will find in Matt. xxii. 1–13. The entire plausibility of the argument arises from the second of the commissions

given to the servants, and the manner in which they are said to have fulfilled it. The commission was—"As many as ye shall find bid to the wedding:"—the fulfilment of it—"So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all, as many as they found, *both bad and good*; and the wedding was furnished with guests."—Now I grant, that "*bad and good*" is a phrase intended to comprehend *all varieties of character*. The servants executed their message. They addressed the King's invitation to all indiscriminately; and persons of every description complied with it; so that "the wedding was furnished with guests." Now, the sole question of any consequence in our present discussion,—the very turning point of the argument,—is this:—were they "both bad and good" *subsequently* to their compliance, and to their admission as guests at the table of the marriage-feast?—did they, when there, *continue* to present all varieties of character, the worst as well as the best? The question, obviously, is—not what they had been before the invitation, but what they

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were after.—And in answer to this question, we have only to look at the representation given in the parable itself. What is it? Why, that of all those who had been gathered from the high-ways *there was only one* whom the king, on "coming in to see the guests," found *without a wedding garment!* Whatever we conceive to be represented by the "wedding garment,"—whether the justifying righteousness of Christ, or personal sanctification, or (which I take to be the truth) the union of both,—it appears that the required qualification for a place at the feast (that is, for a participation in gospel blessings) was wanting in *only-one* instance. The answer to our inquiry, then, is given in the negative. The variety of character, bad as well as good, *did not continue*. Sinners of every character and condition were invited; sinners of every character and condition accepted the invita-

tion:—but the sincere acceptance of the invitation implied the faith of the message, and of the authority with which it came,—the belief of the gospel testimony and the gospel promise, and a corresponding change of heart and character. When we lay aside parabolic figure, what are the plain facts of the case? Who were the persons that sat down to the feast? What were they when invited?—and what, when they accepted the invitation, and had been received? The reply may be given in the language of Paul to the Corinthian church;—“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. *And such were some of you;*

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but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”—1 Cor. vi. 9–11. This is in full harmony with the parable; and it is not a solitary passage of the kind. The case most distinctly shows, that the want of the wedding garment was the rare exception:—that the man who, by what means soever, had found his way into the banquet-hall without it, *had no right to be there:*—and that the servants, if they *knowingly* admitted him without the required costume,—a costume provided by the master of the feast for all the guests,—were to blame, as well as the unworthy intruder himself?—The pattern and warrant for *mixed communion* must be sought elsewhere than here.

Let us look at the other parable—that of the “*tares of the field*”—the *tares and the wheat*.—It is to be found in Matt. xiii. 24–30, and 36–43.—This parable is rather a favourite resort of those who do not feel their consciences bound by the principles of strict or pure communion. Here, it is alleged, as in

the former case, there is *mixture*. Instead of an injunction of separation, there is an explicit command to the contrary. The inquiry of the servants, whether they should attempt such separation, is answered in the negative, and the positive order issued—“*Let both grow together until the harvest;*”—and according to the authoritative interpretation of the parable, that means until “*the end of the world,*”—when the separation is to be made by “the Son of man” himself.

This looks plausible. I hope to show the reader, that plausibility is its only attribute, and that the plausibility itself is but superficial.—The parable,

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were we to expound it in all its particulars, would admit of great enlargement of illustration. I must confine myself to those views of it which immediately relate to our present argument; and even these must be very succinctly disposed of.

1. *My first* remark, then, is—that the tares and the wheat being significant (as they are explained to be) of *persons*,—the persons represented by the former—the tares—*are not hypocrites*. From the manner in which I have heard some express themselves, I am certain, that when they speak of the tares and the wheat “*growing together until the harvest,*” they have no further idea in their minds, than this—that *in the church there always will be hypocritical professors*. Now it is of importance to observe, that this is not at all the question. Hypocrites (as already noticed) are, according to the very meaning of the designation, professors of religion, who, though destitute of true faith, do not allow this to be apparent in their conduct. There is nothing there, that to men gives any clear evidence of their profession being insincere. They contrive to present to human view so much of the “*image and superscription*” of Heaven, as that no one can with confidence pronounce them “*reprobate silver.*” Mark it, then:—the parable *does not*

refer to such. I might almost go so far as to say that it does not even *include* them. It represents a distinction between two descriptions of persons, whose respective characters are *equally apparent*. There is not, in the parable, the remotest hint of any difficulty in discriminating between the wheat and the tares. The servants distinguished the one from the other without the smallest hesitation. "Then *appeared* the tares also." They saw them, and knew them.

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To try to make out the tares to have been a plant so closely resembling wheat as not to be readily discriminated from it, is to make the parable, in this respect, self-contradictory. The risk suggested, in opposition to the proposal of the servants to "gather-up the tares," is not that of mistaking the one for the other; for there was no such risk at all in the case. The fear was, not that they might pull up wheat *instead of* tares, but that they might pull up wheat *along with* tares.—We shall see, by and by, how this tallies with what we believe to be the true principle of interpretation:—what I wish at present, is to show,—and to beg attention to it,—that the tares *do not represent hypocritical professors, but known and visible "children of the wicked one."*—Then notice—

2. On the supposition of the field in which the tares and the wheat are to be allowed to grow together being *the church*,—if the thing designed to be represented is the indiscriminate admixture of the godly and the ungodly *there*; then may it be worth the serious consideration of those who take this view of the matter,—*to whom this state of things is attributed.* What says the householder? "*An enemy* hath done this!" And what says the interpreter? "The enemy that sowed them is *the devil.*" Such is the reply to the question, "Whence, then, hath it tares?" The bad seed is not sown in the field by the servants of the householder, and in obedience to any order of his. It is done by "an enemy." It is done by

stealth. It is a deed of secrecy and darkness, effected “while men slept.” Does it not, then, follow, that, when the servants of the householder *knowingly introduce* into his church “offenders and them that do iniquity,” they are *doing the devil’s*

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work? And does it not further follow, that “the field” cannot signify the church; seeing if it is the *devil’s* work for the servants to *introduce* the wicked into the church, it cannot well be *the Lord’s* work for those servants to *keep them there!*

3. If the field be *the church*, and the parable relates to the fellowship of the church, and intimates it to be the Lord’s will that all varieties of character should be admitted and retained;—then, what is the result? Why, that *christian communion is at an end*. What is called the church becomes, in that case, an indiscriminate mixture of the godly and the worldly, the pious and the profane:—and this, when the conception is properly analyzed, will be found to amount to the same thing with there being *no church at all*. What can the church *in* the world be, if the world and the church are meant to be so heterogeneously amalgamated,—so mixed and incorporated together,—that the very attempt to effect a separation between them is an act of resistance to the expressly intimated will of the church’s head?★ Then the world is the church, and the church is the world. There is no point at which, on this principle of exposition, its advocates can consistently stop, short of—*universal admission* and *no exclusion*.—And this leads me to notice—

★ So says Dr. Hugh M’Neile:—“Every sectarian effort to get what is called a pure church, is a petty attempt to antedate the millenium by a removal of the tares.” He thus glories in corruption, as being a feature in the character of established churches harmonizing them with the mind of God in his word:—representing elsewhere, with feelings rather of complacency than of reprobation, the English and Scotch established churches, along with others, as “containing, recognizing, sanctioning, and caressing, multitudes whom the church of God in Christ utterly repudiates.”

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4. That, like the former parable, this one, when so expounded, *proves too much*, and so proves *nothing*. With the exception of those who hold the notion of such a national church as comprehends all the members of the civil community—the nation and the church being of the same extent,—I am not aware that there are any who would be disposed to follow out the parable, in this view of it, to the full length of its obviously legitimate conclusions.—In the different bodies of dissenters, and in our national establishments themselves, there is a verbal acknowledgment of *discipline*. They are not to be tolerated who lie under the charge of aught that is known by the name of *scandal*,—that is, any gross offence against the laws of morality. How loosely soever even this exception may be attended to in practice,—it stands acknowledged in principle. But this is inconsistent. The designations used in the parable are of the most general and comprehensive description.—What can be more so, than “the wicked,” and “children of the wicked one?” No limitation whatever is so much as hinted. The very word *discipline* becomes thus a term of rebellion. It is not letting both grow together until the harvest. They who make exceptions of any kind, only show themselves sensible that, on their principle of exposition, the parable proves more than enough, and cannot be harmonized with other parts of Scripture. In every instance in which they plead for the separation of *any offender whatsoever*,—even the grossest—they contradict their principle. But let us be consistent. If their is to be separation, let it be as complete as faithfulness and charity united can render it:—and if there is to be none, *let there be none*; let the mixture be as thoroughly indiscrim-

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inate as the parable manifestly requires it to be. Let us have principles on which to act, that are

definite and uniform. It will not do, to quote the "tares and the wheat" in proof that purity of communion is not required,—and then refuse to admit the impurity in the extent which the parable so quoted not only warrants, but enjoins. We must have one thing or another; and not orders that are contradictory, and that mutually neutralize each other.

5. I have said, that they who have recourse to this parable, as a salvo to their consciences in tolerating impure communion, make it manifest that they feel themselves pinched between it and other passages of Scripture:—and this suggests the *general* observation, that *the entire tenor of the New Testament, and every passage in either the history, the epistles, or the prophecies, that bears any relation to the character and constitution of christian churches, might be arrayed against such an interpretation of the parable.* I have already said enough in proof of this. The commands—"If he refuse to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican;"—"purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump;"—"put away from among yourselves that wicked person;"—"be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers;"—"from such withdraw thyself:"—the complaints—"Ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who hath done this deed might be taken away from among you;"—"thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam;"—"so hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate;"—are all in the very face of the interpretation of the parable we

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have been considering. And a principle which thus sets the Bible against itself cannot, with any who admit its inspired authority, be owned as legitimate.

6. The interpretation in question *is not in accordance with the very letter of the parable itself.*—In the parable, according to its only authoritative interpre-

ter, "the field is *the world*." This is surely sufficiently explicit. Our Lord afterwards commissioned his apostles in these terms—"Go ye into *all the world*, and preach the gospel to every creature." "The world," then, in which the gospel was to be preached, is the field in which the tares and the wheat were to appear,—and in which they were to "grow together until the harvest." In the question, therefore,—“wilt thou that we go and gather them up?”—it must be evident that the act of *gathering them up* must bear reference to *the field in which they grow*. It can mean nothing else than the rooting them *out of that field*. And, if the tares are persons, and the field is the world, we are naturally led, for the meaning of the act, not to excommunication from the church, which would leave them still in the world,—that is, would leave the tares still in the field where they were sown,—but to their extirpation from the world itself, by the hand of violence.—And this, accordingly, I believe, to be the real reference of the parable; this the principle for its just interpretation. It is a lesson *against persecution*;—a lesson from Christ himself *against the use of carnal weapons in his spiritual kingdom*.—The adoption of this principle has *three* considerations to recommend it.—In the *first* place, we thereby avoid the manifest incongruity of the parable, when otherwise explained, with the general tenor and explicit statements of scripture on the subject

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to which it is supposed to refer.—In the *second* place; the lesson which our interpretation of the parable teaches is one for the inculcation of which there was imperative need, both existing at the time, and prospective. There was need for it even at the time. Among his own disciples Jesus had already seen the symptoms of a persecuting spirit discovering themselves. A comparison of the parable with such passages as Luke ix. 54–56; Matt. xxvi. 51, 52, and others, may serve sufficiently to evince the existing

occasion for the lesson. The indignant prohibition, from the Saviour's lips, of the proposal, in the one case, of "calling down fire from heaven," and, in the other, of "smiting with the sword," is in perfect accordance with the answer of the householder to the inquiry—"Wilt thou, then, that we go and gather them up?"—the prohibitory answer, "*Nay, lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.*"—And this leads me to notice in the *third* place, that the statements of the parable agree well themselves with our principle of explanation. I have before observed that there was no difficulty in distinguishing the tares from the wheat; and it is not easy, on this very account, to see how this consideration should apply to the exercise, or rather the commanded non-exercise, of discipline in the church. Where there was difficulty in distinguishing between a nominal and a genuine profession, there might have been a hazard of occasionally excluding, by mistake, from the fellowship of the church a true child of God. But in the parable, the difference between the wheat and the tares is *apparent*; and therefore this hazard could have no existence. The reason assigned for the prohibition is—not lest ye

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mistake wheat for tares, and tares for wheat;—this is never even supposed;—but "lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat *with them.*"—The application of this to *persecution*, is forcible and striking. When the servants of the Lord have taken it upon them (as they too often have) to attempt the work of *extirpation*, when has it ever failed that they have occasioned destruction to themselves as well as to their enemies, rooting up wheat as well as tares, and not seldom the former in much greater numbers than the latter? In the field of the world, the righteous and the wicked,—good men and bad—are, unavoidably, and in all possible varieties of relation, mixed together. To effect a separation of the two,

the righteous "must needs go out of the world." Such a mixture had existed from the beginning; but this feature of the moral condition of the world was to be still more remarkably exemplified in consequence of the spread and the partial reception of the gospel; when, according to the premonition of Jesus himself, there should be "five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three,"—and when "a man's foes should be those of his own house."—This state of things is very appropriately represented by, not the mere juxtaposition of plants of different kinds springing up together in the same field; but such an unavoidable intertwining of the fibres of their respective roots, as renders it next to impossible, even with the utmost care, to eradicate one of one kind, without loosening and bringing up with it another or more of another kind. And how much more likely such a result, in the heat and recklessness of the spirit of persecuting zeal!—If, understanding the parable thus, we take it in con-

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nexion with the two passages a little ago adverted to,—namely, our Lord's rebuke of James and John, when they were for commanding fire to come down from heaven to consume the Samaritans, and of Peter, when he drew his sword to defend his Master,—we have *three motives* brought out, which ought to be effectually dissuasive from all persecution. *The first* is, that every thing of the kind is inconsistent with the very *genius* of "the gospel of the kingdom"—"*Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of:*"—the *second*, that the Lord has put it under his ban, and interdicted it by penal sanction—"All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword;"—and the *third*, that the unwarranted attempt cannot be made by God's people, without involving themselves, or their brethren, in the common destruction—"Lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them."

7. I am aware of but *one objection* to this interpretation of the parable:—and it is one of which it would be inconsistent with candour to make light. It is drawn from the close of the parable, which runs in these terms:—“The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall *gather out of his kingdom* all that offend, and them that do iniquity.” The conclusion drawn from this is—that those who are “gathered *out of his kingdom*” must have been *in his kingdom*, and externally have formed a part of it. I grant the plausibility of the conclusion.—But I observe regarding it—1. The phrase “*The kingdom of heaven is like,*” &c, is one that is not always used with particular definiteness; the resemblance intended being sometimes directly between the kingdom itself, in its constitution and character, and that with

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which it is compared, and sometimes between the latter and the *state of things arising from the institution of the kingdom*. This proceeds on a similar principle to that on which our Lord occasionally expresses the mere *result* or *consequence* of his coming, and of the diffusion of his gospel, in terms which, literally taken, imply its having been his *purpose* or *design*:—“I am come, to send fire on the earth:”—“Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, nay, but rather division:”—“I came, not to send peace, but a sword.”—That something of the same kind is to be understood in the case before us, seems clear, from—2. The fact that, in the parable, “the field” is expressly said to be “*the world;*” and the “good seed” and the “tares,” which grow together in it, are the “children of the kingdom” and the “children of the wicked one.” These are not represented as being together *in the kingdom*, but as being together *in the world*. Such should be the state of things, in a degree in which it had never been before, in consequence of the erection of the kingdom. The perfect explicitness of the statement

—“*the field is the world*”—shuts us up to this interpretation; especially when connected with the equal explicitness of the distinction between the two descriptions of persons, as a distinction subsisting *in the world*:—the good seed being “the children of the kingdom” *in the world*, and the tares “the children of the wicked one” *in the world*. If the tares and the wheat represent the children of the wicked one and the children of the kingdom; and if both are represented as *in the world*; then surely both cannot be *in the kingdom*.—It follows—3. That “*gathering out of the kingdom*” must be interpreted in a sense

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corresponding to the intended comparison. According to the nature of the mixture, must be the nature of the separation. Whatever was the association, the *final cessation* of it is what the subsequent phraseology must be intended to express.—Without, then, supposing, as has been done by some, a change in the meaning of the word *kingdom*, in the end of the parable, from that in which it was used in the beginning of it,—a change from the more restricted sense to the more enlarged,—from his reign over his people, his spiritual Israel, to his reign over the world, in subserviency to the interests of that people;—although granting the legitimacy of the distinction, and the admissibility, too, in certain cases (though it should be done sparingly), of supposing such a change, even in the compass of the same parable;—without, I say, supposing this, the meaning seems simply to be—that by the process of judicial discrimination and segregation, which at the end shall take place, between the righteous and the wicked, the subjects of his kingdom shall cease to be any longer mixed up, as they had been in the world, with the ungodly and profane;—that then they should be entirely separate, and *by themselves*. “Gathering out of his kingdom them that do iniquity” will thus mean, not that the known and openly wicked were

ever, with his concurrence and by his injunction, in his kingdom; but only, that the kingdom shall then appear in a state of complete separation from all its associations with surrounding and intermingling worldliness, and be freed from all the sufferings, temptations, and dangers to its best interests, thence arising. The state of things which was occasioned by the introduction of the kingdom shall then termi-

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nate.—“We have a style of expression,—not indeed the same, but similar, and illustrative of the *principle* of explanation—in Col. i. 20. “And, having made peace by the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself, whether they be things on earth or things in heaven.” Now, “*things in heaven*” did not require reconciliation to himself; and all that *can* be meant is, that by the reconciliation of of alienated and apostate men, a state of entire and holy harmony should be produced between them and the angels of light, the fallen being restored to union with the unfallen, in one ever-blessed community—under Christ as the common head.

There is yet another appeal made to the scriptures, for the purpose of neutralizing the plea for pure communion. It is to *the corruptions of the apostolic churches themselves*.—But this appeal has been already met, and I trust, though briefly, satisfactorily repelled. The wonder is, that such an appeal should ever have been made for such a purpose. If, in using the word *corruptions*, I have used a word which they who make the appeal approve, as containing a just representation of the case,—then, by that very admission, they stand self-confuted. Strange! Are the *corruptions* of the churches the points in which we are warranted and bound to imitate them? Surely our aim ought to be, to shun the corruptions, and to endeavour, as far as attainable, to discover, and to conform to, the original standard.—The brethren who take up the opposite ground are in imminent danger.

They are in danger—instead of being, as they ought to be, shocked and revolted by the corruptions which are recorded to have found their way into the churches in apostolic times,—of being secretly not at all ill-

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pleased, but rather even gratified, to find them there. They afford an apology for corruptions in the churches now. If they crept in even under the eye of the apostles, the conclusion is, that attempts to prevent them now must ever be vain. And hence the temptation to this kind of complacency in corruption. I know not, indeed, what the defenders of laxity could have done without the church at Corinth: it suits their purpose so well. But how sadly at variance any feelings such as theirs, with those of the apostle of the Gentiles! And why do they not take their pattern from the church in Jerusalem on its first formation?—or from the church at Antioch, or Philippi, or Smyrna, or Philadelphia? Was the church at Corinth, with its corruptions, more to the mind of Paul, and more to the mind of Christ, than these were? If not, is it not a miserable perversion of the impartial record of divine truth, a record which sets down the evil as well as the good, to take the condemned evil, instead of the approved and commended good, for our pattern? Is this what Christ intended? Who will say so?

I shall close this chapter, by observing, that the due attainment of every end which we can imagine the Divine Head of the church to have had in view in the institution of christian fellowship,—in the communion of churches,—renders attention to purity in that communion indispensable. Without entering at large on this interesting field, these ends may be considered as, especially, *three* in number:—*the glory of Christ; the edification of the church; and the benefit of the world.* Where purity is not maintained, all these three ends are proportionally frustrated.

1. *The glory of Christ.* This glory is apparent in

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churches, as in individuals, according to the degree in which the holy and happy influence of the truth is displayed. The truth has a *social* influence, as well as a personal. It is not only a ground of personal hope, and a means of personal holiness, but a bond of union, and a spring of social action, and social joy. But these things it can only be, in proportion as churches are in a state of separation from the world. Where can be the manifestation of the truth's influence, in a community composed of all descriptions of characters? There may, in such a community, be not a little of individual excellence; but where can there be that lovely feature, so prominent in the portraiture of the very first of christian churches—"the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul?" This was a feature eminently glorifying to Christ, as "the Lord of peace," who "made peace by the blood of his cross;" to his gospel, as the "gospel of peace;" and to God, as the "God of peace." The very element of the character produced by the faith of the gospel is *love*; and the peculiar love that binds the disciples of Christ together, and of which so very much is said in the New Testament, is a principle of which the operation can be experienced and manifested in a church, only in proportion as that church is composed of such disciples alone,—of the spiritual children of God,—“sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.” The glory of Christ is visible in any church, in proportion to its *social* purity, just as his glory is visible in any individual believer, in proportion to his *personal* purity.

2. The *edification, or spiritual benefit, of the church itself.* Personal religion is necessary to christian

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fellowship, and at the same time, christian fellowship has been instituteaby Him who “knoweth what is in

man," with a view to the stability and the growth of personal religion. All who know what christian fellowship is, know also how eminently the ordinances of its social observance, and the exercises of its Social worship, contribute to this end. All, too, who are acquainted with the apostolic epistles are aware, how frequently and how earnestly the churches are admonished to mind the duties of *mutual spiritual edification*. Now it must be obvious to the most unreflecting mind, that both the discharge of the duty and the acquisition of the benefit pre-suppose that the churches are composed of spiritual materials, and that spiritual union exists among their members. That in some christian bodies there are not a few who become *communicants*, without having any notion of *communion*, who, when they come to the Lord's table, think of no fellowship but that of their own souls individually with their gracious Eedeemer, is a position which none will question who know the state of the facts. Of spiritual union with those who come with them to the same table, they never think, and have never, or hardly ever, been taught to think. Even when *this* is the case, there cannot fail to be a great deficiency in the working out of the ends of christian fellowship;—a fellowship which, according to the New Testament, includes the reciprocal exercise of all those social affections that spring from the consideration of the number and the power of the bonds of union,—the "one body, and one spirit, and one hope of their calling, the one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in them all,"—and which

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includes also the practical result of these affections, in "all the members having the same care one of another,"—"every man looking, not on his own things, but also on the things of others." But if the ends of christian association must fail to be answered, even when the members of a community, considered

individually, are of the right stamp, if there be a want of just conceptions among them of the union and communion of all with one another, and of the obligations thence arising, as well as of the union and communion of each with the Head;—how much worse than inefficiently must they be fulfilled, when the materials are utterly heterogeneous,—when “the precious and the vile,” the spiritual and the secular, the godly and the worldly, are blended indiscriminately together! Consentaneous feeling, mutual attachment for the truth’s sake, reciprocal vigilance, and attentive “consideration of one another, to provoke unto love and unto good works,” become anomalies and impossibilities, in exact proportion as such incongruous intermixture is tolerated and sanctioned. The one description of characters must necessarily operate as a preventive of benefit to the other, rather than as a means of its promotion,—nay as a corrupter instead of a purifier,—a weight that depresses to earth, rather than an aid in the ascent to heaven,—a leaven of ungodliness, rather than of spiritual mindedness.

3. *The good of the world.* That this end was contemplated by the King of Zion in the institution of his churches, who can doubt? They are set down in the midst of a world of darkness and sin, for the very purpose of diffusing light and purity around them. How miserably must such an end be hindered and

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impaired, when there is the absence of all that exemplification of the social influence of the truth, from which, in apostolic and primitive times, arose so large an amount of the impression made on surrounding observers, when they were constrained to say—“Behold how these christians love one another,”—and when “of the rest durst no man join himself to them, but the people magnified them!” If individual believers are “lights in the world,” churches are constellations,—assemblages of such lights. If each

christian is a portion of moral or spiritual leaven, churches are larger masses of that leaven. But all such beneficial influence implies the marked separation of both the one and the other—both the individual and the society, from the world. You destroy the influence, when you destroy the distinction. When you bring the world into the church, you nullify the effect of the church upon the world. The more thorough the separation, the more marked and manifest the distinctive example, and the principles from whose operation it arises,—the more vivid and the more salutary will be the impression.—O, let none adopt the principle, in palliation of the evil now complained of, that the intermixture, instead of secularizing the church, may sanctify the world!—Alas! which is the more likely? Whether is it of the influence of the church upon the world, or of the influence of the world upon the church, that the apostle is speaking, when he says—“know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the lump?” Is it of the influence of the good in corrupting the evil, or of the evil corrupting the good?—Surely, there is little need for shutting the eyes of the people of God to the danger of amalgamation

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with the world. “What success can ministers expect, in warning believers against worldly conformity, when, through inconsideration, or on principle, they are mixing up the world with the church? Surely, the more bold the relief in which the church can be made to stand out, in holy distinction, from the world,—so that it can be pointed to as a community constituted on principles, and regulated by laws, of its own,—the greater advantage has the minister of Christ in appealing to the world for the divine excellence of those principles and laws; and the more powerful and impressive becomes the testimony borne by the church against the world, that “the deeds thereof are evil.”—It was because Jesus bore

this testimony against the world, that “the world hated him.” And, on the same principle, he says to his disciples—“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen ye out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” What a strangely incongruous scene, then, is produced by the blending of the church and the world together,—by the introduction into the former of “the uncircumcised and unclean,”—the known votaries of the latter!—no other than the realization *within the church itself* of the very hatred by which the world is declared to be distinguished from it!—of the enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent! Is this a state of things to which there is a single sentence in the New Testament that gives countenance or sanction? Ought not the church rather to bear to the world the relation of an antagonist power, visibly distinct, and working against its spreading corruptions with all the combined force of spiritual

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principle? The amalgamation of the world with the church has the same effect, in regard to the latter, which the early compounding of the principles of human philosophy (“science falsely so called”) with divine doctrine had upon the gospel,—the effect of obscuring its glory, and weakening its power. As it was *the truth in its purity* that was “the power of God unto salvation;” so was it *the church in its purity*, as the grand and permanent exemplification of the influence of that truth in both renewing hearts and uniting them, that evinced its divinity, and promoted its acceptance. By impure communion, according to the extent in which it prevails, *all this is done away*. The incorporation of the two is the effectual counter-working of the divine purpose with regard to the salutary effect of the one upon the other. It is with the church, as it is with an army. Union is strength. When, in an army, there is “one heart and one soul,”

—one principle of patriotism and of loyalty,—one conviction of the righteousness of their cause,—one feeling of attachment and devotedness to their common leader,—there is an energy in their combined assaults, which carries all before it. The introduction of even a few disaffected spirits may infuse a paralyzing panic into the whole host, or may divide it against itself, and more than destroy its efficiency. Thus it cannot fail to be with the church,—the “army of the living God.” The success of their aggressive efforts upon the world depends, to an incalculable degree, upon the union of the members in the faith and hope and love of the gospel,—and the vital warmth and energy thrown by these into all their efforts. Disunion is coldness, weakness, lassitude, and failure.

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One observation more, and I close this chapter, which has extended to a much greater length than I anticipated; for which the vital importance of the subject must be my excuse.—The observation is—What strange conclusions we should come to, were we to apply to *individual character* the principles which are so frequently and so thoughtlessly applied to the *condition of the churches*. In the scriptures, there is the very same evidence that churches should aim at purity in their communion, as there is that believers individually should aim at purity in their personal character. That the latter cannot attain to sinless perfection in the present life, is no good reason why they should not desire it, and make it their aim. That the former have never attained to a state of communion absolutely pure, is no better reason why *they* should not desire it and make it their aim. To say that we need not *seek* a pure church on earth, because we shall never *get* a pure church till we reach heaven,—is no sounder logic than to say that we need not seek a pure heart on earth, because we cannot get it till we reach heaven. As it is our duty, and ought

to be our unceasing endeavour, in the prayerful and diligent use of prescribed means, to bring *our personal purity* as near to the purity of the “spirits of just men made perfect” as we can,—so is it the duty of churches, and ought to be their unceasing endeavour, in the diligent and prayerful use of prescribed means, to bring their *collective purity*,—the purity of their fellowship,—into as near conformity to the purity of the communion of heaven as they can. As the church on earth and the church in heaven are one;—as believers, while on earth, are represented as “come to the spirits of just men made perfect”—

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themselves constituting, in this world, “the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven;” it is surely natural and right, that what appears as the church below, and passes under the name, should be made to bear as near a resemblance as possible to that which is above,—the earthly to the heavenly,—the militant to the triumphant:—that assimilation should be our aim, rather than contrast. This, surely, is more reasonable, than to act as if the corrupt condition of the church on earth were divinely intended to enhance the pleasure arising from its holy fellowship hereafter; so that the greater the present corruption, the more exquisite the zest and relish of the future purity; and, therefore, the more corrupt now the better! How would this do, when applied to the individual believer? How would it do for him, instead of “crucifying the flesh,” and “striving against sin,” “overcoming the world,” and “following holiness;”—to make it his study to keep himself, while here, as spiritually dead and worldly-minded as possible, that so he might enjoy with the greater zest the life and holiness of heaven!—When the excellent John Newton remarked to a lady, on our present subject, “We’ll never get a pure church till we get to heaven; and if there were a pure church on

earth, it would no longer be pure if you and I entered it;”—wise man as he was, he either spoke foolishly, or he spoke more in jest than in earnest,—more to turn aside, by a good-humoured pleasantry, the point of an unwelcome argument, or the edge of a too true reflection, than gravely to settle a point of duty. It amounted to no more than this, that because he and his friend, and every other believer on earth, were

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imperfect and still sinful, therefore they needed not startle or scapie at the most intimate fellowship with the unbelieving and the worldly. He must surely have thought her one of the apostle’s “silly women,” when, if she had indicated any conscientious scruples on the subject, he imagined such an evasion sufficient to remove them. We should certainly desire no greater amount of purity in the church on earth, than to have its communion composed of such characters as Mr. Newton.

In these remarks, I have said nothing respecting the effect of admission into the church—to the external enjoyment of what are termed its privileges—on the minds of those persons themselves, who are so admitted;—admitted without any evidence of their having “passed from death unto life,”—of their having been the subjects of that new birth which the Saviour declares indispensable to a sinner’s being a subject of his kingdom. I am fully persuaded, and have ever been, that ministerial unfaithfulness in this particular,—indiscriminate admission to christian ordinances,—has ruined more souls than, almost any other single cause whatever. O the multitudes, in whose bosoms it has fostered “strong delusion,”—whose “deceitful hearts” it has contributed to cheat into a false estimate of themselves and of their state, and whom it has sent down to the grave with “a lie in their right hand!”—Having a nominal membership in the church on earth, they have never discovered the cruel delusion thus practised upon

them, till they have found themselves excluded from the church in heaven!—The truth is, that in every such admission of unworthy members into the church, there is a *fourfold evil*. The soul of the individual is

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deceived; and deception, especially in a matter of Buch importance, involving the interests of eternity, can never be a *privilege*, but, under the semblance of a benefit, is the most serious of wrongs:—the Lord, the church's head, is dishonoured, by the marring of the spiritual character of his kingdom, and the obliteration, so far as the evil goes, of its distinction from the world:—the church itself is injured, by the spoiling of its appropriate loveliness; by the introduction into it of a corrupting leaven, which endangers “the whole lump,” by planting in it “roots of bitterness,” to “spring up and trouble it:” —and a stumbling-block is laid in the way of an ungodly world, when, instead of having before their eyes, in the holy character of the church as a separate and spiritual community, an exemplification of what the gospel, personally and socially, effects, it can point to the members of this community, and say, with the taunt of scorn and the bitterness of sarcasm—“what do ye more than others?”—All these things the apostle of the Gentiles evidently felt, when he mourned over the backslidings and corruptions of certain of the churches in his day. And surely, when any christians, instead of sympathising with the spirit of his lamentations, almost regard these backslidings And corruptions with a Bentiment of complacency, as furnishing them with an apology for tolerated impurity now, they are fearfully astray from rectitude, both in their views, and in the frame and temper of their minds. They are making the same-fearfully perverse use of the corruptions of churches, which has so often, so madly, and so fatally, been made of the errors and Bins of individual saints. The man who in the social

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corruptions of apostolic times finds a vindication for similar social corruptions in our own days, proceeds on the very same principle—a principle in which there is *no* principle—with him who, in spite of his own personal vices, encourages himself in a good opinion of his personal safety, from the recorded trespasses and falls of good men.—As the latter are recorded, not that they may be imitated in individual character, or that security in sin may be fostered, but that they may be abhorrently shunned, and that self-jealousy may be kept awake in prayerful vigilance; so are the corruptions of churches recorded, not that other churches may follow them, and feel at ease amid worldliness and pollution, but that they may be warned and put on their guard; that they may purify, and preserve in purity, the temple of the Lord.

Let pastors, and let churches, on all the grounds that have been mentioned, “take heed unto themselves,” in regard to this primary and fundamental point—*the materials of which a church should be composed*. If this is neglected, it matters comparatively little what else is minded. If this be wrong, nothing can be right. O let it be remembered, that it is not numbers, that it is not wealth, that it is not worldly respectability, that constitutes the attraction of a church in the eyes of the Lord. On a temple of “living stones,”—on an assembly of true spiritual believers, how few soever, how poor soever, and how despised soever by the surrounding world, they may be,—he will look with complacency and “lift up the light of his countenance:”—he will cheer them with his smile, guide them by his counsel, and enrich them with his blessing:—he will “come unto them,

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and make his abode with them,” saying, “here will I dwell, for I have desired it:”—while, in holy indig-

nation, he will frown on masses of corruption, and turn away from them with loathing, though associated with the largest amount, and with every possible variety, of worldly grandeur. "What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord."

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CHAPTER IV.

OF THE OFFICERS OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.

ON this important subject, I confine myself within the limits of *protestantism*. And the method which I prefer is the following:—

I. I shall state what appears to me to be the truth, with the scriptural evidence on which my conviction of it rests:—Then—

II. I shall endeavour to show what is *not* the truth, with the scriptural evidence against it:—*First*, in the scheme of EPISCOPACY:—and *secondly*, in the scheme of PRESBYTERIANISM.

In other words, I shall try to prove the three following positions:—

1. That there are only two orders of officers recognized in the New Testament, as having existed in the churches constituted by the apostles—namely, *Bishops* and *Deacons*.

2. That there is no evidence in the New Testament in support of *diocesan episcopacy*,—or of bishops invested with authority over the churches in more or less extensive districts, and over the ministers of those churches as their inferior clergy.

3. That there is no conclusive evidence for the existence, in the apostolic churches, of an order of bishops or presbyters that bore rule in the church, but did not teach,—usually called by our presbyterian brethren *ruling elders*.

SECTION I.

PROOF THAT BISHOPS AND DEACONS ARE THE ONLT ORDERS OF OFFICERS, IN THE CHURCHES, RECOGNIZED BT THE NEW TESTAMENT.

This first position being one in which, under this general form of it, our presbyterian brethren are agreed with us, I shall not dwell so largely on it as otherwise I might have done. It is necessary, however, to present the proofs of it, on account of its bearing upon the refutation of the claims of episcopacy. The precise point of variance between presbyterians and independents will be fully discussed under our *third* position.

In support of this our first position, then, we observe—

1. There are some institutions and arrangements, which have in them a kind of *a priori* recommendation from their *naturalness*. They are such as *circumstances naturally suggest*,—or such at least as, when suggested, the obvious exigencies of the case at once show to be *exactly suitable*. They *correspond* to the exigencies; and they *exhaust* them.—This seems to be very much the case on the present subject. There are *two descriptions of interests*, which belong to every christian individually; and (since societies are composed of individuals) which belong to every christian society,—to every church. I need hardly say what these are—the *spiritual* and the *temporal*. Under the one or the other of these two heads, all that concerns the well-being of a church may be easily included. Now, it does seem as if nothing could be more natural and simple, than a distribution

of officers according to these two classes of interests or of wants;—the efficient superintendence of the spiritual and of the temporal necessities of a church

comprehending all that it can require.—Here is simplicity. Here is nature. Here is all that is needed, and no more. And this consideration should at least prevent our being surprised, should we find the distribution of offices in correspondence with this simplest classification of existing wants.

In making this simple distribution of the interests and the corresponding offices of the church, I feel myself quite entitled to assume, without an argument, that when episcopalians rank the *deacon* as one of the orders of the *clergy*, they put him quite out of the place he originally occupied, and confer upon him functions which did not then pertain to his office. The occasion of its first institution, and the charge then explicitly assigned to it of the “tables,” or temporal provision, of the poor, and, inferentially, of the temporalities of the church in general, the reception and distribution of its bounty, must be admitted to fix, with quite sufficient clearness and definiteness, the nature and objects of the office. “*Serving tables*” is the phrase employed to express the “business,” for the management of which the “seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom,” were chosen from among themselves by the “multitude of the disciples,” and formally set apart by the apostles. In whatever other capacity Borne of them, in the history, may be found acting, it is sufficiently manifest that such was the sphere of their occupation in that of *deacons*. I must be pardoned for declining to swell my treatise by entering into any further discussion of the episcopalian dea-

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conship,—and assuming the proper sphere of the diaconal office to be the superintendence of what may appropriately be termed the *temporal* or *secular beneficence of the church*.

While I thus speak, however, it may be proper here to caution my reader against a mistake, sufficiently natural, and, as I believe, very prevalent. I

would not have it understood, because the *secular* is the department or province, with which the latter of the two offices, that of the *deacon*, is specially conversant, that therefore the office itself, in the due discharge of its functions, has in it *nothing spiritual*. It would be incorrect, on the one hand, to say, that the spiritual office has nothing to do with what is secular; inasmuch as it pertains to "the pastor and teacher" to expound and inculcate the principles on which whatever is connected with the secularities of the churches ought to be conducted. And it would be more incorrect still to say, on the other, that the secular has nothing to do with what is spiritual. It is very far from being an entirely *secular secularity* that pertains to the office of the deacon. Under such a view of matters, there lurks a fallacy. The fallacy is, that because the immediate ministrations of an office relate to what is secular, the *ends* to be answered by those ministrations, and the *manner* in which they should be executed, must all be secular too. But the church of Christ, it must not be forgotten, is a *spiritual community*. And it should be laid down as a maxim, that in such a community, there is nothing whatever of which the end, or design, is purely or exclusively secular,—nothing, that is, which has answered the entire purpose of its appointment, when it has secured an object solely temporal,—

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connected only with this world and its interests. There are spiritual ends connected with secular duties; ends intimately associated with the glory of Christ, the prosperity of his church, and the consequent promotion of the principles of his gospel. So that the right fulfilment of a trust, which, in its immediate and palpable functions, bears the aspect of secularity, may be of very essential use in the advancement of spiritual character, both personal and social. The liberal and efficient provision, for example, for the tables of the poor, and for their

individual and domestic comfort, affords a beautiful exemplification of that spiritual love,—that benevolent and beneficent kindness, which is the very *genius* of Christ's kingdom, and which, “in the beginning of the gospel,” was so honourable to himself and his doctrine. How lovely,—how full of all that is interesting and attractive,—how fruitful of glory to Christ and of benefit to souls, was the scene presented by the first church at Jerusalem, when not only was “great grace upon all them that believed,”—their spiritual prosperity abounding by the use of their spiritual privileges; but when, by christian sympathy and christian bounty, no temporal distress was left unrelieved, and no temporal want unsupplied. This was part of the manifestation of their spiritual prosperity; and it tended to the conviction of others, to the recommendation of the principles by which effects so unquestionably excellent were produced, and thus to the conversion and salvation of souls. When the “murmurings” mentioned in the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles arose, they were calculated, as far as the cause of them existed, to hinder these desirable results:—and when the distri-

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button of the church's bounty was committed to the deacons then chosen for the purpose, and the whole existing need was regularly and adequately supplied, the hazard of such a prejudicially counter-working influence was taken out of the way, and the full efficacy of the display of practical love was restored. In this way, it will at once be seen, the diaconal function, with all its seeming secularity, operates most efficiently to the increase of spiritual good. It tends to the circulation of love,—“brotherly love,”—that love which is the very life-blood of the body of Christ. The principle by which the means of temporal benefit are supplied, is this love; and then, the distribution of those means is designed, not merely to relieve the actual want, but to promote the exer-

cise of the same divine principle. Every thing temporal is to be regarded as subservient to what is spiritual

This being the case, it must be evident that, in order to the full influence of the function of the deacon, there must be a correspondence between the *manner* of discharging it and the *spiritual ends* intended by the Lord to be served by it.—When, amongst the members of the civil community, a public subscription is set on foot for the relief of any particular class of sufferers, whether from some sudden local calamity, or from the more general pressure of the times, the distributors of that bounty may be considered as having discharged the trust committed to them, when they have given to each sufferer the share of the amount, either allotted to him by the roll of distribution put into their hands, or determined by the principle of proportion according to which they have been instructed to act. But

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not so the deacon of a christian church. When he visits Christ's poor, he visits his brethren of the family of God:—he visits them in the name of him whose commission he bears:—he visits them with a message of love from his other brethren, by whom he has been chosen and set apart for the execution of this trust. In such circumstances, can he be said to have *done his duty*, when, like the mere agent of a civil and secular society, he has simply doled out the pounds, or the shillings, or the pence, required? Far, we affirm, very far from it. In executing the merely secular part of his function, how faithfully and judiciously soever in regard to the proportional allotment to the different cases claiming the supply, he has overlooked one of the ends,—and that, too, the very highest, which the distribution is designed to effect. He has forgotten the Lord's purpose,—*to cherish love*; love to the Lord himself, for having said—“Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of

these my brethren, ye did it unto me,"—and the warm reciprocation of love to one another in the hearts of his people. He has neglected what ought to have been held by him as of primary importance,—the rendering of the pecuniary donation—the temporal relief—the instrument of promoting spiritual feeling. It belongs to the duty of the deacon to accompany the supply of the means of comfortable subsistence with such words of soothing consolation and encouragement, or of salutary admonition, as the poverty supplied, or the affliction relieved, or the circumstances and character of the individual or the family, may require; and, at the same time, by prayer and thanksgiving, to draw out the gratitude, and establish the confiding dependence, and warm

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the christian affections, of the poor and suffering brethren and sisters, and so to rivet the more closely their attachment to the Lord and to his church. Christ has such ends in view; the church has such ends in view; and he who is the servant of Christ and of the church has not adequately exonerated himself of his duty, unless he has fulfilled it in such a manner as effectually to promote them.

Thus, upon the principle that, in a spiritual community, every thing must be associated with spiritual ends, there may be,—nay, there must be, no small amount of what is spiritual infused into the discharge of the deacon's trust.—And to this I would add, that, since all the secular concerns of the church, as well as the provision for the poor, naturally fall into the deacon's hands,—all that relates to the pecuniary means and the support and progress of the cause of God in general, both in the christian society with which they are connected, and in the world at large;—it may, I think, be fairly regarded as a part of their official duty, to maintain a supervision of the practical operation of the principles of liberality amongst their brethren:—so that, while the pastor, in his

public ministrations, expounds and inculcates the principles, and urges the apostolic motive—"Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye, through his poverty, might be made rich,"—if any deacon, or if the deacons generally, have ground to believe that in certain quarters the influence and consequent product of these principles are not what they ought to be,—that there is any egregious failure or deficiency,—I cannot but regard it as incumbent on them, individually or collectively,

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"not to suffer sin upon their brother," but, with the needful union of affection, fidelity, and delicacy, to remind him of the neglected or the defectively fulfilled duty. This, indeed, may be regarded as the course which the fellow-members of a church in general are bound to follow towards one another;—but there seems naturally to rest a special obligation on the deacons, in such cases, to deal, in faithful kindness, with any who are not duly "honouring the Lord with their substance," whether in regard to contribution for the poor, or to the support of the gospel and the advancement of the cause of God. They have a charge of the treasury:—and it is incumbent on them to see to it that it is not defrauded of any of its dues, but, in its several departments, suitably replenished.

Thus, while the official trust of the deacons is secular, there is in the duty connected with the management of that trust, much that is spiritual, and promotive of spirituality.*

* I have not in the text taken any notice of a question which, on the subject of the Deacon's office, is frequently put—Why have you not *deaconesses*? My reasons are two. *First*: It is not a question of which the difficulty to answer it (were there any) presses on independency alone. In other denominations, there are no deaconesses, nor female office-bearers, any more than among Independents.—*Secondly*: There is no such difficulty. 1. There were no deaconesses in the first church,—the model church,—that of Jerusalem. Although the class of persons of whom the neglect complained of occasioned the institu-

tion of the office was a description of *females*,—those appointed there to hold it were *men*—“seven men of honest report.”—2. The evidence of the existence of deaconesses afterwards, in any of the other churches, is so exceedingly scanty, as to make it matter of surprise that it should have been so generally assumed. There is one passage only, and that a merely incidental one, that at all bears upon it. That passage is Rom. 16.1, “I commend unto you Phebe our sister, who is a servant (δῆακονον, deaconess) of the church which is at

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While, however, I plead for the naturalness and completeness of this twofold distribution of official services in correspondence with the twofold classification of a church’s requirements, I would not be

Cenchrea.” Even here, the strictly *official* use of the designation, how probable soever, is not indisputably certain. And then the other passage, usually cited on the subject—1 Tim. 1. 9, &c, “Let not a widow be taken into the number,” &c.—has ever appeared to me (were it not for the high authorities to the contrary, I should be tempted to say *demonstrably*) to refer to an entirely different matter. The apostle is describing the age and qualifications of such widows as should be “taken into the number” of those who were *provided for by the church*. Provision for widows is the principal subject of the chapter. The injunction in the third verse—“Honour widows that are widows indeed”—has no relation to putting them into office, but to maintaining them in respectable comfort. The injunction immediately following shows this. It is an injunction to “children and nephews,” or rather grandchildren, to “requite their parents;”—that is, evidently, by making the requisite provision for them: and the injunction is repeated in a more extended form in verse 16, where it includes all near relations—“Let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.” And in verse 8, the man is unchristianized—denounced as having “denied the faith, and being worse than an infidel,” who fails in this duty, binding on him alike by the obligations of nature and of grace—the duty of “providing for his own, and especially for those of his own house.”—And while, in this respect, both previous and subsequent context leads to this interpretation, the latter confirms it in another way—namely, that all the reasons assigned for “*refusing the younger widows*” and such as might be summed up in one—the mischievous tendencies—the moral and spiritual dangers—of maintaining in a condition of dependant idleness those who were able, and who ought to have been willing, to gain their own livelihood. (Compare, in regard to idle *men*, 2 Thess. iii. 10–12.) Whatever partial, occasional, temporary relief even “the younger widows” might stand in need of, they were not, for the reasons assigned, to be taken entirely on the bounty of the church. Such complete and comfortable provision was to be reserved for those aged and excellent women described so feelingly by the apostle, as a suitable return for their long-continued course of active and self-denying beneficence. 3. If in any case females were installed in office, it was where the customs of society

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understood to lay stress upon it, as if it had in it any absolute conclusiveness; well knowing that man's theoretical anticipations are by no means always in accordance with God's actual institutes. All, of

did not admit of such easy freedom of intercourse between the sexes as existed among the Hebrews, and as exists amongst ourselves. Out of such a state of society a necessity, or an approach to necessity, might arise for the employment of female agency. And if any church, in parts of the world so circumstanced, should employ it still, under the conviction of their having the divinely-approved example of the church at Cenchrea, if not of others, to warrant it,—who will find fault? But the fact of the original institution sufficiently shows, that the main point is *the office*, and the adequate fulfilment of its benevolent ends. If, in the application of this principle of accommodation to customs, churches go no further than recorded example warrants,—all will be safe enough.

I had forgotten: There is yet another passage which has been supposed to refer to *deaconesses*, or, at any rate, to some description or other of female office-bearer:—I mean 1 Tim. iii. 11, rendered by our translators—"Even so must *their wives* be grave," &c. It is translated by Dr. Macknight—"The women, in like manner, must be grave," 4c.—and paraphrased "the women *who are employed in teaching the young*." And in a note he refers to early authorities for its being understood of such, as well as of female *visitors of the afflicted*; which comes nearer to the idea of deaconesses. But, since the apostle had just spoken of bishops being "the husbands of one wife," and in the very next sentence repeats the requisition as to deacons, it is greatly more probable that the word—*γυναϊκας*—is to be understood in the same sense, and with reference to the wives of both. I say, of *both*. Doddridge and Scott understand it of the deacon's wives, and infer the same thing as being *a fortiori*—"much more"—necessary in those of bishops. But there seems nothing to hinder its meaning both *directly*,—the one already mentioned, the other in his mind, and about to be mentioned too.—Nor would it be at all difficult to assign just and weighty reasons for this requisition, both as to bishops and deacons; although, strange to say, this commentator is at a loss to discover any.—According to the somewhat crotchety authority of Dr. Mac-knight, indeed, (for which too, however, he adduces similar support,)—we should have *Elderesses* as well as Deaconesses:—for thus he interprets the *πρεσβυτιδες* of Titus ii. 3, 4,—"*female elders*," assigning them the same official occupation as above, of teachers of the young

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coarse, depends on our being able to show that in the present instance, there is such accordance.—Observe, then—

2. *We find these two classes of officers mentioned exclusively, on occasions when, had there been any*

others, they too could not possibly fail to have been introduced.—I refer now especially to two passages. The first of them is, Phil. i. 1. “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, *with the Bishops and Deacons.*” This one passage should go far to settle the question. That all the saints in Christ Jesus who were at Philippi “formed *one church,*” there is the clearest proof. In the conclusion of the epistle, the apostle says:—“Now, ye Philippians, know also that, in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, *no church* communicated with me, as concerning giving and receiving, *but you only:*”—and without doubt, the church at Philippi was one of the “*churches of Macedonia*” mentioned in 2 Cor. viii. 1, 2, with such commendation for their exemplary liberality.—The letter, then, is addressed to a christian church;—and in the address, or inscription, the inspired writer mentions the *members* and the *officers*;—“all the *saints,* with the *bishops* and *deacons.*” We are surely warranted to conclude, that there were no others besides the two specified. It is not supposable, on any fair and natural principle,—nay, the supposition would be in the highest

of their own sex. He is, in some points, plausible in support of this gloss. Seeing, however, aged men, aged women, young women, and young men, are all introduced in that passage in immediate succession, it seems arbitrary to understand any of them otherwise than as referring to relative ages, or times of life.

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degree unreasonable, that the apostle would mention the superior and inferior classes of office-bearers, and omit entirely an intermediate class, without even the remotest allusion to them. The fair conclusion from the passage is, that there were none but the *bishops* and the *deacons* in the Philippian church; and that, as all the churches had the same constitution, there were no others in any of the rest.

The *second* of the two passages is, 1 Tim. iii. 1-10.—In this important passage, Timothy has express instructions given him, with regard to the requisite qualifications of those who should bear office in the churches of Christ. The officers specified are, as in the former passage, two in number; and their designations, respectively, are the same,—*bishops* and *deacons*.—Here, then, in the *first* place, we have the same conclusion as before forced upon us,—namely, the improbability,—I might say the moral impossibility, that, in giving these minute instructions, the apostle should have altogether omitted an intermediate office between that of the bishop and that of the deacon; not only assigning no distinct or peculiar qualifications for the discharge of its functions, but not even so much as naming it:—*Secondly*, the two passages confirm each other. The exclusive mention of the two offices in both, serves to give us the greater assurance that we are right in the interpretation of each. An omission is unlikely in either; in both it is out of the question:—and *thirdly*; in both the one and the other, the mention of the two officers bears altogether the aspect of a *thing understood and familiar*. In reading the passages, we are at once impressed with the conviction that the churches then knew of no other offices than these.—

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If the passages thus cited be not sufficient to settle the point, that these two are the only classes of officers recognized by the New Testament, I know not what accumulation of evidence could establish it. 3. We find mention made, in other places, of *presbyters* or *elders*:—Who, it may be asked, were *they*?—We reply; there is evidence sufficiently clear, that *Elder* is only another designation of the *Bishop*; that *both designations express the same office*. For proof of this, we appeal to the following passages:—Acts xx. 17 and 28.—In the former of these verses, we read that “from Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus, and called

the *Elders* of the church;”—and in the latter, he thus addresses them:—“Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you *overseers*,”—(ἐπισκοπους, *bishops*) “to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with his own blood:”—1 Pet. v. 1–4. “The *Elders* which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:—feed the flock of God which is among you, *taking the oversight thereof*” (ἐπισκοποῦντες, fulfilling the charge of *bishops*) “not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind:—neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”—Titus i. 5, 6, 7. “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

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children, children not accused of riot or unruly.* For a *bishop* must be blameless, as the steward of God,” &c.

The passages thus mentioned do appear to me quite sufficient to establish the oneness of the office meant by the two designations:—and this receives additional confirmation from observing—

4. That *Bishops and Elders are never mentioned together*. When the former are spoken of, you never find the latter; and when the latter are spoken of, you never find the former. This is strong collateral proof of their being the same. Had they been different, we might surely have expected to find occasional mention of *bishops* and *elders*, as we do find repeated mention of *bishops* and *deacons*.†

* I have here repeated the word *children*, to show the English reader,

that the words "*not accused of riot or unruly*" refer, in the original, to *them*;—such a reader being naturally apt to understand them as forming part of the character of the *Elder*. The terms, in the original, are in concord with the *children* of the Elder; showing that his family, as well as himself, should have a character creditable to his profession and his prominent position in the church.

† With the highest deference for the eminent critical authority of the late Mr. Ewing, I confess myself somewhat sceptical respecting more than one of the positions which he occupies, in regard to the meaning of the designation—*Elders*.—When he says, in the first sentence of the section of his work on Church Government, which relates to the "Elders of the primitive churches," that "The first converts to the faith of the gospel appear to be frequently spoken of, in the New Testament, under the general appellation of elders,"—I cannot but desiderate more conclusive evidence of the affirmation than is adduced. No passages are quoted, in which the designation of "elders" is given to these first converts, either during our Lord's life, or after his ascension.—When it is afterwards added—"Other elders were those who were the earliest converts added to the church, after the ascension of Christ, in consequence of the preaching of the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven,"—I have the same doubts,

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I proceed to my second position.

and for the same reason,—that no passage is cited, in which such first converts are so denominated. That they are called "first fruits," may be freely granted;—but this is not the same with *elders*. Where are they called elders?—and where is the evidence that *first-fruits* and *elders* are synonymous?

"From among these elders," it is subsequently said, "the first ordinary office-bearers appear to have been selected."—It is certainly more than probable, that these office-bearers would be selected from among those who were both men of experience and men endowed with the spiritual gifts which then abounded. This may be admitted, without admitting that *elders* was a general designation of either the *first converts* or the *spiritually gifted*; and that thus it was not properly a term of office itself, but a term for those from among whom the two descriptions of office-bearers, the bishops and the deacons, were selected. This view renders an ellipsis necessary in those passages where "*elders*" are spoken of as having been "ordained," such as has always, I confess, appeared to me too violent to be admissible. Thus, in Acts xiv. 23, it is said—"When they had ordained them (that is, to or for them) elders in every church, they commended them to the Lord; in whom they believed."—On these words the comment is—"the expression 'they had ordained to them elders in every church,' is elliptical, and supposes the reader to understand what they had ordained those elders to be. The persons ordained were elders before:—they were now ordained to be bishops and deacons to the disciples, in every church."—I have called this a violent ellipsis. Such it seems to me to be:—that the very offices to which the election and ordination took place should not at all be mentioned, when it required so few words to do it!—only the words *ἐπισκοπους εἶναι και διακονους*—to be *bishops and deacons*. I cannot but think the passages which I have referred to in the text are, by far, most naturally interpreted on the

principle of *Elder* and *Bishop* being the same office; and that they require unnatural straining to explain them on any other.—That the word for *elders* is also sometimes used *unofficially*, is granted. But there is no difficulty in distinguishing when it is to be taken in its official, and when in its unofficial sense;—and the *unofficial* use of it is no more evidence against the official, than the general use of the word *διακονος* is evidence against the appropriate application of it to the office of deacon. When once decidedly appropriated, it cannot be said, properly, to continue the secondary, but becomes the primary, sense of the word. What is second in time becomes, through usage, first in association.

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SECTION II.

THERE IS NO EVIDENCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT IN SUPPORT OF DIOCESAN EPISCOPACY,—THAT IS, OF BISHOPS INVESTED WITH AUTHORITY OVER THE CHURCHES IN MORE OR LESS EXTENSIVE DISTRICTS, AND OVER THE MINISTERS OF THOSE CHURCHES, AS THEIR INFERIOR CLERGY.

In entering on the establishment of this position, I would assume the following things:—

1. That all attempts to find the constitution of the *christian* church by reference to that of the *Jewish*, are altogether unwarrantable, and of necessity fruitless. I shall not, therefore, consider it worth my while, to take the slightest notice, in the way of refutation, of the parallelism which high-minded episcopalians have imagined to themselves, between the gradation of ranks,—the high priest, the priests, and the Levites, under the old economy, and the similar gradation which, according to them, was (or rather must have been, for it is more a matter of favourite theory than of appeal to fact) appointed in the church under the new.—It is manifest, that our reasonings on such a subject must be drawn, not from presumptive theories, founded in a system which “decayed, waxed old, and vanished away,”—but from the recorded facts, and the directions, by precept or example, of the New Testament scriptures. All else has its basis in human fancy, not in divine prescription.

2. In our reasonings from the New Testament itself, respecting the constitution of the church of Christ, we must confine ourselves to the period subsequent to

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the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus; inasmuch as it was not till he had “ascended on high,” and had “received gifts for men,” that his kingdom was established, that his church was formed;—and till it was actually formed, it could not have its constitution fixed and exemplified.—With the exception, therefore, of any authoritative hints which our Lord may be considered as having thrown out prospectively, in anticipation of the establishment of his church, (as, for example, in Matt, xviii. 15–17,) we must look for the constitution of that church in the history commencing with the day of Pentecost, and in the apostolic epistles.—I make this observation, to set aside another “vain imagination,” by which a gradation of ranks in the christian church has been inferred from the appointment, during Christ’s lifetime, of the *twelve apostles* and the *other seventy*; the former being conceived to correspond with the *bishops*, and the latter with the *presbyter*!—It is enough, in reply to such a fancy, to say, that for men to talk of successors to the apostles—“the twelve apostles of the Lamb,”—is the most presumptuous and arrogant aspiration of “the vanity of their minds;” that the apostles, on their “twelve thrones,” sit alone, “judging the twelve tribes of Israel,” retaining their full authority, as the inspired vice-gerents of the King of Zion, over the spiritual “Israel of God;” that on their divinely accredited testimony the church was founded, that by their sole authority all its laws were fixed, and that their names will be inscribed on its twelve foundations, after it has reached its consummation in glory:—and that, with regard to the seventy, there is no evidence whatever that their commission was more than temporary, —no evidence of its having even continued beyond the

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time when, having “gone two and two before his face into every city and place whither he himself would come,” they returned, and gave an account of the manner in which they had fulfilled their charge; and that the terms of their commission, for the time it lasted, were very much the same with those of the apostolic commission during Christ’s own ministry, and their miraculous credentials too the same. Those who seek support from such sources as these, may be safely left to their own vain imaginings. Argument here would be quite out of place.

3. While we do not go back to the period preceding Pentecost, neither do we come down beyond the period of the apostles, or to any records of after times,—but keep exclusively to their age and to their writings.—Whatever can be shown to have been the state of things in these after times, and even however early, it can have nothing in it to bind the conscience. It may, to a certain extent, be admitted as *evidential*; but not at all as *authoritative*. And even when regarded as evidential, it can only possess the quality of evidence in cases where apostolic precept or apostolic example is matter of dispute. Existing facts in early antiquity, when they can be clearly ascertained, may then have their weight in bringing such questions to a settlement. But where the apostles *say nothing*, no subsequent records or writings can bind us:—and where the apostles *do decide*, whether by direct precept or by recorded example, no such records or writings can release us from obligation, or even in one iota modify their decision, or justify deviation from it. It was *to them* that Jesus said—“He that heareth you heareth me.” If we would hear him, then, we must hear them. If we have them on our

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side, we may keep our minds very easy, whosoever else can be mustered against us. The Fathers, and.

even the early Fathers, have been shown to differ from one another, and not seldom to be barely consistent with themselves. Let others, then, be their expounders and reconcilers, and carry on their interminable warfare, for the purpose of settling what, after all, has no authority in it, when the settlement has been effected:—be it ours to keep to the apostles;—to make our sole appeal to them; to feel ourselves bound where they decide, and free where they are silent.

4. When, in the present controversy, I speak of *episcopacy*, let me not be understood as meaning the existing English Hierarchy, or any other ecclesiastical constitution of a national character passing under the same designation.—The three essential orders in Episcopacy, are *bishops*, *priests*, (or *presbyters*) and *deacons*. But in the existing Hierarchy of England, we have arch-bishops over the bishops; in both of whom—the supreme and the subordinate—are vested the entire spiritual jurisdiction of the church, and at the same time, a share in the secular jurisdiction of the state: and under these we have, in regular gradation, deans, arch-deacons, prebendaries, canons, chancellors, commissaries, vicars, rectors, curates, and deacons. To which array of spiritual offices may be added the more secular ones of surrogates, proctors, lay-rectors, and church-wardens.* No one is so foolish as to think of pleading bible authority for such a complicated system as this. It has no prototype there. It is as unlike the constitution of the

* We are so little accustomed in the North to the steps of this long ladder, that I most crave pardon if I hare chanced to misarrange them.

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“kingdom which is not of this world” as that constitution appears in the New Testament, as it is possible for any one thing to be unlike another. It has sprung from worldly ambition; from the principle which began to work even in the bosoms of the twelve themselves, when “there was a strife among

them which should be the greatest." That principle reared by degrees the magnificent Ecclesiastico-political establishment of the man of sin:—and of the worldliness of that establishment—of its secular pomp and policy—no small amount was retained, when the papal domination was disowned.—I have to do at present only with the leading principle of episcopacy, as stated at the head of this section;—with the question, namely, whether, in the constitution of the apostolic churches, there were any bishops *in the diocesan sense of the designation*,—bishops exercising ecclesiastical authority *over the ministers and congregations of a district or diocese*.

Confining ourselves, as we determinately do, to *scripture*, our argument here needs be but short.—Observe, then—

1. If we have succeeded in the proof that *Bishop* and *Presbyter* are, in the New Testament, designations of the same office, the question is already settled. The proof of this we do not resume; but with confidence refer to it. If the reasoning there be admitted to be sound and conclusive, the whole system of episcopacy falls at once to the ground. If, in the New Testament, a bishop is the same with a presbyter, and a presbyter the same with a bishop,—then, of course, the bishops were not an order of officers superior to presbyters and over them in authority:—and if not, where is episcopacy?—But—

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2. Reference is made, in support of the principle of the system, to scripture precedents. It is not affirmed that anywhere diocesan episcopacy is formally instituted; but it is alleged to be exemplified. And could the allegation be made good, our own avowed principles would oblige us to yield submission. Three cases are referred to. They are,—that of the apostle James, at Jerusalem; that of Timothy and Titus, at Ephesus and Crete; and that of the

angels of the seven Asiatic churches.—I must offer a few remarks on these, in their order.

FIRST CASE. James, it is alleged, was Bishop of Jerusalem,—exercising episcopal authority, not merely in common with others, over “the multitude of the disciples,” but over all the other “ministers of the word” themselves. These ministers were what, in modern phrase, would be called his clergy, subject to his authoritative dictation. The position is bold, Where is its proof?

1. On several occasions, James is singled out in a way that seems to imply and to indicate such distinction and superiority:—as when Paul, in writing to the Galatians, speaks of persons who had come from Jerusalem to Antioch, as having “*come from James;*” —when the historian of the Acts of the Apostles represents Paul, on his arriving at Jerusalem after the Demetrian riots at Ephesus, as “going in,” with himself and others, “*unto James;*” and “all the elders being present;”—and when Peter, on his deliverance from prison by the angel, charges those in the house of John Mark, to “show those things *unto James,* and to the brethren.”—Gal. ii. 12; Acts xxi. 18; xii. 17.—Now, suppose we grant that in these modes of expression there *is* something distinctive

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and peculiar as to James,—to what does it amount? To no more, I apprehend, if to anything, than to this; that, after a certain time at least, the apostles were accustomed to leave Jerusalem, for the purpose of carrying the gospel to other places. This was the case with Peter. At the very time referred to in the first of these passages, he was at Antioch, Gal. ii. 11; and at other times we find him “passing throughout all quarters,” and at Joppa, “tarrying even many days.” That the rest occasionally followed a similar course, we have every reason to believe. But it would not have been suitable that by the use of this liberty, or rather in the discharge

of this duty, *all* the apostles should be absent from Jerusalem *at once*. What, then, if, by agreement among the apostles themselves, it was understood that James was to remain more stately resident there than the rest?—providing thus for a case which was possible; although there is little or no reason to suppose that it often, if even ever, occurred.—That nothing more than this, or something like this, is meant, is sufficiently clear from the connexion of two of the cited passages themselves. In the one, Paul speaks alike of “James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars.” They were all three “of note among the apostles;” but there is not the slightest indication of any *official* distinction amongst them. In the other, how do we find the elders who were present with James speaking to Paul? They do not leave it to their supposed *bishop* to dictate to him what seemed the path of *duty*. It is an easy, friendly, brotherly interview. James and the elders hear together his interesting narrative; they unitedly magnify the God of grace for its details; and then

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they give him their combined counsel—“Do, therefore, this that we say unto thee.” And, while they gave this counsel, what are the terms in which they speak of the previous decision respecting the freedom of the Gentiles from the Mosaic yoke? Do they say—“James, our bishop, who presided on that occasion, pronounced his authoritative *sentence*, that the Gentiles should not have it imposed upon them?” Nothing of the kind. Their language is—“As touching the Gentiles who believe, *we* have written and concluded that they observe no such thing.” Acts xxi. 25.

2. And this naturally leads me to the other and more direct proof of the prelatie authority of James, —namely, his conduct in what episcopalians are fond of denominating the first ecclesiastical council—Acts xv.—As a whole chapter will be devoted to the full

discussion of the real character of that assembly,—and its bearing, or no bearing, on our present subject, I shall say but little on it at present. It will then, I trust, be made to appear, that the case is one which, in the way of appropriate example, no party can claim. For the present it must suffice to observe:—1. That the idea of James, *in his capacity of bishop of Jerusalem*, having authoritative presidency over the other apostles themselves, is an outrage on all that can be deemed “decency and order.”—2. If Jerusalem was his diocese, Antioch was beyond its limits:—to whose jurisdiction soever it might be supposed to pertain, it assuredly came not within the boundaries of his; nor could his episcopal authority, therefore, be either appealed to from it, or bind it by its decisions.—3. And yet it was not at Antioch alone that the decision come to in the assembly at Jerusa-

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lem was received and owned as obligatory,—but by “all the churches of the Gentiles.” Was James bishop of the whole christian population of the heathen world? A large diocese!—4. The original words for “*my sentence is*” do not at all necessarily express the pronouncing of an officially authoritative decision. In his previous address, James refers to what “Simeon.” (Peter) had said;—agrees with his judgment in the matter, and confirms it,—delivering, at the same time, his own, in full coincidence with it, And then the whole assembly—“apostles, elders, and brethren,” unite in the same judgment—and give it forth, thus unitedly, to the churches at Antioch and Syria and Cilicia.” If the “*sentence*” of James is here to be taken as implying *authority*,—the authority is the same as that with which Peter had spoken before him,—that of an *apostle*.—Then, 5. This accords with the terms of the appeal. It was not made to James,—to James alone, or even to James especially. The determination at Antioch was “that Paul and Barnabas and certain other of them should

go up”—not to the bishop of Jerusalem, but “to the apostles and elders” who were there. It was they that “came together to consider of the matter:—it was by them the decree was framed:—and by them, associating “the brethren” with them, it was issued and circulated. Neither James, nor any special office of James, is at all to be found in the document in which it was embodied and circulated.—It shall be our endeavour hereafter to show that there was apostolical,—that is, inspired—authority in it; but *prelacy*, most assuredly, there was none.—We proceed to our

SECOND CASE.—It is that of *Timothy* and *Titus*.—They are two, indeed; but from their similarity, we take them as one.

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The former, it is alleged, was clearly the bishop of *Ephesus*, and the latter of *Crete*. The affirmation rests on the charge given them, respectively, by the apostle Paul, in reference to those places; a charge which, it is affirmed, evidently implies the possession of diocesan authority.—To *Timothy* he writes:—“As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest *charge some that they teach no other doctrine,*” &c.:—and again—“*against an elder* (a presbyter) *receive not an accusation,* but before two or three witnesses. *Them that sin rebuke before all,* that others also may fear.” (1 Tim. v. 19)—And to *Titus*:—“For this cause left I thee in Crete, *that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain, elders* (presbyters) *in every city, as I had appointed thee,*” &c. (Titus, i. 5.)—Here is the ordination of presbyters;—here is the charge of the soundness of their doctrine;—here is authority to investigate accusations against them, and to rebuke them when they fell into sin. Is not this superiority,—and authoritative superiority? Undoubtedly it is.—Are not these, then, the powers of a diocesan bishop? Be it so. It does not from that follow that either Timothy

or Titus was such a bishop. The *powers* of a diocesan bishop might be possessed, and yet the *office* of a diocesan bishop have no existence. They were possessed by the apostles themselves; yet Timothy and Titus were not apostles. The truth appears to be, that they were what may appropriately be termed *apostolic delegates, or plenipotentiaries*. They accompanied the apostle, as his assistants in his arduous ministry, and were commissioned by him, doubtless with the sanction of his divine Master's authority,

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as special occasion required, to occupy particular stations for a season, as his delegates or vice-gerents; to act for him in his absence, and supply his unavoidable lack of service. Were it not that the designation savours of antichrist, we might call them Paul's *legates a latere*, in the places occupied by them in his absence. They were above bishops. They acted by delegation of apostolic powers. Timothy is called an *evangelist*; but neither the one nor the other is ever designated an ἐπισκοπος or bishop.—And all that remains to be proved concerning them is, that neither at Ephesus, nor at Crete, nor anywhere else, had either the one or the other a settled office,—a permanent official connexion with the churches in those places. And the proof of this is on the very surface. It requires no more than the simple comparison of a few passages in the apostle's letters to each of them.—In Tit. i. 5, before quoted, 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.” That this was only a temporary commission, or delegation of powers for a special occasion, and not a permanent official charge, is as clear as possible from chap. iii. 12; where he says—“when I shall send Artemas unto thee, or Tychicus, be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis: for I have determined there to winter.” The apostle was desirous to have

Titus again with himself, and thus proposes to send one or other of the two fellow-ministers named, to exchange places with him.—In 1 Tim. i. 3, the apostle writes:—As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine,” &c.

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—from which it appears, not that he appointed Timothy to a permanent office there, but that he left him behind, on his going to Macedonia, for the special purpose of counteracting the progress of certain prevailing heresies.—In 2 Tim. iv. 9–12, he directs him thus:—“Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me. For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia; Titus to Dalmatia; only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me for the ministry. And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus.”—Here let the following things be noted.—1. We have, in these verses, Titus, who, when Paul wrote to him, had been “left in Crete,” gone into Dalmatia: and whether the Epistle to Titus or the second to Timothy be supposed the prior in date,—whether Titus went from Crete to Dalmatia, or was left in Crete subsequently,—it is, in either case, obvious, that the stay in neither the one place nor the other was officially permanent, but that there was a removing from place to place, as circumstances required.—2. Though Timothy was at Ephesus when the first of the two epistles was written to him, these verses render it a matter of uncertainty whether he was there at the date of the second. I enter not into the dispute among critics as to their respective dates, and the precise distance of time between the one and the other. But the language—“Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus,” is much more likely to have been used of a place where Timothy, to whom the letter is addressed, *was not*, than of the place where he was:—and the likelihood,

as *Whitby* remarks, of his having been at the time somewhere in the lesser Asia is confirmed by the

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request in the subsequent verse, to bring with him the cloak, the books, and the parchments, which the apostle had left with *Carpus at Troas*.—3. Wherever he was, whether still at Ephesus or elsewhere, the passage shows us that his stay was to be short,—evidently for some special purpose, the completion of which the apostle urges him to expedite, so that he might “come to him shortly;”—in a subsequent verse, “before winter.” All this goes to show that he was not stationary, as the office of a Diocesan Bishop would have required him to be.—4. When to the verses quoted we add the twentieth and twenty-first—“*Erastus abode at Corinth; but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick. Do thy diligence to come before winter. Eubulus greeteth thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brethren;*”—we learn, that there was a number of ministers attendant upon the apostle, who were left by him, as circumstances required, at different places, for special ends, and were recalled and exchanged as he saw needful or expedient; holding no permanent official charge in any one place.—When this is taken in connexion with the previous proof that *bishop* and *presbyter* are designations of the same office, the point seems to be settled by quite a sufficiency of evidence,—*that in those days there was no such office as that of a diocesan bishop*. Were there any evidence whatever, indeed, in what Paul says to Timothy, that could make him out to have been the bishop of a diocese, it must have proved him to have been *some-what more*,—a bishop of bishops—an ἀρχιεπίσκοπος, an *archbishop*; seeing it is not the qualifications of *presbyters* merely that are described for his direction, that so he might “lay hands suddenly on no man,”

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—but those of *bishops*; so that he was to ordain *them*, and consequently to have *them* under his archiepiscopal jurisdiction. And such have some actually fancied Timothy's official distinction to have been I ARCHBISHOP TIMOTHY! I think I see the youthful evangelist smile at the honour thus put upon him by modern criticism:—but it is not the smile of self-complacency and conscious elation, but the smile of pity for the littleness of ecclesiastical ambition. As the commissioned legate of an apostle, he was in reality higher than any such modern dignitary;—but in his own estimate, his greatness, like that of the apostle whom he represented, lay in his being “least of all, and servant of all.”

THIRD CASE.—The only other scriptural ground, that I am aware of, which has been taken up in support of the office of diocesan bishop, is that which is found in the addresses of the epistles to the seven churches of the lesser Asia,—in Rev. ii. and iii.—“To the angel of the church at Ephesus,” “To the angel of the church in Smyrna,” &c.

The precise import of this designation has been a much controverted point.—Without entering largely into the discussion, and frankly admitting the difficulty of determining the sense with precision and certainty, I would remark upon it—

1. It must have been well and readily understood *at the time*, for it is given as the explanation of a symbol:—“The seven stars *are the angels of the seven churches*; and the seven candlesticks (or lamps) which thou sawest are the seven churches.”—As no difficulty would then be felt in understanding what was meant by the seven *churches*, we may presume that neither would there be any about who were signified by their *angels*.



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2. The distinction so pointedly expressed between the two symbols and the two things signified by them, is certainly quite sufficient to set at once aside what has appropriately been termed the “*ultra congregational*” view of the import of the designation—namely, that it means *the church itself*, in its corporate or collective capacity, contemplated and designated as a person,—an angel,—a messenger. This, for the reason just hinted at, as well as for others which might be mentioned were it worth a moment’s while to notice them, is an outrage on all propriety and common sense, which one cannot but feel ashamed should ever have been resorted to in support of any cause, how good soever we may otherwise consider it.

3. Not much more defensible is the *presbyterian* interpretation, which regards the ANGEL of each church as signifying, according to a similar figure of personification, the *consistory of the eldership*,—either the *session* or the *presbytery*, according as they take the word *church* to mean one congregation or more than one;—in a word, the rulers of the church regarded as *officially one*, and so figuratively embodied in one person.—This is far from natural. To me it appears one of the most extraordinary exemplifications of the power of attachment to system, and of the force of habits of mental association, that men of sound judgment and eminent learning could ever have brought themselves to think it so. That a *unit* may be an appropriate symbol of a *collective number* is alleged to be exemplified in the vision of the “angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel, to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and

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tongue, and people.” “As this gospel,” it is alleged, “can be preached only by *men*, this angel, who has



it to preach to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, must be the symbol of a human ministry. And as it is perfectly evident, that no single man can thus preach it, but that there must be a *great company* of preachers to carry it to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, the angel mentioned is, and of necessity must be, the symbol of that "*great company*."* The example is an unfortunate one. Here, the angel is one of the heavenly messengers, and *is himself the symbol*:—in the other case, the angel is an earthly minister, and, instead of being the symbol, is *the thing symbolized*! It is the "seven stars" that are the symbols,—the symbols of "the angels of the seven churches." And, as each of the stars is a unit, so must each of the angels be. To make the stars symbols of the angels, and then the angels, in turn, symbols of collective bodies,—is to make a caricature of symbol.—The cases, then, are not at all parallel. And even apart from the irrelevancy of the example, the idea of a collective body being symbolically personified in an individual, not of a higher order, as in the "angel flying in the midst of heaven," but of their own order—of themselves,—is, I repeat, anything but natural.† "It is

* "The claims of episcopacy refuted"—by the late Dr. Mason of New York, page 108.—the italics are his.

† Dr. Mason endeavours to show, against the Episcopalians, that the fact of the *singular* and *plural* numbers being used promiscuously in these epistles, is clear proof of the *collective import* of the designation "*the angel*;" seeing he is sometimes addressed as *one*, and sometimes as *more than one*. He uses the argument dexterously. But any little plausibility it might possess is completely neutralized by the fact,—a fact to which he never so much as alludes,—that the epistles were

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not usual," as has justly been remarked, "to address epistles to mere personifications; and had the parties to whom these apocalyptic epistles were sent been the body of elders in each congregation, the title 'presbytery,' or some analogous appellation, would have been employed."*

4. We must refer to what has formerly been adduced in evidence that the word *church* is never, in the New Testament, used to denote a number of congregations under a common government,—as sufficient to set aside the *episcopalian* explanation of the *angel*, as meaning the *diocesan bishop* of the several congregations, with their presbyters, conceived to have been in Ephesus, and, of course, in each of the other six cities, which were the seats of the churches;—and also to the proof that bishops and presbyters were originally the same.—There is no evidence whatever of “the church at Ephesus,” or the church in any one of the other cities, meaning any thing else than is meant by the same word throughout the New Testament; nor that there were any other office-bearers in any one of them than those which are

ordered to be addressed “to the *seven churches* which were in Asia;” that they are expressly said to contain “what the Spirit saith unto the *churches*,” and yet, that if the plural address be to the “*collective ministry*,” the *churches* are not addressed at all! And in different instances, the plural address cannot, with any semblance of reason, be understood as referring to no more than the pastors of the churches. See Rev. ii. 10, 13, 23, 24; iii. 20, &c. Surely, when it is in each epistle repeated—“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches,” the natural and obvious meaning is, that every member of the churches individually should give ear to what was said to the churches collectively; not every one of the pastors merely.

* “Anglo-Catholicism, not apostolical,” &c. By W. L. Alexander, (now D.D.) App., Note A.

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represented as having belonged to all other churches. We have seen, that by Paul, in his time, the elders or presbyters of the church in Ephesus were addressed, each and all of them alike, under the designation of bishops. Whosoever, therefore, the *angel* in each of these churches is understood to have been, there is an utter destitution of all proof that he was a *bishop* in the *episcopalian* sense of the term. It is pure assumption, and nothing more. And what can be more preposterously unfair than to assume, for

the explanation of a passage confessedly obscure, what all other and plainer passages contradict?

5. There remain *two suppositions*, in the one or the other of which, it appears, we must acquiesce.

The *first* (and incomparably the simplest, could it be made good) is the hypothesis of those who hold that at that time there was only *one pastor, elder, overseer, or bishop, in each of the seven churches of Asia*; and that he, of course is addressed, under the designation of the angel of the church, and the church collectively through him.—The obvious objection to this, drawn from the fact that in the church of Ephesus, as the 20th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles informs us, there was a plurality of bishops,—is met and obviated, on the part of those who take this ground, by referring to the interval of thirty years which had elapsed between the one time and the other, and the changes which, during that time, might have taken place;—and they bring in support of this, and as evincing its probability, what is said, in the apocalyptic epistle, as to the declension of that church from its “first love” and from the abundance and purity of its “first works.”—The objections to this hypothesis (otherwise not beyond the limits of

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the reasonable) are, *first*, that it is hardly consistent with probability, that in the period specified the Ephesian pastors should have been reduced to one, and that the same should have been the case in all the rest of the seven churches,—in some of which at least, if not in all, there is every likelihood there was—(as both at Ephesus and Philippi we are sure there was)—a plurality:—and *secondly*, that in the earliest records subsequent to the apostolic, to which this is a fair case for reference, there is evidence of a plurality having continued to exist at Ephesus.

The *second* of the hypotheses adverted to is—that in the eldership of these churches there was, at that early period in the church’s history, a *president*,—a

primus inter pares,—to whom it is that the epistles, respectively, are addressed.—In this view of the matter a number of eminent congregationalists are disposed to acquiesce, as, at any rate, the least objectionable.—It has been urged against it, however, that if a *presidency* such as is supposed was *permanent*, it constituted a species of *arch-bishopric* in each church, of which nowhere else in the New Testament is the remotest hint discoverable;—and that in the idea of its being a presidency *by rotation*, for a limited time to each incumbent, as circumstances might suggest, there is a want of that dignity and settledness of order which characterises the constitution of the churches, as it appears in other parts of the New Testament;—and, at the same time, that “THE ANGEL” is much liker the designation of a permanent official relation than that of a mere president *pro tempore*,—for the month, or the year, in course of which the epistle happened to be sent.

On the whole, the point is one of dubiety and diffi—

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culty,—on which it is not either fair or safe for any party to rest much:—and it cannot be allowed to supersede the evidence deducible from plainer portions of the word of God. It is one of those points, (of which there are very few) which would be quite intelligible at the time, but which to us have become somewhat uncertain and obscure. And it is a principle of biblical interpretation, of which no one will question the soundness, that when, on any subject, passages are found of which the meaning is plain, and one presents itself in which it is difficult and dubious, the plain should settle the point against the difficult and dubious, not the difficult and dubious against the plain. Obscurity and dubiety are enough for my present purpose.

I proceed to my third position.

SECTION III.

THERE IS NO CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE FOR THE EXISTENCE, IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES, OF AN ORDER OF BISHOPS, OR PRESBYTERS, THAT HAD PART IN THE RULE OF THE CHURCH, BUT DID NOT TEACH,—USUALLY CALLED BY OUR PRESBYTERIAN BRETHREN—RULING ELDERS.

I HAVE formerly mentioned the agreement of presbyterians with independents, as to there being only two orders of officers recognized as permanent in the churches of Christ, in the New Testament scriptures—namely bishops and deacons; and, consequently, as to bishops and presbyters being designations of the same office.—This is the ground taken by both my two esteemed and able friends Dr. King and Dr.

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M'Kerrow.* I could not, in this respect, wish my own sentiments, as an independent, more simply and dearly expressed than in the following sentences of the former (pages 15, 16.) “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 who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:’—no mention is made of other office-bearers.”—Thus, too, Dr. M'Kerrow, (page 13,) when speaking of Paul's first epistle to Timothy, as containing a delineation of a plan of government for the churches,—“1. He mentions two classes, of office-bearers, and only two:—these are overseers (or elders) and deacons; chap. iii. 1–12.”

Where, then, in this department of our subject, lies the difference between us? In this. Our presbyterian friends divide the former of the two descriptions of officers into two classes; namely, elders that *both teach and rule*, and elders that *rule only*:—elder the *genus*; teaching elder and ruling elder the two *species*:—or, elder the *species*; teaching elder and ruling elder

* In their respective Treatises, entitled,—“The ruling eldership of the christian church,”—and “The office of ruling Elder in the christian church: its divine authority, duties, and responsibilities.”

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the two *varieties*. Independents question the scripture authority for this distinction; holding not only that bishop and elder are designations of the—same office, but that, in every case, that one office includes both the departments of teaching and ruling;—that in all bishops and elders alike these twofold powers are vested;—that there is no scripture authority for elders that rule but do not teach.—On the subject of the OFFICERS of the Church, this is THE GREAT POINT OF DIFFERENCE. And to the full discussion of this we now beg the reader’s close and candid attention. We shall first produce the evidence that all elders, or bishops, are scripturally commissioned both to teach and to rule; and then examine the proofs adduced in support of an eldership that have the power to rule, but not to teach.

The evidence of the former of these two positions may be stated as follows:—

1. Those very passages which prove the identity of the office expressed by the two designations, prove, at the same time, that *teaching* is one of its essential functions. Having before adduced the passages for the former purpose, let us now look at them again as they bear upon the latter.

Acts xx. 17 and 28.—The comparison of these two verses, we have seen, proves that elder and bishop are the same office; “the elders of the church” being here enjoined to “take heed unto them-

selves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost had made them *overseers*”—the same word as that usually translated *bishops*. But the passage contains satisfactory proof too that the official duty of these overseers, or bishops, included *teaching*. The words which follow clearly imply this:—“to

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feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” The word rendered “to *feed*” (ποιμαίνειν) signifies to *fulfil the functions of a shepherd*, and bears reference to the word “flock,” which he had just used. Our translators seem to have chosen the word “to *feed*,” under the impression of suitable provision for the flock constituting the most important part of the shepherd’s charge. The flock is a spiritual flock; the provision, spiritual provision,—instruction in divine truth, the only nourishing provender of the flock of Christ. Such instruction, therefore, formed a part, and the chief part, of the official duty of *all* these elders; although rule, or guidance, and general superintendence and care, was another. They were to *tend*, or (could we turn our noun, as in some other cases we do, into a verb) to *shepherd* the flock or “Church of the Lord:”—“Feeding the flock,” says Dr. M’Kerrow, (p. 68,) “is only one part of the shepherd’s duty: *ruling* them is another, and an equally important part of it.” I am not disposed to contend about degrees of importance: it is enough for my purpose that both are admitted to belong to the shepherd’s office and to be here included. And the subsequent context is altogether confirmatory of those addressed having been teachers; and if some, all,—for there is no distinction so much as hinted at:—“For I know that after my departure grievous wolves shall 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.*” Surely this language applies most

naturally to public *teachers*, perverting the truth of God, and becoming pestilent heresiarchs.

Titus i. 5-7, was also quoted in evidence—and

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conclusive evidence it is—that *elder* and *bishop* are designations of the same office. But the passage is no less conclusive in the proof which it furnishes that of the elders or bishops thus ordained by Titus, *public instruction* was a leading and essential duty. For what is the concluding qualification in the apostle's delineation of character?—"holding fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, *that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort, and to convince (or confute) the gainsayers.*"

I Pet. v. 1-4. Here, as in Acts xx. 28, the elders are enjoined to "*feed* the flock of God, *taking the oversight*"—discharging the *episcopal* function—"not by constraint, but willingly."—The *feeding*, as in the former passage, means acting the part of shepherds; and to their being *under shepherds* there is an allusion in the immediate following words—"And when the *chief shepherd* shall appear, ye also shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." And we have seen, and need not repeat, that providing appropriate nourishment belongs as essentially to the duty of the spiritual shepherd, or pastor, as the exercise of rule.

I have mentioned these passages first, as naturally first suggesting themselves, and as having in them a special force of evidence from the circumstance already noticed, that the very proofs of the identity of the office of bishop and elder should each be a proof, at the same time, of *teaching* being one of its duties.—But—

2. There are other passages which, independently of this speciality, are quite as conclusive on the point to be established. In some of these the same, and in others different, designations of the office are used:—but under every designation the same union of teaching and ruling appears.

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1 Tim. iii. 1-7. The passage—including to verse 12,—has before been adduced, in proof that *bishops* and *deacons* are the only two classes of permanent officers in the church. The part of it now cited describes the qualifications of the bishop. And of these one is, that he be “apt to teach.” So far as this passage goes, then, *fitness for teaching* is a required qualification in *all bishops*; and, by consequence, in *all elders*,—bishop and elder being, confessedly, the same.—In verses 4 and 5, too, the apostle makes an allusion, in the way of illustrative comparison, to the paternal trust: “for if a man know not how to rule (προστηναι) his own house, how shall he take care (επιμελησεται) of the church of God?” Now surely the rule of a family here intended, is not a rule *independent of instruction*. It is the general parental charge; a charge embracing duties, of which instruction is none of the least imperative and important,—being one, indeed, which is indispensable to duly principled subjection, and which it behoves the parent to conduct in such a manner as to secure this subjection,—this respectful and submissive obedience. It is in illustration of the bishop’s function that the comparison is introduced. Of that office, as we have seen, “apt to teach” is a necessary qualification. So it is of the charge of a father. And the plain meaning is, that if, in one department or in another of his domestic function as a father,—whether in instruction or discipline, (and indeed the two are so inseparably connected, that excellence in the one can hardly be imagined, where there is much defectiveness in the other) “he who desired the office of a bishop” was egregiously faulty, he proved himself disqualified for the official oversight—the *επιμελεια*, the general care—“of the church of God.”

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Eph. iv. 11. "And some, pastors and teachers."—"Another title," says Dr. M'Kerrow, "by which *elders* are designated, is that of *shepherd*, or pastor." (p. 68.) My friend quotes it in proof that to the elder's office *rule* belonged. But it no less conclusively proves that to the elder's office *provision* or *nourishment* belongs,—that is, *teaching*.—And the words just cited from the epistle to the Ephesians go to prove that the "pastor and teacher" are joint designations of *one office*; so that all pastors were teachers, and all teachers pastors:—and thus, if *pastor* be one of the designations of the *elder*, every elder should be a teacher.—That in Eph. iv. 11, "pastors and teachers" are to be taken together as designating one office, is to me clear from the structure of the sentence in the original; and, indeed, it is not less apparent in our English translation. They come in at the close of an enumeration, and constitute together its last *item*: "some (to be) apostles; some, prophets; some, evangelists; some, pastors and teachers." Had "*pastors*" been one office, and "*teachers*" another, we should naturally without question, have had—"some, pastors; and Borne, teachers."

Heb. xiii. 7. "Remember them who have had the rule over you, (ἡγουμένων) who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."—"Another of the titles given to them (elders)" says Dr. M'Kerrow, "is that of *governor* (ἡγουμενος)." And he proceeds to show that the word expresses *rule*, whether ecclesiastical or civil. This we are not disposed to question. But let the reader mark what is here too, under this designation, connected with the exercise of rule—

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"*who have spoken unto you the word of God.*" Still the same:—ruling and teaching united.

1 Thes. v. 12,13. "Now we beseech you, brethren, to know them that labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love, for their work's sake."—Here too is the same union. The word rendered "who are over you" *προισταμενους*. "It is," says Dr. M'K., "another of the titles applied to elders," and "signifies a *president* or *ruler*." And the passage is one of those cited by him in instancing its occurrences. It is hardly necessary to say, that the "labouring among them," the "being over them in the Lord," and the "admonishing them," do not here express the functions, respectively, of three distinct offices, but the united functions of the same office. The *one definite article*, in the original, preceding all the three clauses, settles this point, were it otherwise doubtful. Had distinct offices been meant, the article would have been repeated before each.* It is very likely that the term for "*being over them*" does here denote especially rule, although, like the others, it is somewhat indefinite. "*Labouring*" is general, though usually associated with the preaching of the gospel, "labouring in word and doctrine." And, whether it here includes this or not, "*admonishing them*" embraces the entire process of moral and spiritual training, though chiefly signifying exhortation to duty, and reproof its opposite. The passage, therefore, comes among the

* It stands—τους κοπιωντας εν υμιν προϊσταμενους υμων εν κυριω, και νουθετουντας υμας.—It would have stood —τους κοπιωντας εν υμιν, και τους προϊσταμενους υμων εν κυριω, και τους νουθετουντας υμας.

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proofs that there were none who ruled, who did not, at the same time, teach. And it is admitted to relate to elders.

"Another title given to elders," adds the same author, "is *steward*:" "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of

the mysteries of God—"I Cor. iv. 1.—"A bishop (or overseer) must be blameless, as the steward of God."—This too, he shows to be a situation of authority and rule:—"A steward (οικονομος) is a person invested with authority, to rule either in a family or in a city:"—and, having given instances—Gal. iv. 1, 2, and Rom. xvi. 23, he adds—"When elders, then, are described as *stewards of God*, this certainly implies that they are invested with authority to rule in the house of God."—Be it so. But is authority, or rule, *all* that the designation implies? Is not one of the first associations that occur to our minds in connection with an οικονομος, the supplying of the family with suitable provision,—the *virtualling* of the household? Is not this the chief, I might almost say the sole idea suggested by our Lord himself, when he uses the comparison, as belonging to the superintendence, or rule, of the domestic steward?—"Who, then, is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, *to give them their portion of meat in due season?*" Luke xii. 42.—And indeed, what was it, in the terms of one of the passages above cited, to be "a steward of *the mysteries of God?*"—what, but to be entrusted with the dispensation of those divinely revealed truths which are "the wisdom of God in a mystery?" And in what, accordingly, does Paul represent his own stewardship as having con-

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sisted?" "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 (or though) against my will,—οικονομιαν πεπιστευμαι—I am entrusted with a stewardship."* If then, the bishop, or elder, be a "steward of the mysteries of God," the ministration of the word must be an essential department of his trust.

Thus, under all the designations by which elders, or bishops, are distinguished, we find *teaching* a part of the duties devolving upon them,—entering essentially into their charge.—Observe now,—

3. How perfectly *reasonable* and *natural* this is:—I mean, the union of *teaching* and *ruling*.—Why, one of the very departments of the teacher's business is, to set forth clearly in their scriptural simplicity, and to enforce by the motives of gospel grace and divine authority, the principles and laws according to which rule is to be conducted, and the church, by admission and discipline, to be preserved in its purity. It is by their very competency to expound these principles, and to elucidate and carry home these motives, that "pastors and teachers" give their people confidence—enlightened confidence—in yielding obedience to the power with which the divine Head of the church has invested them; or, in other words, in going unitedly, intelligently, and heartily, along with them, in following out the mind, and executing the will, of that Head. The association of the teaching and the ruling is, in this way, just such an

* In our vernacular version—"a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me."

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association as commends itself to our judgments, and exemplifies the wisdom of the church's Head in establishing it. The study of the laws of Christ is as much a part of the teacher's duty, as the study of his truth. And, as it is the study of them that enables him to understand and apply them himself,—it is his ability to expound them that renders submission to them, on the part of the people, an act of enlightened and conscientious subjection to Christ,—as every act, whether of churches or of individuals, ought to be.—Let it not be placed to the account of the high-mindedness of office (a feeling to which, we humbly trust, we have no very overweening

propensity) when we add, that we are not prepared to admit the *identity of the office* sustained by the teaching and ruling elder, and by the elder that merely rules;—to admit, that is, the latter to be the same office with the former, *minus* the teaching. We maintain, that the “pastors and teachers” hold a *distinct office* in the churches; and that, if there be any authority in the scriptures for ruling elders who do *not* teach, they must be regarded as holding a distinct office also,—a *third*, intermediate between the former and the deacons. And, in point of fact, they are almost always so distinguished in the current terminology of presbyterianism. How seldom, if ever, do we hear the two spoken of under a common designation! They are never “*the elders*” but “*the ministers and elders.*” “The *last class* of office-bearers in the church,” says Dr. Dick, “consists of ruling elders;” language in which he represents these as, not a mere division of the first of two classes, but a class by themselves.—So too Dr. Thomson, of Coldstream, in his “comparative view

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of English and Scottish dissenters:”—“Two sorts of officers are recognized by both:—and what are *deacons* in the one are just *elders* in the other. Names are nothing.” Here, elders are distinct from *bishops*, and identical with *deacons*.

But, passing from this, as what may be regarded in the light of a point of verbal propriety rather than matter of fact,—we must now go on to consider the grounds on which our brethren maintain the distinction between elders that both teach and rule, and elders that rule only,—whether the latter be held as a distinct office, or as a division of one more comprehensive. Into this subject, as being one of the great turning points of the controversy between Presbyterians and independents, we must enter, as already said, somewhat carefully and at large.

The passage of Dr. Dick, from which the few words just quoted are taken, stands thus:★—"The last class of office-bearers in the church consists of ruling elders:—in speaking of whom it will be necessary to enter into greater detail; as the divine institution of such persons is controverted,—by episcopalians, who deem it incongruous that laymen, as they call them, should be admitted to any share in the government of the church; and by independents, who maintain that the scriptures make no mention of any other officers besides pastors, except deacons. It is acknowledged that our information respecting the latter is more explicit and ample, as we have not only an account of their institution, but a description, in another place, of their qualifications.† Still, however, we believe that there is a

★ Lectures on Theology, Lec. C, vol. iv., p. 379.

† This is a somewhat singular admission, when taken in connexion

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warrant for ruling elders, because there are some passages in which they seem to be distinctly recognized."—Now, before we enter on the consideration

with the almost universal *practice* heretofore, at least for a long period past, of the different presbyterian bodies. They have had ruling elders, but no deacons. They have had the office, that is, in behalf of which, it is here admitted, least can be said; while they have not had the one respecting which we have the "more explicit and ample information," and for which the necessary qualifications are specially described! This, it may be said, is a mere inconsistency with themselves; seeing their theoretical system of church order includes them both. I grant it The fact, however, looks as if they had found *too offices enough*; and if, in selecting the two, they have preferred the one which is *less* to the one which is *more* expressly enjoined, they should not surely be over severe on us for adopting one which they as well as we admit to be of divine institution, and refusing the other, for which we see no sufficient authority.—But the principle on which the omission of the deacon by our presbyterian friends is by this eminent writer—if not vindicated—at least excused and palliated, is to me more surprising still than the omission itself:—"In some parts of the church, the office of deacon is retained, but in others it is not; and the want of it has been represented as a criminal omission. But the institution arose out of particular circumstances, and may, therefore, be dispensed with, when these do not exist. In some congregations there are no poor; in others, they are very few in number; and



where they most abound, they can be attended to by the elders, whom we acknowledge as office-bearers in the church, as we shall afterwards see; and who, on the principle that an inferior office is comprehended in the superior, possess the powers of deacons, as ministers possess the powers of elders. This is our apology for not having deacons in all our congregations; and it seems to be satisfactory. They are not appointed, because all that they could do can be done by the elders, without encroaching upon their other duties." Bishops and deacons are thus admitted to have been office-bearers in the churches as constituted by the apostles. They are expressly mentioned; and their respective qualifications are specifically delineated. And here it is declared a *satisfactory* apology for setting aside—not occasionally or in special instances merely, but systematically and universally—the one of these offices, because its duties can be sufficiently well brought under another, for whose primitive existence the evidence is granted not to be so full and explicit!—And if the office of deacon may be set aside,

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of the passages which are alleged to contain this "distinct recognition," let the reader mark what is here admitted:—not merely what has already been

on the principle of the inferior being included in the superior,—then, since "ministers have the powers of elders" as well as "elders the powers of deacons,—since the elder is included in the minister, as well as deacon in the elder,—why may not both deacon and elder be set aside, and a "satisfactory apology" be found by the ministers for the absorption and monopoly of office-power in themselves,—in their own official charge! A convenient principle this (how little soever so meant) for clerical ambition.

[Since the preceding part of this note was written, there has been a material and gratifying change. To a very considerable extent, our presbyterian brethren have ceased to be satisfied with acknowledgment of the deacon's office, in their "second book of discipline," as "an ordinary and perpetual function in the Kirk of Christ," and allowing that acknowledgment to stand as a dead letter, and a testimony against their practical inconsistency.—In reply to a note of inquiry to my friend Dr. Buchanan in regard to the law and practice of the Free Church, he thus writes, after making reference to the terms of the "second book of discipline:"—"Under the sanction of this Directory, which was framed in 1578, and which continues in full force in the Free Church, the office of deacon always had a place in the Church of Scotland, although in more modern times it had, to a great extent, fallen into desuetude. In 1843, when it became necessary to make special regulations as to the management of our church's secular affairs, an Act was passed, the week after the disruption (on the 27th May, 1813) entitled 'Act anent the administration of the secular affairs of the church, and the appointment of deacons.'—This Act directs, 'that each congregation should have a sufficient body of deacons,' &c:—but, as it 'may be impossible, in some instances, immediately to accomplish this,'—the law directs that 'in such cases, and in the meanwhile,' elders should 'attend to these matters (the secular affairs of the congregation) in addition to their own more peculiar duties.'—There are other Acts, prescribing the mode of electing



deacons, and of setting them apart to the duties of their office.—It will be obvious, from what I have now stated, that the office of deacon is a part of our system, and that every congregation is expected and required to have deacons.”

This is well. Of the extent to which, by the numerous congregations of the Free Church, the terms of the Act have been practically

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noticed, the distinctness of the offices of pastor and ruling elder; but, moreover, that the latter, the ruling elder, is an office of whose institution we have nowhere any account, and of the qualifications for the discharge of whose duties we have nowhere any description! From such admissions there surely arises a strong previous presumption against the original existence of any such office. Notwithstanding this, however, since our brethren conceive the office to be “distinctly recognized” in certain passages of the New Testament, let us see what the passages are, and what their respective amounts of proof.

The passages are three in number—Rom. xii. 6-8:—1 Cor. xii. 28:—and 1 Tim. v. 17.—Of these passages we consider the last as the only one really deserving of serious attention. They are all, however, insisted upon by presbyterians, with more or less degrees of confidence; and we must examine them all accordingly.

1. Rom. xii. 6-8. “Having then gifts, differing

complied with, I am not sufficiently informed to say. I presume, however, it is considerable, and will, in due time, be general and universal.

In the two able works which have recently issued from the press, on the subject of the Elder’s office, by ministers of the United Presbyterian Church,—Dr. King and Dr. M’Kerrow,—the obligation of the Deacon’s office in the churches, as having the express sanction of the New Testament, is distinctly acknowledged, its desuetude condemned and deplored, and its revival pleaded for.—This also is well, and indicates a likelihood that in that church too the same restoration of the office will by and by have place.—Could we find authority for the office of the *ruling elder*, as *they* have found it for that of the *deacon*, we trust we should have grace to follow out our convictions as they are doing theirs. We want more light, however, for this, than even these volumes, acute and able as we admit them to be, have afforded us.]



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according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Surely this need not detain us long.—There are passages to be found on various points, from which as grounds of primary appeal nothing can be deduced, although, on the supposition of the particular points having been previously, and on other grounds, established, they might reasonably enough be considered as containing an allusion to them. The present is one of these; though, even in the case supposed, the allusion could not be said to be very certain or clear. As it stands in itself, it is obviously quite too general and indeterminate, to prove any thing on the point now in question.—The language of the whole passage is of that indefinite character, and susceptible of such a variety of interpretation, that I cannot but regard it as a symptom of felt lack of better proof, that it should ever have been appealed to. It cannot be brought, with any decisiveness, into the argument. That each of the phrases used would be distinctly enough understood by those to whom the epistle was addressed, there can be little doubt. But we cannot, with any certainty, ascertain what that understanding was. The whole passage might be interpreted as a simple direction respecting the spirit and manner in which the duties of prophecy, of ministry, of teaching, of exhorting, of giving, of ruling, and of showing mercy, ought to be fulfilled, without designing to express any distinctive appropriation of each of these

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to a particular official class. Our conclusions must rest on terms much more sure and definite in their



import than those of such a passage, to be at all satisfactory. Satisfactory it can never be, to say—that “many commentators are of opinion” that “*prophecy*” and “*ministry*” are general divisions, under which the different offices of the church are arranged; the former comprehending “*teaching*” and “*exhorting*” and the latter “*giving*” “*ruling*” and “*showing mercy*.” It would, of course, be quite a sufficient reply to this, to say, that many commentators think otherwise. There is not in the style and structure of the passage, the slightest indication of “*prophecy*” and “*ministry*” being general terms, each including a certain portion of those which follow. On the contrary, every several clause stands in the very same distinctive separation from the rest: “Whether prophecy,—*or* ministry,—*or*, he that teacheth,—*or*, he that exhorteth,—he that giveth,—he that ruleth,—he that showeth mercy.” So far as the construction of the passage goes, any man might insist upon it that each one of the clauses is the designation of a distinct class,—with which none of the others had a right to interfere.—That *prophecy* is *not* to be regarded as a generic term, inclusive of *teaching* and *exhorting*,—we have evidence in other passages, where “*prophets*” appear, in enumeration, as a distinct class of persons from the “*pastors and teachers*.” Thus in Eph. iv. 11, “And he gave some (to be) apostles; and some, *prophets*; and some, evangelists; and some, *pastors and teachers*.”—When it is said—“At any rate it is plain, that *ruling* is distinguished from teaching, exhorting, and giving;” who denies it?—but when it is added, in the way of explanation, and as being of equivalent import

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—“or from the peculiar work of the pastor, the doctor, and the deacon,”—we demur. There is more assumed than can be granted. That *pastor* and *doctor* (or *teacher*) were distinct offices, is, as has just been remarked, rendered very unlikely by the passage cited from the epistle to the Ephesians, and is at the

best, a matter of uncertainty:—and that “*exhortation*” expresses the peculiar function of the *doctor* or *teacher*, who is supposed to have had the sphere of his labour among catechumens, or applicants for baptism, whom it was his special province to instruct, —while “*teaching*” expresses the special department of the “*pastor*”—is an assumption altogether gratuitous, and withal having in it no small amount of unlikelihood.

It must be obvious, that, in arguing from such a passage, we cannot be entitled to take one of the enumerated particulars as expressing a definite office, and another one of the functions of that office, and a third the exercise of a private and unofficial gift or grace,—just as it may suit our purpose. We must have some definite principle of interpretation. If that principle be not what has just been mentioned, but must be that of official distinction; then let it, in this sense, be consistently carried out. And if it be so carried out, a presbyterian can have no more right to assume, (as, from the power of habitual association, he may be apt to do), that “he that teacheth” is a ruler as well as a teacher, than another has to assume that “he that ruleth” is a teacher as well as a ruler. So far as the fair exegesis of this passage goes, the teacher is as distinct from the ruler, as the ruler is from the teacher. The teacher must not rule, any more than the ruler teach. The

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one cannot rule, nor can the other teach, without their encroaching, respectively, on each other’s province and prerogative. Dr. M’Kerrow says—“The apostles fixes our attention, not only on teaching and ruling, as distinct gifts, but on different individuals as exercising those gifts—‘he that teacheth’—and—‘he that ruleth.’ I appeal to the common sense of my readers, if this phraseology does not lead us to the conclusion, that there were persons appointed to rule, distinct from ‘those who are appointed to

teach.”—Page 85. Appealing, with equal confidence, to the common sense of *my* reader, I have only to ask, whether *the converse* does not, with the same conclusiveness, follow from the premises,—that there were persons appointed to teach distinct from those who were appointed to rule? If the *ruling* and the *teaching* are not only different gifts, but gifts exercised, respectively, by different persons, I see not how this can possibly be evaded; how the argument which warrants the inference that there were rulers who did not teach, does not, of necessity, warrant the inference also, that there were teachers who did not rule.—It will not do for Dr. M’K. to say—“*I admit that teaching and ruling are united in the same person, in the case of the elder who labours in word and doctrine.*” No doubt, he admits it. So do we all. But this is nothing to the purpose. The question is, whether such union of the gifts is to be found in this passage. To me it is clear as day, that on Dr. M’K.’s principle of interpretation, it is not only not to be found, but pointedly excluded; the same principle which divests “him that ruleth” of the official function of teaching, divesting “him that teacheth”

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of the official function of ruling. If the ruler be a distinct class, so is the teacher.

These remarks proceed on the supposition that the “teaching” and the “ruling” have reference to public official duties in the church. But, just as a specimen of the indefiniteness of the designations, and of the uncertainty of their precise import, it may not be amiss to notice for a moment, without at all dwelling upon them, the different interpretations put by critics and commentators on the “*προϊστάμενος*”—“he that ruleth,” translated by some of them, consistently with their interpretation, “he that *presideth.*” By *Calvin*, it is explained of rulers in the church, but, at the same time, is extended, in the principle of it, to all descriptions of confidential superintendance;—by

Henry, of “those ministers who, in the congregation, did chiefly apply themselves to ruling work;”—by *Whitby*, as corresponding with “κυβερνήσεις, governments,” in 1 Cor. xii. 28, elsewhere designated προεστῶτες and προϊστάμενοι;—by *Hodge*, of ruling presbyters. These, though not precisely alike, are closely akin to each other. *Scott*, with an episcopalian leaning, interprets the designation of the “exercise of authority in the church over any description of its ministers, or in any magistracy or presidency in the community;”—*Macknight*, of “a stated office, perhaps the Bishop’s ministry;”—*Schleusner*, in like manner, of “the president of the church, him to whose care the christian assembly is committed, and who is elsewhere called bishop, presbyter, shepherd;”—*Guise*, of “him that is entrusted with the church stock, and with a superintendency over it, to see that it is applied to its proper uses;”—*Boothroyd*, of “him

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who presides over distribution to the poor;”—*Clark*, of those probably who received and provided for strangers, especially the persecuted;—*Stuart*, (who discusses the point at length, and with almost a superfluity of learned argument), as corresponding with “ἡ προδοτατις,” the term applied in Rom. xvi. 2, to Phebe, and rendered a “succourer of many,” and as signifying, in the sense put upon it by *Clark*, “one who receives and entertains strangers.”—I have nothing to do at present with the reasonings in support of each of these interpretations. I refer to them, merely to show the indefiniteness of the designation.

And then, further, what are we to make of all the other items in the enumeration, if they are to be taken *officially*?—“Ministry” is most generally understood here of the *deacon’s office*; but by *Whitby* it is interpreted of the office of *Evangelist*.—Supposing the office of the deacon its true reference, then what are the offices, as distinct from the deacon’s, of “him

that giveth,” and of “him that showeth mercy?”—And again, if “he that teacheth” designates the official teaching elder,—rare we to have a separate office for “him that exhorteth?” And this latter, by the way, is by Boothroyd understood, specifically, of “the *Bishop* or *Pastor*, who not only enforces christian duties, but applies the doctrines of Christianity for the comfort, hope, and joy of the faithful:” while by “him that teacheth” he understands “any persons of competent gifts, who taught the ignorant, or such as were called catechumens.”

How precarious, then, I repeat, must be the ground furnished by such a passage, as the basis for any sure conclusions on the subject under review!—My own

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opinion of the passage has been already indicated. In the connexion in which it stands, and for the purpose it was designed to serve, not only is it not necessary that the enumerated particulars should be understood *officially*,—but it is rather the contrary. I am persuaded, that by the very use of the word “*office*” in reference to the *functions* of the bodily members (“all the members have not the same *office*”) an illusory effect is produced on the minds of inconsiderate English readers. But it is obvious that *all the brethren* were members of the church corporate, the spiritual body; and as obvious, that the apostle is speaking of the several *functions* of all the members. As, in the natural body, each member, how little and insignificant soever, has its own place and its own appropriate use; so, in the body of Christ, every individual member has some function which it may usefully discharge,—some special end it may serve for the general benefit. And it is a great misfortune, when the members of churches get into the habit of interpreting passages such as the one before us, as if they had reference only to those who *bear office* in the christian community. They are thus led to think too much about their officers, and too little about

themselves. But the spirit of this whole passage manifestly is, that all have their places, and all their functions. The whole church is addressed; and the duty inculcated is, that all should use the peculiar gifts possessed by them, whatever they were, official or private, natural or miraculous, for the general good, without self-conceit, or pride, or envy, but with all becoming humble-mindedness and self-diffidence, and with all incumbent assiduity and zeal. Our official distinctions, and our forms of church order

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we must seek elsewhere than in a passage which, from its very connexion and structure, gives so “uncertain a sound” as this:—and elsewhere they may, with sufficient clearness, be found.

2. And if the phrase “an uncertain sound” be applicable to’ *this* passage, it has a still stronger application to the one which comes next in order—1 Cor. xii. 28,” And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.”—I expressed surprise in the former case: my surprise is still greater here. It is beyond measure strange that any stress should ever have been laid on a ground so insecure and feeble as this. “*Helps*” and “*governments*” are the two items in the list from which the conclusion is drawn. The one is made to signify *deacons*, and the other *ruling elders*. And I think this is just as likely to be the true interpretation as any other,—perhaps the most likely; understanding *ruling elders*, however, not in the presbyterian sense of elders whose office was to rule apart from teaching, but of *bishops*, whose office included both instruction and rule. But still, both the terms are quite too general in their import, and too completely unexplained by their occurrence and connexion any where else in the New Testament, to allow of any sure conclusion to be drawn from them. Here too

it may be worth while to show their indefiniteness by a few references.—“*Helps*,” or *Helpers*, are by *Dr. Owen*, by *Calvin*, by *Bloomfield*, by *Dr. Henderson*, and by presbyterian writers in general, (as, in our own day, by *Dr. Dick*, *Dr. King*, *Dr. M’Kerrow*, and others,) understood of the office of the *deacon*. But

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by *Dr. Macknight*, the word is interpreted of “those who, speaking by inspiration, to the edification of the church, were fitted to assist the superior teachers, and help the faith and joy of others;”—by *Guysel*, of those who, “being of the lower class of prophets, foretold particular events, and were assistant to the apostles and churches, in going to one place and another on special occasions, for various purposes;”—by *Horsley*, in a like sense, of “such as Mark, Tychicus, Onesimus,” &c.;—by *Whitby*, of “deacons, and other officers, who ministered, not only to the hick and poor, but in holy things also, as baptizing and distributing the eucharist;”—by *Doddridge*, of “helpers in the management of charities;”—by *Boothroyd*, of “persons who assisted the apostles in administering baptism, praying with the sick,” &c.;—by *Scott*, of persons “qualified to attend, and be assistants to, the apostles in their labours, as evangelists; or, as some explain it, to help the pastors in the office of deacons, and in various other services.”*

* “*Helps*.” ἀντιληψεις. This word occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It is derived from ἀντιλαμβάνω, and denotes, properly, *aid*, *assistance*, *help*;—and then, those who render aid, assistance, or help,—helpers; *who they were, is not known*. They might have been those to whom was intrusted the care of the poor, and the sick, and strangers, widows and orphans, &c.; i e. those who performed the office of deacons. Or they may have been those who attended on the apostles, to aid them in their work; such as Paul refers to in Rom. xvi. 3, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my *helpers* in Christ Jesus:”—and in verse 9, “Salute Urbane, our *helper* in Christ.” It is not possible, perhaps, to determine the precise meaning of the word, or the nature of the office which they discharged:—but the word means in general, those who, in any way, aided or rendered assistance in the church, and may refer to the temporal affairs of the church, to the care of the poor, the distribution of charity and alms, or to the instruction of the ignorant, or to aid rendered directly to the apostles. There is no

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Then again, by the same critics and commentators, “*governments*” are understood of ruling elders who were not teachers; of bishops, or elders who both ruled and taught; of “those who had the gift of discerning spirits, and were thus fitted to direct the church;” of “those who were qualified to preside over the secular affairs of the church, as governors;” —of “suitable persons to be left in authority by the apostles, when they were forced away from newly planted churches, that they might set in order things - that were wanting;” of “persons endued with a deep and comprehensive mind,—wise and prudent;” of “such as had the disposal of the charitable contributions of the church, and dealt them out to the poor.”*—Thus strangely diverse and mixed up with each other are the views entertained of these and the other designations in this enumeration, as well as of those in the former passage in Rom. lii.—Respecting the “*helps*” and “*governments*” *Doddridge* says—“I think we can only guess at the meaning of these words, not having principles on which to proceed in fixing them absolutely:” and *Pearce*—“These two words, (notwithstanding all that the commentators say about them) I do not understand.” In the ninefold enumeration of gifts in the beginning of the chapter, and the enumeration of offices in the close supposed by many to correspond to it, an

evidence that it refers to a distinct and permanent *office* in the church; but may refer to aid rendered by any class, in any way. Probably many persons were profitably and usefully employed in various ways as aids in promoting the temporal or spiritual welfare of the church.”—*Albert Barnes, Comm. on 1 Cor.*—What proof, I repeat, can a term whose import is so indeterminate furnish on such a subject?

* See the writers before named, and others.

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eminent bishop of the Anglican episcopacy fancied he found a gradation of rank to this extent to have existed in the apostolic church; and on this ground he undertakes to vindicate the equally numerous

gradation in our southern hierarchy!—The truth is, it is foolish for *any* party to pretend to build on passages so necessarily obscure, and which, from this obscurity, leave so much room for ingenious conjecture and fancy, and can afford to no system any thing like a solid and satisfactory support. On such a subject as the one before us, we must find our ground, as before said, in passages more definite, and which have less in them of evident reference to the peculiarities of the era of spiritual gifts, which was to pass away, and more of direct relation to the ordinary and permanent constitution of the church.

3. 1 Tim. v. 17, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour; especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.”

This passage is undoubtedly entitled to a somewhat closer examination than either of the former. Even if the point in dispute had been previously settled on the presbyterian side, the interpretation of the former would still have been exceedingly doubtful and conjectural:—how much more when they are themselves numbered among the proofs of that point! I consider the *third* passage as, in the present argument, really *standing alone*. Let the following remarks upon it be candidly weighed:—

1. It has, we trust, been successfully proved, that elder and bishop are designations of the same office, and that the office of the bishop—the ἐπισκοπος—includes in it the charge of *teaching* as well as of *ruling*; both being naturally, as well as by actual

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prescription, comprehended in the *oversight* which the original word expresses. If these things have been fairly made out, then the entire weight of that proof goes into the scale of *a priori* probability that in *this text too* the term *elder* (being manifestly, and by universal consent, a term of office) is to be understood as synonymous with *bishop*; that it ought to be so interpreted, unless it absolutely cannot, or can-

not without unnatural force. This is a fair principle of exegesis,—a principle universally applied. We have seen that the evidence of *elder* and *bishop* being designative of the same office is, by presbyterians, in their argument against episcopacy, admitted to be conclusive. On the other hand, there is no evidence whatever in favour of *elder* having any other official sense—any sense inferior to that of *bishop*, as just explained,—any sense that divests it of the teaching department of oversight, and confines its functions to ruling alone, thus converting it, in fact, into a distinct office, and making the *official complement* of the churches *threefold* instead of *twofold*,—that there is no evidence of the term *elder* being used in such a sense,—UNLESS IT BE FOUND IN THIS PASSAGE ITSELF. Candour, therefore, should admit the previous likelihood, that the sense established by other passages is the sense here.

2. The word in the first clause of the verse, which is used to express the official duty of the elders—*προεστωτες*—which is here rendered “rule,” is susceptible of a more general or a more special signification, according to the circumstances and connexion in which it is found. It may denote the general duty of “*being over*” the church, considered as comprehensive of both the departments of teaching and

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ruling. It is equally appropriate, when used of either.—Or, if it happens to be introduced where the former of the two departments is otherwise mentioned, and is thus used distinctively, it may denote more specifically the latter, the department of ruling.—I am not sensible that it is of any great consequence to my present argument, whether it be taken here in its more general or in its more specific sense. I am inclined to understand it in the former,—as meaning—“the elders who discharge the functions of their office well,”—these functions including the twofold *oversight* of teaching and of

ruling.—“We have formerly seen, that in other passages, in which the same word occurs—as 1 Tim. iii. 4, 5; and 1 Thes. v. 12,—it is associated with the duty of teaching, as another function of the same office. Even on the supposition, however, of its being, in the passage before us, correctly rendered “*vide*,” and of its denoting such rule in the stricter and more definite sense, it does not at all follow that the rule must be that of a distinct office—an office from whose duties *teaching* is excluded. The evidence of the various passages we formerly had under our review, exemplifying the different designations under which elders are spoken of, is all to the contrary:—and we may, perhaps, see reason immediately to think, that, instead of such exclusion of teaching being necessary in the passage before us, the necessity, in order to a consistent exegesis, is on the other side.—Observe, then, further,—

3. It is quite clear, that the word rendered “honour” is here to be understood as meaning more than mere *respect* or *deference*; and more especially, that it includes at least, if it does not even expressly and

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exclusively signify, that particular expression of respect and due consideration, which consists in the *bestowment of temporal subsistence and comfort*. This is put beyond a doubt by the 18th verse, in which proverbial maxims are used, which, both by our Lord himself and by this apostle, are appropriated to this particular subject:—“For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn;”—and “the labourer is worthy of his reward.”* The word itself, indeed, rendered *honour*, (τιμη) is one which means also *price, recompense, remuneration*;† and, as it is often so used, it probably was intended to have this explicit sense here. At all events, the subsequent verse, just cited, shows this to have been *included*, if not alone meant.—But what proof, it may be asked, arises hence that the refer-

ence is not to *lay-elders*? The proof is this:—that we have express authority in scripture for “those who preach the gospel living of the gospel;” but we have no precept, and no example, for the pecuniary support of any other order. The fair and natural conclusion is, that the “elders” who were to be counted worthy of this “honour” were elders in whose office *teaching*, or “the preaching of the word,” was included.”*

* See Matt. x. 9, 10; Luke x. 7; 1 Cor. ix. 9, &c.

† This original import is remarkably apparent in the Latin word *honorarium*,—of which the etymology is manifest, and which signifies recompense.—The Greek word denotes *recompense*, in the twofold sense of *reward* and *punishment*, being thus used either in *bonam* or in *malam partem*. With some of its derivatives the ideas of value, preciousness, &c., are more exclusively associated. *Price*, in the strict sense, is its meaning, Matt xxvii. 6 and 9; Acts iv. 34; v. 2, 3; vii. 16; xix. 19; 1 Cor. vi. 20; vii. 23.

* And here we have an exemplification of the different light in which

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4. It seems sufficiently evident that the distinction expressed in the verse is a distinction, not between officers of *different descriptions*, but between officers of

the same thing appears, in different circumstances, and according to its bearing upon different conclusions. In his argument against episcopacy, Dr. Dick says,—speaking of the bishops of that system—“To preach the gospel is not an essential duty of their office; they are appointed merely to rule:—and hence it appears, that, although they receive “double honour.” they are not worthy of it according to the judgment of Paul, who *assigned it only to those who both rule well and labour in word and doctrine.*” If so,—then, since the apostle does expressly assign it to “the elders that *rule well*,” those whom he thus designates and describes were not elders that *only* ruled, but such as must also have “laboured in word and doctrine;” which is precisely the view of the case taken by independents; a view which leaves not a vestige of room for the ruling elder of presbyterianism, and yet a view which presented itself naturally to this able writer’s own mind, when he was arguing on another subject.

Dr. King (on the Ruling Eldership, pp. 44, 48,) says,—“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.” He subsequently adds, “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. 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 officers 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.—That the apostle's language “clearly expresses” the distinction in question, is precisely what we dispute. But, granting the reasonableness of the remuneration for lost time, &c.,—I have only to ask (for here lies my argument) whether from any other passage than this any precept or example can be brought for the remuneration, in

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the *same* description, fulfilling their official functions *with different degrees of fidelity and diligence*.—In the former of the two clauses of the verse, this is beyond dispute: “Let the elders that rule *well* be counted worthy of double honour.” We have here, most clearly, the idea conveyed, that the duty of presidency, or oversight, might be discharged with various degrees of faithfulness, disinterestedness, and labourious application; and that from this there ought to be considered as justly arising superior and inferior claims to honourable acknowledgment and compensation.—That a distinction of degree in the discharge of the duty is meant by the word *καλως*, translated “*well*,” in the former clause of the verse, might be confirmed (were confirmation necessary) from the use of the same phraseology, in chapter third, respecting the office of the *deacon*:—verse 13. “For they that have *used the office of a deacon well** purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” It was not the mere occupancy of the office that could procure the benefit described (whatever its precise import) but the faithful, affectionate, and diligent fulfilment of its duties; and the degree in which the benefit would accrue, would bear

the way of maintenance, of any officers of the church besides such as “preached the gospel?” I say “from any *other* passage;” for to assume *this* as authority for such remuneration, is at once to beg the question, and at the same time to stamp inconsistency and failure of

duty on the entire extent of presbyterian practice. Not that in such inconsistency there would be any argument against their system. I should scorn so to make use of it. The inconsistency of any body of men with their own principles, is but a pitiful proof against the validity of the principles themselves.

* καλῶς διακονήσαντες, corresponding precisely to καλῶς προεστῶτες.

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proportion to the degree in which the duties were so fulfilled. Thus, too, with the *Elders*. The honour and the recompense were not to be bestowed alike on them all; but an ampler amount of both was to be conferred, and conferred proportionally, on such as excelled in those qualities which the duties of their office specially required.—If, then, a distinction in degree be the principle of explanation for the first portion of the verse, there arises thence a previous probability that the same principle is carried on to the second; and that the word “labour” means *to be laborious*. It is not enough here to say that the word in the original *will bear* such an interpretation. It is its proper meaning. It does not denote *work* merely, but *labour*, and labour of an exhausting kind and degree,—labour to fatigue.* And hence the participles of the verb in the aorist and perfect active, and the present passive, signify being exhausted, fatigued, weary.† Even, therefore, when it is used for the labour of a particular office generally, it still implies that in that office the labour required is of no easy and perfunctory kind.—That in the verse before us the verb is used in its legitimate and proper acceptation, for *being laborious*, the circumstance (clearly apparent in the former part of the verse) that the apostle is not speaking of the mere discharge of official duties, but of the degree of commendable and meritorious fidelity and zeal by which the discharge of them was characterized, renders, in my

* “κοπιαῶ—laboro, molestos labores tracto, quibus corpus defatigatur ac vires exhauriuntur,—a κοπος labor gravis, molestia.”—Schlensner.

† “κοπιασασ—aor. ἵ, delassatus; perf. κεκοπιακῶς, lassus, fati-

gatus. praes. part pass. κοπιωμενος, faticens.”—Hedericus.

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judgment, next to certain. Thus a sense is yielded, in full agreement with the use of the designation *Elder* elsewhere. Here as in other places, the office includes both the functions of ruling and teaching; and “double honour”—ampler recompense—is enjoined to be given—to such as fulfilled the one of those functions *well*, and especially to those who *were laborious* in the other. This I believe to be the true meaning. Why (we are naturally ready to ask) should there be a “*well*” in the one case, and not a “*well*,” expressed or implied, in the other? Why should “double honour” be claimed for elders who *excelled in riding*, and then specially claimed for elders who “laboured in word and doctrine,” *whether they excelled in their work or not*? If they but *ruled well*, was it a matter of comparatively little moment whether they *taught well*? The teaching, surely, was not the least important part of their duty. But, when we take the word “labour” in the sense of *being laborious*, we have, as the ground of the special claim, not the duty itself merely, but the faithful and self-devoting diligence with which it was fulfilled. And let not the reader forget, that in so interpreting the word, we are neither perverting it from its proper signification, nor even giving it one atom more of meaning than natively belongs to it.

5. These views of the passage receive decided confirmation from the proper meaning of the word *especially*—or of the original word (μαλιστα) so translated. According to what may, I think, be called invariable usage, it must be understood as representing those who are described in the latter part of the verse as *comprehended under the mote general description in the former*,—not as a distinct class of persons, but

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a select portion of the same class, distinguished by a specified particularity. I am not aware of an instance

in which the word is used otherwise than to single out a part, so distinguished, of the more general whole that had been previously mentioned. Let me give two or three instances.—1 Tim. v. 8, “But if any man provide not for his own, and specially (μαλιστα) for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” Here, “*those of his own house*”—those belonging to his own family—are a specifically distinguished portion of the more comprehensive designation “*his own*” which may be understood of his relations at large.—1 Tim. iv. 10, “We trust in the living God, who is the Saviour (or preserver) of all men, *specially* of those that believe.” “Those that believe” are included among the “*all men*,” but distinguished from the rest by their faith.—Gal. vi. 10, “As we have, therefore, opportunity, let us do good unto all, *especially* unto them who are of the household of faith:”—an instance of the same kind with the one preceding.—Tit. i. 10, “For there are many unruly and vain talkers, *specially* they of the circumcision.” The vain talkers who were “of the circumcision” are thus specifically distinguished, as a portion of the “many vain talkers” mentioned more generally, that called for peculiar vigilance, and determined opposition.—Examples might be multiplied. Established usage, then, compels us to consider the “*especially*” in the present instance, as signifying that those mentioned in the latter part of the verse were *a portion of the preceding more general description*. To conceive of the two parts of the verse as referring to *distinct offices* is to assign to the adverb a sense which it never bears. If the former part of the verse

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be explained as referring to *lay dders*—to elders that *rule but do not teach*—then those in the latter part of the verse, who *both ride and teach*, are *not* comprehended in the previous description. To give the *especially* its proper sense or effect, it is not enough that those in the latter part of the verse be a

proportion of the *elders*; they must be a proportion of the *elders described in the former part of it*. But if those described in the former part of it be elders that rule but do not teach, and, as such, constitute a *distinct class of officers*, then mark what becomes of the *μαλιστα*, the *especially*. The substitution of other terms will best show the absurdity which is thus produced:—‘Let the *riding elders* who fulfil their duty well, be counted worthy of double honour, especially the *teaching elders!*’—or, ‘Let the elders who *rule bid do not teach*, when they do their duty well, be duly honoured; especially those of them who *both teach and rule!*’ Put it in any form you please; unless it can be made to signify, with consistency, that the last described are *a part of the preceding whole*, it will not be agreeable to the proper sense of the *especially*. On no other principle can that adverb have its legitimate signification,—the signification which the idiomatic use of it in the original language has fixed as its appropriate import, except on the principle that the “Elders who rule well,” in the beginning of the verse, are the same order of office-bearers of which those in the end of it, who “labour in word and doctrine,” are a *still more select* description, adding to the distinguishing excellence of the former a farther distinguishing excellence of their own:—those elders, namely, who to eminence in ruling joined laboriousness in teaching; or rather, perhaps, who,

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while fulfilling in an exemplary manner the functions of their charge in general, devoted themselves, with commendable diligence, and with a sacrifice, it might be, of time, and ease, and interest, to the “ministry of the word.”

Taking all these considerations, then, together;—see direct proof that *bishops* and *deacons* were the only two recognized classes of stated officers in the church;—the direct proof that *elder* or *presbyter* is only a different designation for the former of these

offices,—the same with *bishop*;—the absence of all other evidence besides this one text of any intermediate office, and the *a priori* improbability, on this account, of its meaning any such office here;—the general import of the original word for *rule*, as in itself, and according to the use of it elsewhere, including the whole of the elder's or bishop's charge, instruction as well as government, both being by other passages ascertained to belong to the office;—the clear evidence that *honour* here signifies recompense, and that we have no law of Christ for any but such as “preach the gospel living of the gospel,” or being supported by those among whom they labour;—the proof, on the face of the passage, that the distinction expressed in it is not one of office, but of degrees of excellence in the manner in which the different functions of the same office were discharged; and the confirmation of all this, by the proper meaning of the word *especially*,—or the word in the original so rendered,—as, in invariable usage, denoting that those whom it specifically distinguishes formed a part of the previously mentioned and more comprehensive whole;—taking, I say, all these considerations together, I feel myself warranted in affirming that this

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passage—the only one in which the office of the *lay* or *ruling elder* can with any plausibility be said to rest, is not only inconclusive in support of that which it is adduced to prove, but conclusive of the contrary;—and that, as I have already said, the legitimate meaning of the verse is this:—“Let the elders (presbyters, bishops) who fulfil well—with superior fidelity and zeal—the duties of their oversight, be counted deserving of the more ample recompense; especially those of them who give themselves assiduously to the department of the ministry of the gospel,—who “labour in word and doctrine.”—The elders, or bishops, might, every one of them, have all the required qualifications for office,—but in different

degrees; one excelling in one department of duty, and another in another; and, at the same time, in each of those departments, there might be manifested a greater measure and a less of exemplary animation and diligence. This—and not any distinction of office—is evidently the ground of the apostle’s direction in the passage. Timothy was to see to it, that *zeal was duly stimulated, and industry duly rewarded.**

* An authority of high critical eminence, and, from his situation in the presbyterian Church of Scotland, it must be presumed, impartial, Principal Campbell, thus writes:—“It has, in modern times, been made a question, whether the presbyters, even exclusive of their president, could all come under one denomination; or whether some of them were properly pastors and teachers, and others only assistants in matters of government and discipline. Some keen advocates for presbytery, as the word is now understood, on the model of John Calvin, have imagined they discovered this distinction in these words of Paul to Timothy (1 Tim. v. 17.) “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour; especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.” Here, say they, is a twofold partition of the officers comprised under the same name, into those who rule and those who labour in the word and doctrine; that is, into ruling elders and

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There is still one point remaining to be noticed,—a point early alluded to, and of which the farther mention, then promised, may as well be introduced here as anywhere else:—I mean the point of a *plurality*

teaching elders. To this it is replied, on the other side, that the *especially* is not intended to indicate a different office, but to distinguish from others those who assiduously apply themselves to the most important as well as the most difficult part of their office, public teaching; that the distinction intended is therefore not official but personal; that it does not relate to a difference in the powers conferred, but solely to a difference in their application. It is not to the persons who have the charge, but to those who labour in it, δι κοπιωντες. And to this exposition, as by far the most natural, I entirely agree. What was affirmed before, in relation to the coincidence of the office of bishop and presbyter, from the uniform and promiscuous application of the same names and titles, may doubtless be urged, in the present case, with still greater strength. The distinction is too considerable between a pastor and a lay-elder, as it is called, to be invariably confounded under one common name. When the character of such as are proper for the office of elder is pointed out by Paul to Timothy (1 Tim. iii. 2.) “apt to teach,” or fit for teaching διδακτικος, is mentioned as an essential quality; and though the words be different in the charge to Titus (Tit i. 9.) the same thing is implied—“that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the



gainsayers." This is spoken indiscriminately of all who were proper to be nominated bishops or elders; which we cannot suppose would have been done, if part of them were to have no concern in teaching. We find no such quality among those mentioned as necessary in deacons. And a dubious, not to say a forced, exposition of a single passage of scripture, is rather too small a circumstance, whereon to found a distinction of so great consequence. If, therefore, it were only from this passage that an argument could be brought for the admission of those denominated lay-men to a share in the management of church affairs, I, for my part, should most readily acknowledge that our warrant for the practice would be extremely questionable." Lectures on Eccl. Hist. vol. I. pages 177-180. The Doctor adds—"But I shall have occasion to consider this afterwards." I am not aware, however, of his ever afterwards resuming the subject as a scripture question, and adducing any other proofs in support of the distinction. In giving up 1 Tim. v. 17, he has given up the only text that possesses even plausibility.

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of elders in each church. This is a subject regarding which modern independents have been often twitted with their alleged inconsistency, in pleading as they do for universal adherence to the model of the apostolical churches, and yet satisfying themselves so generally, almost universally, with *one pastor*. Our presbyterian brethren have shown a good-humoured disposition rather to "glory over us" on this point of their order; alleging that, in having a plurality of elders, they are more in conformity to the practice of the first churches than we are. "Our independent brethren," says Dr. King, "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 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 necessity. 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

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teaching elders, of whom the apostles assigned certainly more than one, and likely a considerable number, to the most diminutive of christian assemblies?*" We "suffer the word of exhortation." We make no pretensions to infallibility; nor are we less liable than our neighbours to fall into inconsistencies. If, in this particular, our practice were admitted to be inconsistent with our great general principle of adherence to the apostolic model of christian churches,—the admission would not materially affect the two great general questions, What are the *offices* of such churches, and what is their *government*? We might bear the charge, and be right in our main principles after all. A few remarks, however, require here to be made:—

1. The matter of fact, of the existence of such a plurality, in some at least of the apostolic churches, candour will not allow me to question. We find it in the church at Philippi,—Phil. i. 1. We find it in the church at Ephesus,—Acts xx. 17. We find it, (for, though the words may possibly *bear* a different meaning, such meaning is not, I frankly admit, their *natural* one) in the churches at Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, and other places,—Acts xiv. 23.

2. On a principle formerly adverted to,—(namely, that *Elders* does not express the office to which the ordination took place, but the previously existing order of men in the churches *from amongst* whom the officers—*bishops* and *deacons*—were chosen for ordination) some have regarded these two offices—the bishop

and the deacon—as included in, and accounting for, the plurality admitted to have existed. But here

* On the Ruling Eldership, pages 22, 23.

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again candour interposes her *veto*. Believing the *elders* to have been, not the *class ordained from*, but the *office ordained to*, I should consider myself as “handling the word of God deceitfully,” were I to take up any such ground. I desire, above all things, to be preserved from this, as one of the greatest of sins.—But—

3. If we *are* in inconsistency, our presbyterian friends must even be content to share the charge with us. We cannot let them off. It is not enough to free them of the charge, that they have, in their congregations, a plurality of *elders*. The question is, are they the same description of elders with those of the apostolic churches? We say, *No*. We conceive the evidence, formerly adduced, to be quite conclusive, that of those churches the elders were, all of them, *teaching* elders:—and, since Dr. King admits that the presbyterian plurality is *not* a plurality of *such* elders, we must contend that it is not the New Testament plurality, more than our own.—But—

4. I have before hinted (Note, page 202), and must here more formally repeat, that the inconsistency of those who hold a principle, in not acting up to the principle they hold, can never be admitted as disproving, or even in the slightest degree affecting, the soundness of that principle. There are presbyterians who admit that the “double honour” due to “elders that rule well”—1 Tim. v. 17,—has relation to maintenance. Now I should think I was doing a very silly thing, were I to say to such presbyterians—You must be wrong in holding that there is such an office to be found in the New Testament as that of your *ruling elders*,—for *you do not pay, you do not support them*. They might fairly reply—Well; be it so that we are

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inconsistent in this part of our practice, this has nothing to do with the evidence and the validity of our principle. It may be very right that they should be remunerated; and we may be wrong in not bestowing such remuneration; but the ruling elder may be a bible office after all. And so may we say, on the point of *plurality*. It maybe so that in the apostolic churches there was a plurality; and it may be so that there ought to be a plurality still; but the *teaching and riding elder* may be the only elder of the New Testament after all.—Even of this description of elder the payment, or support, is not, in all cases, indispensable. The right to it is divinely chartered; but it is a right which he who possesses it may, in special circumstances, and for special reasons, decline asserting, and place in abeyance. Thus, on different occasions, did Paul himself, “lest he should hinder the gospel of Christ.” And thus he admonishes the elders of the church at Ephesus to do in imitation of his example:—“Ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me: I have showed you all things, how that, so labouring, ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said—‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” Acts xx. 34, 35. The *duty* on the other hand is universally obligatory upon the churches; but the fulfilment of the obligation may, in some cases, be rendered impossible by the circumstances of the people; and then comes the farther duty of the many helping the few,—the strong, the weak. I would, then, with all diffidence, ask—

5. May not a principle of a similar kind be applicable, in regard to the *number* of officers in the church?

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Is not *the office itself*, and the actual efficiency with which its ends are accomplished, the main concern?

It seems abundantly manifest that the principle of *proportion* is the principle by which a matter such as this must be adjusted; and that to speak of fixing any *definite* number, would be the very height of absurdity. I once had a member in my church, who, because the number of deacons in the first church, the church of Jerusalem, was *seven*, insisted upon seven being *the* number for all churches,—so that the smallest should have no fewer, and the largest no more. This was the principle of conformity to the primitive model, pushed to an extreme which, while we may respect the spirit of it, cannot but provoke a smile at its eccentric absurdity. In the deacon's office, as well as in the bishop's or pastor's, *proportion* must regulate; so that, if the ends of both offices are effectually answered, it matters comparatively little whether it be by the ministration of two, or three, or seven. If no definite number, then, can, in either case, be fixed as *the* number for which apostolic authority can be pleaded,—and if the main consideration be the office, and the effective answering of the ends of its institution, may there not be as much of concern about the form more than the substance, in contending for a mere *plurality*, as in contending for a certain *amount* of plurality,—in insisting on the necessity of *two*, as insisting on the necessity of *twelve*? I have been amused sometimes at certain churches pluming themselves on their strict conformity to apostolic practice in having their plurality of elders, and teaching elders too, while the plurality is the one concern,—not the amount of actual efficiency with which the ends of

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the office are answered:—for it has just been a plurality, and no more,—and the two, composing that plurality, instead of “giving themselves wholly” to the duties of their ministry, have had their minds and their time occupied from Monday till Saturday with the engagements of their secular calling. With

how much greater effectiveness are the ends of the office likely to be served by the undivided labours of one devoted pastor, than by the necessarily limited and distracted attendance upon their official functions, that can be given by any two whatever so circumstanced! The questions—What are the offices? and, How are the purposes of their institution effected?—are assuredly questions of incomparably more importance than the question—How many should there be in each?—In what Paul calls “the beginning of the gospel,” persecution augmented the number of dependants in a greater or less degree upon the church’s bounty, and thus rendered the duties of the deacon’s office the more extensive and onerous, and the necessity of a larger number of those who held the office the more imperative. And so too, in those days, when in so many places the number of converts was large, and, all having just passed from heathenism themselves, and being surrounded with the heathenism of others, and there being no such means of instruction by reading as are enjoyed amongst us,—the number of teachers required, as well as the constancy and quantity of instruction from each, must have been so much the greater *within* the church; and the heathenism amidst which the churches were planted, and from which their numbers were to be kept up and multiplied, called for the greater number of teachers and preachers

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without the church, to work upon the dense mass of enviroing darkness and corruption;—and then, too, to meet these obviously existing exigencies, the number of gifted brethren—of brethren endowed with the preternatural gifts of the Holy Spirit—made a large number of qualified teachers so readily accessible;—that we can see temporary reasons for a more numerous ministry than continued afterwards to be necessary, as also the wisdom, and the power, and

the goodness of the exalted Redeemer, in accommodating the supply to the demand.

I am far from thinking that these remarks settle the question either way. The object of them is rather to show that it is a question open to doubt. I must candidly say, that the evidence for the fact of a plurality of elders, or bishops, in the apostolic churches is, of the two sides, the stronger; but, there being no precept or example whatever ascertaining the extent of the plurality,—fixing any specific number,—the principle of proportion is left to be the regulator,—and the grand concern is the existence, and the efficiency, of the office. It is to this that the churches ought most solicitously to look. A church that is punctilious about form, may plume itself on its conformity to the apostolic model, in having its plurality of pastors, when by its two the ends of the office are far less effectually answered than they are by the one of other churches.

I have taken no notice of the reasonings on either side derived from *expediency*. The truth is, that reasonings on this principle so exceedingly plausible have been urged on both sides of the question, that the balance may be considered as oscillating between the two scales. I can enter into no such discussions;

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my sole object, in every case, being, as far as possible, to settle the question of expediency by settling that of fact and of divine authority.—Neither have I at all availed myself of the early maxim of post-apostolic times—“one church, one bishop”—having laid down and avowed the resolution, in no case to go beyond “the law and the testimony”—the inspired record.

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CHAPTER V.

OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH.

ON this part of my subject, it is not my purpose to say any thing at all about *episcopacy*. My reasons are,—*first*, that according to the episcopalian form, the government of the church lies in the hands of the bishops,—the archbishops and the diocesan bishops. Now it has before been our endeavour to prove, that for such an order of officers in the apostolic churches there is no evidence to be found in the only authoritative standard,—the Scriptures of the New Testament. It would, therefore, be a very superfluous, and for that reason a very preposterous thing, to occupy time in discussing the nature and extent of the *authority* of an office, after having shown that there is no warrant for its *existence*. And *secondly*—when we come to the consideration of the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, we shall have opportunity for a remark or two (as much as may be deemed sufficient) on the subject of *councils*.—At present I confine myself to the controversy between *independents* and *presbyterians*; that is, between the *popular* and the *representative* systems. I shall, as usual, begin with the evidence from Scripture of the system which I believe to have its sanction—that of INDEPENDENCY.—To this subject I shall devote the present chapter. The discussion of the passages of Scripture which form the basis of independent and congregational church government, will of course,

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to a considerable extent, involve the collateral discussion of the reasonings of presbyterians against it, and the arguments by which they support their own views. The two cannot well be severed; and, in

truth, they are more satisfactorily examined conjointly, as well as with less of repetition.

I begin with a few remarks on the *designations* by which this form of church government has been distinguished. These remarks will, of course, bring before the reader the distinguishing characteristics of the system. The designations to which I have special reference are the two which I have just used—INDEPENDENT and CONGREGATIONAL.—It is to me obvious, that the designation by which any particular body of men, whether in their religious or their secular capacity, has come to be distinguished, may be contemplated under two different aspects,—the more *definite* and the more *comprehensive*. The designation may have been originally taken from one only of the distinctive peculiarities of the body;—but, having once become the designation of the body holding that peculiarity, it associates with it, when so applied, whatever other peculiarities are held or practised by the same body. This I take to be precisely the case in the present instance. *Independency* and *congregationalism* are designations of the same system of church order,—and *independents* and *congregationalists* of the same christian body; although each of the designations may have been derived from a different feature of the system. The great general and fundamental principle of the system itself is this:—That every regularly constituted christian society, or church of Christ, with its own office-bearers, has within itself, without appeal

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to any higher authority save that of Christ the Church's Head, the full power of its own government, in the admission of members, and in the administration of all instituted discipline, even to the utmost limit of its exercise,—exclusion from the body:—and that such government, in all its parts, is to be administered in the presence, and with the

authoritative concurrence, of the church collectively considered.

I have called this *the fundamental principle* of the system. You will at once perceive, however, that, properly speaking, there are here *two distinct principles*; and that from each of these principles one of the distinctive designations is derived;—*independency* from the former, *Congregationalism* from the latter. But still, in usage, the one comprehends the other. Independents are congregationalists, and congregationalists independents.

The *independency* of the system, then, means,—not of course independency of the HEAD,—either of his *grace* or of his *authority*; as if, whether individually or collectively, there could be any prosperity, or even spiritual existence, without the former; or as if there could be any right to take a single step without the latter, or to frame a single law for the direction either of their personal or social conduct, beyond what He has enacted for them, and has recorded, in the form of precept or example, in his own word. This kind of independency we leave to any (and such there have been and still are) who may choose to lay claim to it in theory, or to proceed upon it in practice,—by adding at their pleasure, as to them circumstances may seem to require, it, statutes of their own to those laws of his kingdom which are sanctioned by the

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inspired messengers of his will.—Neither does independency mean such an independence of the churches upon one another, as that each should regard itself, and be regarded, as disunited and insulated from all the rest; unconnected with them by any bond of union, having with them no common objects of interest and no power of association for their accomplishment,—unconcerned in any thing but what immediately and exclusively pertains to itself. There *is* a union; a union of love; of mutual fellowship; every member of each being virtually a member of

all; of giving and receiving; of prayer and of occasional counsel; and of concentrated co-operation for objects of common interest;—a union of which more particular notice may be taken by and by:—The independency, for whose scriptural authority we plead, is the independency of each church in regard to the execution of the laws of Christ, of every other church, and of all other human power whatsoever than what is lodged in itself. It is the full competency OF EVERY DISTINCT CHURCH TO MANAGE, WITHOUT APPEAL, ITS OWN AFFAIRS.

With regard, again, to the *Congregationalism* of the system, I cannot better express the distinction between it and its independency, than in the following statement by my learned friend Dr. Alexander, on which, when I have laid it before the reader, I shall offer a remark or two:—"The views which are held amongst us, in relation to church order, are divisible into two classes;—those which belong to us as INDEPENDENTS, and those which belong to us as CONGREGATIONALISTS. By many these two terms are understood as if they were synonymous; or at least, as if either might be used indifferently, as alike

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comprehensive of all the views of ecclesiastical polity peculiar to our denomination. This, however, is a mistake; independency and Congregationalism are perfectly distinguishable the one from the other. They relate to distinct provinces of ecclesiastical economy; the former having to do with the *external*, the latter with the *internal* relations of each church or society of believers. As *independents*, we affirm that each church stands free of all extrinsic interference, whether proceeding from private individuals, ecclesiastical functionaries, or synodical bodies. As *congregationalists*, we assert the right and duty of every member of a church to take an interest in all matters relating to the management of the church's Affairs. By the former, we denounce all intrusion

into the church from without; by the latter, we protest against all encroachment upon the privileges of the body from within.”*

The remarks I have to make on this statement relate, not at all to the correctness with which the *import* of each of the designations is given in it;—but to the seemingly alleged impropriety of using either of the two as comprehensive of the other; and comprehensive indeed of whatever peculiar principles or practices are held by the body that is indiscriminately called by both. This impropriety I doubt. It is true that “a church may be independent, without being congregational.”† But still, it cannot be what usage has distinctly called an *independent church*. That designation is given to no

* “Congregationalism: being the substance of an address on that subject, delivered in Argyle Square Chapel, Edinburgh, on the evening of Sabbath, Oct. 18, 1840.”

† *Ibid.*

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churches but such as are also *congregational*. A congregation managing its affairs by a representative session, even although standing alone, and declining subjection to any superior church court, could not, with propriety, because it could not consistently with usage, be denominated an *independent church*.—This proceeds on the same principle on which, although, according to those views of the ordinance of baptism which, both as to mode and subject, we hold to be scriptural, we *paedobaptists* are *baptists*, it would be both foolish and false to call our churches *baptist* churches;—on which, too, though we have what we deem the scriptural office of the *bishop*, we never dream of calling ourselves *episcopalian*s;—and on which, once more, while holding the *unity of the Godhead*, it would be a misnomer far from palatable to us, because usage has appropriated the designation to the abettors of what in our eyes is a heresy subversive of the gospel, to call us *unitarians*.

The *sic voluit usus* must be bowed to, if we would avoid exposing ourselves to the most absurd and mischievous misconceptions.—At all events, *independents* and *congregationatists* mean the same body of believers, although each designation expresses a different feature of their distinctive polity.

That distinctive polity, then, consists in the *two particulars*;—*first*, that *each church is entrusted with its own government*; and, *second*, that *that government is to be conducted, not by the office-bearers alone as its representatives, but by the office-bearers and the congregation conjointly*. It is impossible, however, to adduce the scriptural evidence in support of each of these particulars separately; inasmuch as, the texts which prove the one involve also the proof of the other. To these texts we now proceed.

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A considerable portion of the evidence on the present point, has been already before us, in considering the *proper import* of the word *church*. We have shown, that by a church is meant a congregation, or society of believers;—and that there is no instance in the New Testament of its being used in its alleged *representative acceptance*,—that is, as denoting *the church's officers independently of the people*.

The first of the passages which might have been adduced on our present subject was, in this way, discussed before. I refer to Matt, xviii. 15–17. I must request the reader to go back upon that discussion. If we have succeeded in showing that there is no evidence whatever of the word *church*, in the last of the directions—“Tell it unto the church”—signifying the officers of the church, or the church in its representatives; but that it ought to be understood in the sense which (with the exception, of course, of the *church universal*, which in this occurrence of it, it *cannot* mean), it invariably bears in the New Testament scriptures,—namely, any par-

ticular congregation, or regularly constituted and regularly convening assembly, of believers;—then the charge—“Tell it unto the church,”—will mean—Make it known to the christian assembly with which the offender and yourself are connected; lay it before the brethren:—and the decision of that assembly is final,—without appeal, save to the tribunal of Christ.

But we have evidence more conclusive. Let the reader look to *the fifth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians*; and having carefully read it, observe:—There you have, 1. The statement of a case, as

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reported to the apostle, and his reproof of the church at Corinth, for the light and negligent manner in which they had dealt with it: verses 1, 2.—2. His authoritative directions how they should now deal with it,—by the immediate exclusion of the offender from their christian fellowship:—verses 3-5; and verses 12, 13.—And then 3. This should be compared with a passage in the *second epistle*, in which he enjoins the restoration of the offender to their fellowship, as one whom the salutary discipline had brought to repentance:—2 Cor. ii. 6-10.—Now *to whom*, in all this, is the apostle addressing himself?—For an answer, we have only to look to the beginning of the epistle. It is—(1 Cor. i. 2.)—“To the church of God which is at Corinth.” For, although, in the address of the letter, there are associated with the church “all the saints which are in all Achaia,” (which naturally enough accounts for his speaking elsewhere of *the churches*, and, it may be, for one or two other incidental expressions) there are none, it is presumed, who will be so unreasonable as to conclude, that a case belonging to the Corinthian church was to be brought before an assembly of all the christians in the province.—On the terms of the sentence we may offer a remark or two immediately. But the chief question evidently is, *by whom* the

sentence was to be pronounced and executed,—*by whom* the discipline was to be exercised. And taking the entire passage together, I can hardly imagine any thing plainer than this. THE CHURCH is addressed. The pronoun *ye*, throughout the whole chapter, has an unvarying reference. That reference is to the brethren collectively. And what is the injunction?—“For I, verily, as absent in body, but present in

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spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed:—in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

It has been alleged, that the case is peculiar; that this is not a sentence to be inflicted by *the church* at all, but the avowed determination of the apostle as to what *he himself* should do, in the exercise of his apostolical authority, and his miraculous power.—“It is worthy of attention,” says Dr. Dick, “that from this case, which was evidently peculiar, no legitimate inference can be drawn respecting the ordinary procedure of the church. The Corinthians had neglected to do their duty; and Paul, interposing by his apostolic authority, pronounced a sentence, and called upon them to execute it. It was Paul, and not the Corinthians who excommunicated the incestuous man; and their office consisted in publishing the sentence in their assembly, and acting conformably to it, by excluding him from their fellowship. There is no recognition of power in that church to judge or to censure; their business was merely ministerial. This I consider as the proper explanation of the passage; which, thus viewed, gives no countenance to independents.”★—True—“thus viewed:”—but is it rightly viewed? To ascertain this, observe—

1. It seems an extraordinary assertion that “there was *no recognition of power* in that church to *judge* or

* Lectures on Theology, vol. iv., p. 357.

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to *censure*.” What says the apostle? In verse 12, he puts the question—a question which involves an affirmation—“Do not ye judge them that are within?” Is this not a recognition of the power of judging? Is it not an express declaration that all who were “within”—that is, evidently, the members of the church—were, by the law of Christ, and the constitution of his churches, subjected to their judicial authority,—the members individually to the judgment of the church collectively?—And to whomsoever it is that *judgment* is committed, it must follow, that in the same parties is lodged the power of *censure*. The *judicial* and the *executive* stand here in immediate connexion. The sentence and the *censure* are placed in the same hands:—“*Do not ye judge* them that are within?—Wherefore, *put away from among yourselves* that wicked person.”

2. It must be evident to the most cursory attention, that the apostle *reprehends the church for not having done sooner, and of their ovm accord*, what he now enjoins them to do.—This is admitted by Dr. Dick, in the expression—“The Corinthians *had neglected to do their duty*.”—In the second verse, the apostle says—“Ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.” Now, *how* should he have been “taken away from among them?” By any other than themselves? By any other power, or any other act, than their own? Assuredly not. The word here translated “*taken away*” is the same which, in the thirteenth verse is rendered “*put away*,” when they are charged to excommunicate the offender. This, then, was what they *ought to have done before*. This was the “*duty*”



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which (in Dr. Dick's phrase) they had "neglected to do." It is vain, therefore, to speak of its having been "the apostle, and not the Corinthians that excommunicated the incestuous man:"—for supposing this—not granting it—if it be admitted (and how can it be denied?) that in doing so,—in following out his intimated decision,—he only did what it was *their previous duty to have done*, the argument from the passage is the very same. The previous duty is explicitly admitted also by Dr. M'Kerrow:—"Those persons to whom the matter belonged had not taken any steps for maintaining the discipline of the church, by *having this person cut off from their communion*"—page 33.—It ought, then, to have been done before:—that is, there were laws of discipline, which they ought before to have applied and executed, without requiring this decision and direction of the apostle. And yet, how does my friend go on to argue?—Thus.—"Does he (the apostle) require the members of the church to sit in judgment upon the offending individual, and to determine whether any, or what, censure should be inflicted on him? No. He tells them that this was a matter concerning which he, as an apostle, had already determined: 'I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, *have judged already* concerning him that hath so done this deed.' Why, then, does he write to them at all about it? He writes to them simply for the purpose of informing them what his decision was, and in what way he wished it to be carried into effect. His decision was, that the person who had been guilty of so heinous a sin *should be cut off from the communion of the church*, and he commands that this decision should be solemnly and

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publicly carried into effect, as a sentence ratified by Christ himself, the great Head of the Church."—But



had not Dr. M'Kerrow just before represented this—the “having this person cut off from their communion,”—as the very thing which it was their duty before to have done?—and is it true, then, that the apostle now writes to them “simply for the purpose of informing them what his decision was, and in what way he wished it to be carried into effect?” No. If it was the very thing they should have done before, it follows that they did not stand in need of the information:—and he evidently writes to them, not merely to inform them what to do, but to reprove them for not having already done it And, whatever be the way in which he here admonishes them now to set about the painful but necessary duty, the same was the way in which they ought to have set about it before.—But—

3. It was *not* the apostle that excommunicated the incestuous man, *but the church*.—It is true, that the apostle pronounces authoritatively, as an apostle, the law of Christ respecting the case. He tells the Corinthians what he himself had “judged,” or determined, should be done in it. But this was not the man’s excommunication. It was, no doubt, their incumbent duty to acquiesce in this judgment, to pass sentence in accordance with it, and to carry the sentence into execution. “What might have been the consequences to them, as a church, had they failed so to do, in those days when the power of the exalted Lord was lodged in the hands of his divinely accredited and endowed vicegerents, it is needless for us to inquire, or to conjecture. Our proper inquiry is,—what was the part which, in this matter, belonged to the church?”

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And sorely the passage leaves no room for doubt here. The man *was not excommunicated* till the church fulfilled the injunction—“Put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” They did fulfil it:—and then,

4. We have further evidence, in the apostle's own explicit testimony, that *it was not he* who excommunicated this offender, but *the church*,—and the church *collectively*.—It appears that the discipline had had a salutary effect; that the man had been brought to repentance; and that he had intimated his desire to be restored to fellowship with his brethren. And in the passage in the second epistle to the Corinthians, from which we learn this, we have at once evidence *by whom he had been cut off*, and *by whom he was to be restored*. In 2 Cor. ii. 6–8, Paul thus writes:—“Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such an one should be swallowed up with overmuch Borrow. Wherefore I beseech you, that ye would confirm your love toward him.”—Here, then, we learn *by whom* the punishment was inflicted,—*by whom* the offender was excommunicated;—not by the apostle himself.—ὕπο των πλειονων, “by the many;”—that is, if we are to allow words to have their obvious meaning, by *the church collectively*.—And from the same passage we further learn, that *by the same associate act* he was to be restored,—re-instated in communion with the church, in the privileges of his former membership, and the enjoyment of the “brotherly love” which by his grievous trespass he had for the time forfeited. The church had cut him off, and the church were to restore him. Paul enjoins

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both; and the same kind of argument by which it is alleged that the apostle, and not the Corinthians, excommunicated him, will equally prove that the apostle, and not the Corinthians, gave him back his ohuroh status. And on the very same principle might it be affirmed still, that a church, when obeying apostolic direction in any case, *does nothing*; that it is still the apostle, and not the church, that both judges and

censures, that both pronounces and executes the sentence.

5. It has been affirmed—"the members of the church of Corinth bore no farther part in the discipline that is here described, than is borne by the members of any presbyterian congregation, when they are assembled to witness the administration of a public rebuke to an offending individual who has been previously dealt with by the session, and who has been suspended by them from the enjoyment of his privileges, as a member of the church. In the one case, as well as in the other, the sentence has been pronounced independent of the people: and in the one case, as well as in the other, the people are assembled to witness the sentence being carried into effect, agreeably to the apostolic injunction, 'them that sin rebuke before all, that others may fear.'"—*Dr. M'Kerrow*—pp. 34, 35.—It might as well have been said at once, that they bore *no part at all*; for mere *witnessing* is really nothing:—they had nothing to say or to do, in either the judgment or the execution. But was ever affirmation more gratuitous? On the assumption of its having been previously proved from other passages independently of this, that the discipline of each congregation was lodged in the authority of a Bession, subject to the revision

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of higher courts, the affirmation might have had some colour of truth and fairness. But this we cannot allow to be assumed. And in the passage itself, where is there the remotest hint of the pre-judgment of a session of officers, of the execution of whose sentence, by one of themselves, the people were only to be the assembled witnesses? I need not say, there is nothing whatever of the kind. The only pre-judgment to be found here is that of *the apostle*. But an apostle is not a session; nor is a session an apostle. And we have already seen that the sentence pronounced by him is one which ought

to have been pronounced and executed before: and we have seen too *by whom*; even by the church—that is, officers and members together (for that both are included we have, as we shall see immediately, Dr. M’K.’s own admission) when they were “gathered together, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is not to be wondered at, that when Dr. M’K. wrote thus, verse 12th should have stared him in the face and more than whispered—How *can* you say so? That verse is—“Do not ye *judge* them that are within?” Let us see, then, how he disposes of the objection which the terms of this verse so palpably interpose. “Should it be objected,” says he, “to the view which I have given of this case, that the apostle addresses the members of the church of Corinth as persons who did judge in the church, when he says (verse 12,) “Do not ye judge them that are within?”—I answer, that he shows us, in the beginning of the following chapter, in what sense he affirms that they judged those that are within. He there gives us to understand, that it is in the same sense as it is affirmed of the saints that they shall judge the world—and

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even judge angels. “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that ye shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?” (chap. vi. 2,3.) Surely no one will affirm that the saints shall judge the world, or judge angles, *in person*. They shall judge them in the sense of being assessors along with Christ, acquiescing in the sentences which he shall pronounce upon men and devils. *In the same sense* are we to understand the apostle’s language, when he speaks of the members of the church of Corinth, “judging them that are within.” Their judging was nothing else than their acting as assessors, along with the office-bearers of the church, by acquiescing in the sentences which they

pronounced. This is obviously the meaning which he affixes to his own language, when he speaks of the saints judging the world: and the rules of just criticism demand, that, when he speaks of the saints judging in the church, the same interpretation be put upon his words in the one case, as in the other." Pages 35,36.

Let us look calmly at this position, that we may see how far its esteemed author adheres in it to "the rules of just criticism." To me the position appears a very extraordinary one.—Observe, respecting it,—

First.—"In the epistles which Paul wrote to this church," observes Dr. M'K., page 32, "*the elders must be considered as addressed, as well as the other members of the church.*" In that part of the first epistle to which a reference has been made (the fifth chapter) he calls the attention of *the office-bearers and of the members generally*, to a case of grievous delinquency

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which had been tolerated amongst them," &c.—Now, the very same style of address, which is maintained throughout the *fifth* chapter, continues in the beginning of the *sixth*. How is it, then, that on coming to it, the elders, or rulers, are slipped out, and the members only considered as addressed? Is this quite consistent with what "the rules of just criticism demand?"—or is it consistent with his own previous and correct affirmation? I cannot but regard it as neither.—Then—

Secondly.—The people, according to Dr. M'K., are, in matters of discipline, assessors with the rulers;—the rulers judging and pronouncing sentence, and the people, as in duty bound, bowing assent,—neither judging, nor sentencing, but simply witnessing, with submissive acquiescence, the carrying of the sentence into effect. Well. If from the fact that "judging the world" and "judging angels" signifies not judging "in person," but only being "assessors with Christ," it be a fair sequence that in judging in the

church the brethren must be regarded merely as assessors with the rulers; then we have to ask, how stands the case as to those rulers themselves? *They*, let the reader observe, are not assessors. They are the principals,—the judges with whom the people are assessors. They sustain in the church, the same official position which Christ sustains in the judgment. Is not the sequence inevitable, that in the judgment itself *they* are not to be assessors merely, but principals?—that *they*, though not the people, are to judge “*in person?*” If from the people’s being only assessors in the judgment, it follows that they must be only assessors in the church; then does it not also follow from the rulers being principals in the church,

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that they must be principals in the judgment? A nice morsel this, though not so meant, for the pride of clerical distinction.—But still further,

Thirdly.—If from the reference made to “the Baints judging the world,” and “judging angels,” it follows that the judgment to be exercised in the church by those who are addressed can be only that of assessors, giving their assent to a judicial sentence in the framing and pronouncing of which they have had nothing to do,—and that the word “judge” has no higher sense than this either in the end of the fifth chapter or the beginning of the sixth; then where, in the whole passage, is the *proper* idea of “judging” to be found at all? There is nothing of the kind. The people, it seems, are addressed. When they are addressed—“Do not ye judge them that are within?” means only their being assessors in judgment,—not judging, but only assenting:—and the same continues the meaning in all that is said about “judging” in the beginning of the sixth chapter. By whom, then, is the judgment to be formed and pronounced, to which these assessors give their assent? By “*those persons to whom the matter belonged,*” replies Dr. M’K.—that is, by the elders, the

rulers, the session. But, although, by the power of a habitual association, these are, naturally enough, in my friend's mind, *they are not in the passage*. The people only (according to him) are addressed:—there can be no judgment but that of those who are addressed as judging:—that judgment is the judgment of assessors only. And thus in the proper sense of the terms, there is neither *judge* nor *judgment* in the passage:—there are assessors without judges; there is assent to a judgment, without the judgment

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itself. There is no consistent principle on which the passage can be explained, but that of the church collectively, as composed of rulers and members, being addressed throughout. It is not fair to slip out the rulers, and slip them in again as occasion requires,—or to slip them out of the passage, and keep them in the mind and the mental theory. And this leads me to notice—

Fourthly.—There being, manifestly and confessedly, more in the judgment spoken of in the beginning of chap. vi., than mere assent to a formed and pronounced sentence,—namely, the forming and pronouncing of that sentence,—the judicial investigation and decision; then, if the people alone are here addressed, it will follow, that this judicial investigation and decision is placed *in their hands exclusively*. The rulers have nothing to do with it. Instead of the people being assessors with them, they must be content to be assessors with the people. How writes the apostle? “I speak to your shame. Is it so that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?”—“*Among you.*” The reference can extend no farther than to the persons addressed. If these be the people, it is among them that the “wise men,” competent to investigate and to judge, are to be sought and found. But the passage, it may be alleged, relates to the settlement of differences by

private arbitration, and to the selection of the arbitrators from amongst their fellow christians. Be it so. Still, two things are to be noticed:—the first, that the judgment is something widely different from that of mere assessors; and the second, that the arbitration must be of such a character as to admit

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of a final appeal to “the church;” that being the appropriate christian court of judgment, as contrasted with the Heathen courts, to which reference is evidently made when they are spoken of as “going to law one with another,”—“going to law before the unjust, and not before the saints.”—I have only to add—

Fifthly.—How does the view of the people’s “judging,” taken by Dr. M’Kerrow, accord with the spirit and force of the apostle’s reasoning? According to that view, it can amount to no more than this—if, in the judgment of the great day, you are to be assessors with Christ, are ye unworthy or incompetent, to be assessors with your church rulers?—if you are to have the honour of giving your assent, in that day, to his sentences, are you unworthy of the honour of now giving your assent to theirs? Tame enough, certainly. The inference of the apostle is not so. It is not of mere assent that he speaks, but of *bona fide* judgment:—“are ye unworthy *to judge* the smallest matters:—things that pertain to this life? If, then, ye have *judgments* of things pertaining to this life, set them *to judge* who are least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame. Is it so that there is not a wise man among you?—no, not one that shall be able *to judge between his brethren?*”—I grant, as a matter of course, that “the saints” are not, in the strict and proper sense of the word, to be *judges* in the great day. There is one Judge. But that one Judge will first pronounce *their* sentence of acquittal and acceptance; and, that having been done, they shall appear, in the character of his approved and

accepted people, as taking part with him in the judgment of the ungodly,—entering into the principles

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on which that judgment shall proceed, discerning the righteousness of its awards, and affixing to the sentences pronounced their intelligent and solemn amen I Was it right and becoming, then, in the members of the Corinthian Church, to treat with such contumelious pretention those who were destined by the Lord himself to a distinction so high? Was there any congruity in their preferring to their judgment that of a heathen tribunal,—that of the very men in whose final sentence of banishment and “destruction from the presence of the Lord” these despised brethren were to take part?—“Set them to judge who are *least esteemed* in the church.” “*Least esteemed*” is not a translation of the original word—ἐξουθενημενους. It means neither more nor less than *despised—treated with contempt*. They were so treating their brethren, when they thus passed them by as incompetent, or as undeserving of their trust, and carried their matters of difference before the heathen:—and his injunction is, that they should no more act thus contemptuously toward them, but constitute those their judges whom they were in this manner despising. And while the terms of the injunction—“*Set them to judge*”—may, with all propriety, be regarded as addressed to them individually, respecting the appointment of arbitrators in matters of private offence and disagreement; they may, we should think, with no less propriety, be interpreted as relating to the procedure of the church collectively, when in such cases it came to be appealed to as the final tribunal. The procedure recommended, as the best for bringing all to a clear understanding, and a satisfactory issue, appears to be,—the nomination of such individuals of their number as, from character,

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occupation, and habits, might, in each case, be best qualified for the task, who should institute a full investigation of the facts, should form a judgment on the merits, and should report both, more or less minutely as the nature of the matter in controversy might require, to the church; that, thus enlightened, they might pronounce their collective and authoritative sentence.

My two remaining observations relate to the nature of the sentence itself, ordered to be pronounced and executed:—

Sixthly.—In the representation of the case by the apostle himself in the passage already referred to in his second epistle, taken in connexion with that in the first, we have satisfactory evidence, that the “punishment” of which he speaks was *not* a punishment (as some have insisted) of an *extraordinary kind*, which he threatened, and declared himself determined, to inflict, by the intervention of his own *miraculous potcer*. Thus certain expositors have interpreted “*delivering to Satan for the destruction of the flesh;*” as if it meant the infliction, and that through Satanic agency, of some bodily distemper and suffering. We might argue against this on various grounds. We might justly allege the unlikelihood, that, if inflictions of bodily distress and pain were meant, the word “*destruction*” would have been used; this word being perfectly appropriate when “the flesh” is understood of the carnal or corrupt principle, but quite the contrary when it is understood of the body, as the subject of such miraculous penalty.—We might urge the improbability of the apostle’s representing the infliction, in such a case, as effected through so strange an instrumentality as the agency of Satan, when the

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punishment is the expression of love for the person as well as hatred of his sin,—when the object of it

is his spirit's final salvation,—and when, on other occasions, (as in this very epistle, chap. xi. 30–32,) offenders who were directly visited with such inflictions of corporeal suffering on account of their departure from Christ's will, are described as “chastened of the Lord, *that they might not be condemned with the world.*”—But there is no need for such grounds of argument. The statement of the apostle, that the “punishment” was “inflicted of the many,” settles the point;—since by this express statement we are necessitated to interpret the punishment itself in a sense consistent with the persons inflicting it.—Observe, then—

Seventhly.—Such interpretation is not at all difficult.—“To deliver such an one to Satan” is far from being an unnatural phrase for *excommunication*, when the representations of Scripture are borne in mind, respecting the division of mankind between God and the Devil, who is called “the God of this world” and “the prince of this world,”—between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the wicked one. To “deliver any one to Satan” comes thus naturally to mean—ejecting him from the one kingdom, and declaring him, *so far as the conduct for which he is dealt with indicates*, a subject of the other.—And the *end* is one which, in all acts of discipline, must, by every church, be kept steadily in view,—“*the destruction of the flesh.*” This is an expression, for the meaning of which no one can be at a loss who is even superficially acquainted with the phraseology of this apostle in various other parts of his writings; particularly in his epistles to the Romans and the

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Galatians. Even in this epistle itself, and only a paragraph or two before, he had used expressions of the same kind;—as, when, in chap. iii. 1–4, he had represented the Corinthians as “still *earned*, and walking as men,”—that is, as under the too uncontrolled influence of the principles and tendencies of

corrupt nature, and behaving like men who had not the new nature in them. It is the obvious and gracious end of all discipline to subdue to repentance; by this means to overcome and destroy the power of the carnal principles, and restore that of the spiritual; and thus "the spirit," recovered by penitence, cleansed from the guilt of sin by the renewed application of the blood of atonement, and from its pollution by the supplicated grace of the Holy Ghost, may eventually, instead of perishing under unrepented, unremitted, and unremoved transgression, "be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

The only further observation I deem necessary, is, that all this is in perfect agreement with what the apostle says of "*his own spirit*" being *present with them* in the execution of the sentence. There is not the slightest evidence that by "*my spirit*" he means the Holy Spirit. The phrase in the fourth verse obviously corresponds to that in the third, and is explained by it. In the third verse he speaks of himself as "absent in body but *present in spirit*:"—and when, in the verse following, he says—"When ye are gathered together, *and my spirit*" what more should he be understood as meaning, than that, in the execution of the sentence authoritatively enjoined, he should be present with them in spirit; and that his spirit should go entirely and heartily along with them in the painful but indispensable fulfilment

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of the divine Master's will.—And thus, when the two passages, in the two epistles, are taken together, there seems to be no possibility, on any principle of fair and candid exegesis, of evading the conclusion, that the exercise of the discipline was committed to *the church collectively*; and that every act of it, whether in excommunicating or in restoring, was to be performed "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when they were gathered together," invested, when thus assembled, "with the power of our Lord Jesus

Christ,” and having his warrant to act with his authority.—There is an evident reference to the same sad case,—sad in itself, though happy in its issue—in 2 Cor. vii. 8–12; by which this conclusion is fully sustained. But enough has been said.

The passage on which we have thus somewhat largely insisted, important and conclusive as it is, does not stand alone. We refer also, in evidence of the same point, to the epistles to the seven churches of Asia, contained in the second and third chapters of the Book of the Revelation.—On these epistles let it be observed—

1. It is clear, that each of them is addressed to one of the churches,—and to that one exclusively of all the rest; and that each church had immediately to do with the contents of its own epistle. Not that there were no lessons to be learned by each of the churches from the contents of all the other six letters as well as from that to itself:—there were lessons for all then, and there are lessons for all still:—but what I mean is, that each epistle relates to the affairs of the one church to which it is directed to be sent. Each is addressed by itself, and for itself. Corruptions of different kinds had unhappily found their

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way into most of them. But, whatever is commanded for the rectifying of those corruptions, each of the churches, it evidently appears, was regarded as competent to do for itself, without appeal to any of the rest, or the right of any of the rest authoritatively to interfere. Each is censured for the admission and continuance of its own corruptions, and each is enjoined to put them away.—In this respect, the case of these seven churches is in perfect harmony with that of the church at Corinth which has just been under review.

2. In no one of all the seven epistles is there the remotest hint to be found of any *presbytery of Ephesus*, or *synod of Asia*,—to which their matters should, in

any case, be referred. Had there been such a thing, it could hardly have failed, in regard to points of such paramount importance, to be, in some way or other, alluded to. We might reasonably, indeed, have expected more than an allusion. There would have been a deficiency in the directions given as to essential duty, had there not been some express injunction to see to it that all they did was done in conformity with the constitutional arrangements, and legitimate authority, of the church of Christ. Had such courts existed, they must have been mentioned, as those to which delinquents in each congregation were ultimately amenable. Yet there is not even an allusion, either to session in each, or to presbytery or synod for all.

3. It may be alleged, that this at the utmost proves no more than *one* of the two points undertaken to be established—namely the *independency* of the churches; that it furnishes no proof of their *congregationalism*,—seeing in each of the epistles “*the angel of the church*”

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is so specially and pointedly addressed.—Suppose this were admitted, it is no small matter to have so distinct an additional evidence of their *independency*. But it cannot be admitted, that “*the angel*” (whomsoever we understand by the designation) is addressed *apart from the church*, or as possessing, or warranted to exercise, any independent authority. The epistles, when dictated, were ordered (as before noticed) to be sent to “*the seven churches* which were in Asia;”—they contain “what the Spirit saith unto *the churches*;”—the churches collectively are, in point of fact, addressed, the plural being used as well as the singular. In each case, it is the character, not of the angel personally, but of the church collectively, that is actually given; and to the church collectively, therefore, the instructions and commands are addressed. The proof that, while the singular number is used, the plural is also meant, is palpable. In the epistle

to the church at Smyrna, the opening is in the same style of individual address with the rest:—yet, while it is said “I know *thy* works, and tribulation, and *thy* poverty (but thou art rich”) &c.—it is immediately added—“Behold the Lord shall cast *some of you* into prison, that *ye* may be tried; and *ye* shall have tribulation ten days: be *thou* faithful unto death, and I will give *thee* a crown of life.”—In that to the church at Pergamos, the same mixed style of address occurs:—“I know *thy* works, and where *thou* dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is: and *thou* holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain *among you*, where Satan dwelleth.”—And so in the epistle to Thyatira:—“I know *thy* works, &c.—but unto *you* I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as

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many as have not this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak,—I will put *upon you* no other burden. But that which *ye* have already, hold fast till I come.” And in that to the Laodiceans:—“I know *thy* works, &c.—As many as I love I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent. Behold I stand at the door, and knock: *if any man* hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” All the promises which are subjoined to the different epistles—“*to him that overcometh*”—by supposing distinction of one from another, assume plurality.—Surely, then, on the same principle, the admonitions to duty in purifying the churches from their corruptions ought to be interpreted as addressed to the collective bodies:—“I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there (in thy communion) those who hold the doctrine of Balaam,” &c.:—“So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent,” &c.—“I have a few things against thee, because thou suffered that woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess,

to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols.” It was their incumbent duty, *as churches*, to see that these evils were remedied,—that these “wicked persons”—just as in the case of the church at Corinth—“were put away from among them.”

I might add, still farther, to these specific instances, the *general tenor of such other epistles* as are addressed to christian churches. They are all in the same strain. It is certainly an extraordinary circumstance, if there was really at the time a representative constitution in the churches,—if their discipline, for example, was

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conducted by a session, from which there was a right of appeal to superior courts,—that when matters of that nature are at any time referred to, there should not be found so much as an allusion to such a constitution, but every thing confined to the one church addressed, and terminating within itself. The entire and uniform strain of the language is to the churches *collectively*, and to the churches *exclusively* and *finally*. The intelligent reader may just look at such passages as the following, and mark their accordance with the specific examples we have been illustrating:—Rom. xvi. 1, 2, and verses 17, 18; 2 Cor. xiii. 1; Gal. vi. 1; 2 Thes. iii. 6, 14, 15.

We have already, in part, seen what is pleaded in opposition to all this, when considering the question about the meanings of the word *church*; and more especially the sense, affixed to it by presbyterians, of the *church representative*,—the church *in its office-bearers*. On this we do not go back. But the grand appeal, in support of presbyterian representative courts, and courts of review, is made to the *fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles*. This, indeed, may be regarded as *the palladium of presbytery*. It is by much too important to be disposed of in the close of a chapter. We shall appropriate one entirely to itself, and bestow upon it a full and deliberate investigation.

I frankly avow, it has long been a cause of astonishment to me, that such a view should have been taken of it, and that so much stress should have been laid upon it. The explanation of the passage is abundantly simple upon other principles. But even lengthened examination and argument sometimes become requisite, when simplicity has been rendered complex, and plainness difficult, by the application of a mistaken principle of exposition.

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CHAPTER VI.

ON THE ARGUMENT FOB PRESBYTERIANISM DEBITED FROM THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

I HAVE already said that this is the palladium of presbytery, as a system of courts of appeal and review. If it can be shown that this fortress is one "daubed with untempered mortar," I know not another that can afford the supporters of that system any safe protection. I have to entreat my reader, then, to dispossess himself, as much as possible, of previous impressions, and to attend with candour to the following considerations.

There are *three* subjects which by this chapter are brought before us, of which each might be separately discussed; and were it our present object to set forth the entire case, as forming a part of the early history of the church, the distinct discussion of all the three would be indispensable. The three subjects are—1. The *great point* appealed from Antioch to Jerusalem, and settled at the latter place:—2. The *restrictions* with which the decision was accompanied:—and 3. The *nature of the authority* by which the verdict was pronounced.—Of the three, the first, as being a vital point of evangelical truth, essentially connected with the ground of human salvation, is, beyond question, incomparably the most important. But neither it

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nor the second belongs to our present inquiry. It is the last of the three we are now to examine; and the others have no farther relation to our subject, than as the introduction of them may, in any way, contribute to its elucidation.

In entering on this inquiry, it is right for me distinctly to state, that not by presbyterians alone, but by different denominations of Christians much more has, in my opinion, been made of this portion of scripture, in support of their respective views, than, with regard to any of them, it at all warrants. I trust that, before I have done, I shall be able to convince my readers, that, whatever lessons may be incidentally, and by inference, deduced from some parts of it, it does not furnish a model for any one of those forms of church government between which the christian community is divided,—episcopalian, presbyterian, or congregational;—but that, with regard to the chief point, the point of doctrine, the determination ultimately adopted, and communicated to the church at Antioch, and to the Gentile churches generally, rested, not on the authority of a *church court*, by what title soever designated, but on that of *apostolical inspiration*.

I shall divide this discussion into two sections:—first adducing proof of what I believe to have been the fact, that the appeal from Antioch was settled by inspired authority; and then, secondly, examining the evidence to the contrary, pleaded on the part of the supporters of presbytery.

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SECTION I.
**PROOF THAT THE APPEAL FROM ANTIOCH WAS
 SETTLED BY
 INSPIRED AUTHORITY.**

In order to the reader's clearly understanding the present argument, it is indispensable for him to bear in mind, that those fellow-christians who conceive the appeal from Antioch to have been made to a *church court*, of whatever description, *give up the idea of inspiration* as having had any thing to do with its deliberations and decision. In the terms of one of the ablest and most elaborate advocates of the presbyterian scheme,* they regard it as an "authoritative, though an uninspired, ecclesiastical court." And in this view of it they all agree, it being, indeed, essential to their argument; of which, by the admission of inspired authority, the force (if force it otherwise had) would be annihilated:—the supposition of such authority setting the case at once aside, as a model for permanent imitation. It is hardly necessary to add authorities on this point to that of Dr. Brown. I may, however, just mention other two, of at least equal weight, the late Drs. Dick of Glasgow and Mason of New York.—The former writes:—"It has been said, that the reason for referring this cause to the church at Jerusalem was, that the apostles were there, who were inspired men, and could decide this question by infallible authority; and that this was the ground of the submission of the churches to their sentence. But this supposition is of no avail to the cause of independency, because it appears not

* Rev. Dr. Brown, of Langton.

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to be founded on truth. * * * * There is no evidence that the reference was made to the apostles as infallible judges. The reason of this allegation is,

that it was made at the same time to the elders who were not inspired. If the apostles were consulted as oracles, why were the elders also consulted, who were not oracles?"* "We may find a satisfactory answer to this question by and by. What I now quote to prove is simply the fact of the denial, in the present case, of apostolic inspiration.—To the same purpose Dr. Mason:—"The apostles, on this occasion, acted simply as members of the synod; they did nothing in virtue of their extraordinary, which was their apostolical, character, nor introduced into the deliberations of the assembly any influence but that of *facts*, of the *written scripture*, and of *reasonings* founded on the comparison of both."†

This, then, is a point which we must closely and carefully examine. I shall by and by endeavour to show, that, even were inspiration put out of the question, our presbyterian brethren must find their model, not circumstantially alone and in minor particulars, but in its most essential elements, defective and untenable. At present I take up the one point just stated. I avow it as my firm conviction, that *it icas a case of appeal to inspired authority, and that it was by such authority the decision was framed, and the decree issued.*—I support this position by the following considerations:—

I. It was a case of such a nature, that NO AUTHORITY OTHER THAN THAT OF INSPIRATION WAS COMPETENT TO SETTLE IT.

* Lectures on Theology, vol. iv., page 360.

† Diocesan Episcopacy Refuted, pages 84,85.

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The grand point appealed, let the reader remember, was one of *doctrine*; and of doctrine, too, not of a trivial or unessential character, but affecting the very substance of the gospel,—the foundation of the sinner's acceptance and hope. It involved the great fundamental question between *grace* and *works*. It

was evidently, therefore, a point which required to be settled by the very highest authority,—by authority from which there could be no appeal. When the Gentiles were desirous to know, what really was the foundation on which their hopes of salvation were to be placed, is it to be imagined, that they would appeal, for satisfaction on such a question, to any authority but that which could impart to them the “full assurance of faith” that, in receiving it, they were receiving what was *divine*?—I assume it, as an indisputable maxim, that there is no authority short of divine competent to settle a point of doctrine *as a point of faith*. I was about to use a qualifying term, and say an *important* point of doctrine. But the maxim admits of no qualification, of no exception. Whatever it be that comes before us as a *point of faith*,—a point to which our assent and submission are required, must come before us with *divine authority*. Faith has regard to the testimony of God; and must in no case “stand in the wisdom of man.” Nothing but what is “given by inspiration of God” is entitled to demand our belief, or bind our consciences.—This leads me to observe—

2. If the decision in question was not given by inspired authority, IT COULD NOT BE IMPERATIVELY BINDING.

Call the authority by what ecclesiastical designation you will, it was still *human*:—and, as has just

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been observed, no merely human authority can ever render faith imperative.—If my reader shall start and say—What! even when *the apostles of Christ* formed a part of the council!—that reader requires to be reminded, that he is falling into an illusion; a sufficiently natural one, I admit—but one of which it is needful that he divest himself, if he would form a fair judgment. If the meeting was that of an ecclesiastical court, the apostles are not to be considered as acting, or judging, in their inspired capacity. And

if you divest them of their inspiration, they become "as other men." Their judgment ceases to be divine; and the faith that rests upon it rests entirely on human authority. When a church court, in our own days, frames a decision,—if it proceeds on any correct principle at all, it frames it as being, according to their judgment, in harmony with the dictates of the Word of God:—but every christian man is not only at liberty, but is under obligation, to examine and judge for himself whether it is so or not;—and if, upon examination, he arrives at a conviction that *it is not*, he is bound to decline submission to it:—his principle must be "we ought to obey God, rather than men." If the "*decree*" under consideration was only a human decision, the decision of an uninspired tribunal,—it follows, that "the brethren of the Gentiles" were then, and that we are now, precisely in this predicament regarding it. They were then, and we are now, under obligation to test it by the word of God:—for observe—IT FORMS NO PART OF THAT WORD. The record of the decision, as a matter of fact, forms part of a divinely inspired narrative; but *the decision itself is not inspired*, and therefore is *not divine*, nor *divinely obligatory*. God's word is infallible; but in-

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fallibility belongs to nothing human. And if this was the judgment and decree of an uninspired council, the Gentile churches could have no absolute certainty of its being right, or that in conforming themselves to it, they were obeying God. And, had any churches or individuals asserted the right of private judgment as to any one of the particulars in that decree, and taken up the ground of non-conformity,—whatever might be thought of their presumption, in venturing to bring to the bar of their own wisdom even the uninspired opinion of such men as the apostles, yet it would not be easy to convict them of rebellion against God:—for, with a really conscientious desire to know the divine will, they might only, even although

mistaken, have been appealing from *man's* authority to *his*.

3. If this is conceived to have been a mere uninspired ecclesiastical council, then, by those who think so, the appeal must be regarded as having been made FROM THE SUPERIOR AUTHORITIES TO THE INFERIOR,—FROM THE DIVINE TO THE HUMAN.

You say—O no; the appeal was from the lower to the higher,—from the representative court of the one congregation at Antioch to the superior representative court at Jerusalem. I answer;—of the representative character of this latter assembly, notice will come to be taken by and by. In the mean time, however, it must not be forgotten, *by whom* the doctrine had been taught at Antioch, for a decision between which and the doctrine of the judaizing teachers who had come down thither from Jerusalem, the appeal was made. The teacher of that doctrine was PAUL,—was, therefore, AN INSPIRED APOSTLE of JESUS CHRIST. You will not question *his* inspiration.

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Is it, then, to be imagined, that the inspired instructions of one who “had the mind of Christ,” and who was “not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles,” were remitted for review, and for judicial decision upon their authenticity, to an uninspired assembly?—To the churches of Galatia this apostle asserts, and jealously vindicates from every suspicion and surmise, his own direct and independent inspiration; assuring them, that “the gospel which he preached was not received of man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ;” and that such, accordingly, was his perfect knowledge of it, that, on his visiting Jerusalem, the other apostles—even “James, Cephas, and John”—“in conference added nothing to him.”—I cannot, therefore, for a moment tolerate the supposition, that the object of the deputation from Antioch was, or possibly could be, to obtain a *human* decision on his *divine* commis-

sion, or a human sanction to the soundness of his heaven-revealed doctrine. To nothing of that kind could he ever have submitted; nor could he ever have been sent up "*by revelation*" (as he tells the Galatians he was) for any such purpose. It would have been *God appealing to men!*

The manifest object of the appeal was,—to ascertain whether the dictates of inspiration *in him* corresponded with the dictates of inspiration *in the other apostles*; which had been brought into question by the false pretensions of these unauthorized judaizers.—This is consistent, and plain. The other supposition is inconsistent with every reasonable view we can take of the official dignity of this inspired servant of the Lord, as well as of the divine regard

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for the honour of inspiration,—of God's jealousy for his own glory, and the glory of his exalted Son.

4. There is nothing in the facts on record regarding the discussion of the subject of appeal, in the Jerusalem assembly, THAT IS AT ALL INCONSISTENT WITH THE INSPIRATION OF THE DECISION.

It may seem, at first view, otherwise; but a very brief examination may suffice to show that it is in appearance only.—The statement in the seventh verse may appear at variance with the idea of inspiration—"and when there had been *much disputing*." How could this be, if there was present, and in exercise, the authority of inspired men? The question is natural and fair. But the answer to it is simple. The "disputing" was not among the apostles. There can be no question, that *they*, from the first, were all of one mind, holding the same truth, under the inspiration of the same Spirit; and between the views they had by inspiration and their sentiments independently of it, it were monstrous to suppose any discrepancy. But in Jerusalem, as in Antioch, there were "zealots for the law;"—and these zealots were disposed to take part with those who had gone

from the one place to the other, and taught the doctrine which had occasioned the appeal. It was *from them* that the disputation arose. And is it any evidence against the inspiration of the apostles at the time, that these men should then and there have ventured to speak out their heretical views? It could no more be evidence against it at that time, than it was at other and at all times. That these zealots did entertain views, on the point in question, at variance with those held and taught by the apostles,

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is a matter of fact which there is no denying. Considering, then, the fierceness and forwardness of their zeal, is there any thing incredible, or even wonderful, in the fact of their having, on such an occasion, avowed and insisted upon their favourite dogmas? What is there in *this* fact to disprove the inspiration of the other apostles at that time, more than there was to disprove *Paul's* inspiration in the fact that at Antioch he and Barnabas are related to have had "much dissension and disputation with them,"—that is, with the same description of men? Men who would dispute the point in the face of one apostle, would not hesitate to dispute it before the rest. They were not so easily daunted. And at such, a time, when men belonging to their own party had had the boldness to face Paul and Barnabas at Antioch, and had proved so far successful as to necessitate this reference, were the members of that party at Jerusalem to be abashed, and to shrink from coming forward to support their associates, and to assert and defend their favourite dogmas? It was a season when the whole force of the *esprit de corps* would stir them up, and urge them on, to stand by their friends and their principles. It was with them, then, the apostles and elders had to do, in the way of disputation. The perfect unanimity of the apostles themselves on the occasion, appears on the whole face of the unadorned narrative.—No one of the

other apostles rises to dispute with Peter the view given by him of the facts connected with his own commission to "open the door of faith to the Gentiles," as determining "the mind of the Spirit;"—nor does any one express a doubt, or start an objection, as to James's interpretation of the prophecy of

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Amos. Instead of there being "much disputing" among the apostles, there was evidently none at all. Their "dissension and disputation," just as in the case of Paul and Barnabas at Antioch, was entirely with the judaizing heretics.—This leads me to notice—

5. Neither is there any thing inconsistent with inspiration IN THE TERMS OF THE DECREE ITSELF.

There are *two points* which may appear so; but which, in reality, are not.—1. The first of these is, the circumstance of "*the elders and brethren*" being joined with the apostles in the decree. If *they* were not inspired (and no one contends for their having been so) does it not naturally follow, that neither were the apostles?—that *all* ought to be regarded in their *ecclesiastical and deliberative*, not in their *inspired*, capacity?—I answer: this does not, by any means, follow. The decree, or decision, is given in the form of a letter, addressed and transmitted to "the brethren of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and Oilicia." It is fair, therefore, to compare it with other letters, —letters of which the inspired authority is not questioned, Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians commences thus:—"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ."—This form of introduction is never regarded as either disproving the inspiration of Paul, or proving that of Sylvanus and Timotheus.—Still more decisive is the opening of the epistle to the Galatians:—"Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead,) and all the brethren which are with me, unto the

Churches of Galatia.” Does this compel us to set aside the inspiration of the writer in that epistle, even

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when at the very moment he is asserting it,—or, if we admit it, to admit along with it the equal inspiration of “all the brethren who were with him?”—If not, are not the cases parallel? If one apostle might thus, when himself writing with inspired authority, associate brethren with him in the inscription of his letters, without being understood as by so doing either compromising his own inspiration or affirming theirs,—why might not the apostles collectively do the same?—“The apostles *and elders and brethren* send greeting unto the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia,” is a form of address from which no inference, on the point before us, can legitimately be drawn, which might not, with equal conclusiveness be deduced from “Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ, *and all the brethren who are toith me*, unto the churches of Galatia.”—2. The mode of expression in the decree—“*it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us*”—is unlike (it has been conceived) the language of inspiration, and resembles rather that of men who discussed, and deliberated, and pronounced a judgment.—But this is a mistake, into which an English reader alone ought to fall. The phrase “*it seemed good*” would be falsely interpreted, were it considered as conveying the idea of any kind or degree of dubiety or hesitation,—such as men are wont to express, when they deliver an opinion or sentence of their own, founded upon, or inferentially drawn from, particular premises, which have come under their deliberative review. The word in the original Greek is one often employed for *affirming the mind* of him who uses it of himself; or for affirming the mind of another, if it is of another he is speaking:—so that the phrase “*it*

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seemed good to the Holy Ghost” is precisely equivalent to—“*it was the mind* of the Holy Ghost.”* About this there was no hesitation,—no doubt. The apostles, by their apostolic authority, might simply have *asserted* it, and, in the name of the Lord, required submission. They might have said—“If any man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which we write unto you are the commandments of Christ.”—But to silence the contumacious legalists, and to satisfy and settle the minds of the brethren, they do more than affirm; they point to proof. Peter does this in verses 7, 8, 9, “Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the

* Ἐδοξε γὰρ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι καὶ ἡμῖν.—I do not deny that the verb δοκεῶ has a looser and a more determinate signification; sometimes signifying the opinion merely, and at other times the more fixed and definite judgment. Its meaning depends not a little upon its connexion. That in the present instance, in its impersonal form—(I say *impersonal*, although, strictly speaking, all the remainder of the sentence is the true nominative to the verb:—“To lay upon you no other burden, &c.—seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us,”)—it has the sense I have given it, is very evident. For ἔδοξε, it is sufficiently manifest, must have the same signification in its relation to ἁγίῳ πνεύματι, as in its relation to ἡμῖν. If, then, in the latter relation it means merely “IT WAS OUR OPINION,” in any indeterminate or unauthoritative sense, it will follow that in its former relation it must mean that it was “THE OPINION OF THE HOLY GHOST;”—not, observe, *their* opinion with regard to the mind of the Holy Ghost, but the Holy Ghost’s *own* opinion, in the same indeterminate add unauthoritative sense in which it was theirs. We cannot imagine them speaking in any such terms of the Holy Spirit:—ἔδοξε τῷ πνεύματι must be understood as their declaration of the mind of the Spirit;—not of what *they were* of opinion was the mind of the Spirit,—but directly of *what that mind was*.

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hearts, bear them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.” Mark the kind of proof thus adduced; for it furnishes a beautiful commentary on the words—“*It seemed*

good to the Holy Ghost.” He declares what the lesson was which the Lord designed to teach by the immediate descent of the Spirit on the Gentiles who believed. He had done the same previously, when he was called to account at Jerusalem for his conduct in the house of Cornelius. “As I began to speak,” says he on that occasion, “the Holy Ghost fell on them as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God?” Acts xi. If we regard his interpretation of his vision at Joppa, followed by the descent of the Holy Ghost on Cornelius and his household, as possessing *divine authority* on the former occasion, we are shut up to the same conclusion on the latter. He points anew to the same facts, as the intimation of “the mind of the Spirit.” The Lord took hy own way of communicating truth even to his inspired servants. He did not, as he might have done, convey the lesson of the equality of the Gentile believers with the Jewish in regard to admission to all the privileges of his own church, by direct intimation to the mind of Peter, empowering him to give miraculous attestation of it to others. He took a different method. He taught him the lesson symbolically,—by the vision of the clean and unclean

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animals mixed together in the great sheet let down from heaven,—giving secret intimation, at the same time, to his mind (as the narrative clearly shows) of the import of the vision:—and thgn, after having, on the authority of the divine lesson thus conveyed, gone into the house of the uncircumcised, saying “God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean,” the direct descent from heaven of the Holy Spirit, without the intervention

of any imposition of hands, or even of any prayer for it on his part, was an immediate divine confirmation of the import of the vision,—or a repetition of the lesson conveyed by it. The fact of the mind of the Spirit having been communicated *in that particular way* implied not the remotest uncertainty as to *what that mind was*. There was nothing of the kind. To that fact Peter again points as *decisive*.—The addition of the words “*and to us*” expresses no more than *the coincidence of their mind*,—that is, of the mind of all who united in the letter,—with the mind of the Spirit symbolically intimated, miraculously attested by his own descent and agency, and both the symbol and the attestation infallibly interpreted.—And while Peter points to this manifestation of the mind of the Spirit, James shows the harmony of the lesson with the predictions of the prophets, which were just the previous notices of the same truth given by those “holy men of God” who, in former ages, “spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” He shows that the Spirit’s dictates *then* were the same as the Spirit’s dictates *now*. But if in quoting and interpreting prophecy, James was not himself inspired, then are we to this hour uncertain, whether the prediction cited by him was explained according to

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its true and original meaning, and whether, therefore, it was appropriately applied!

6. I have only farther to add:—had there been anything in the narrative, or in the terms of the decree, which NECESSITATED our leaving out inspiration, we must, of course, have bowed to the necessity:—but it ought surely, in all candour, to be admitted, that NOTHING SHORT OF NECESSITY should drive us to such a position. It is a strangely unnatural one.

First of all, it may fairly be questioned, whether the apostles, divested of inspiration, *were apostles at all*. In their apostolical capacity, they were the commissioned vice-gerents of the Lord. Their authority

was supreme. And being supreme, it was peculiar, and without succession. It lay in their inspiration. To speak of the apostles acting in the church without their inspiration, is an anomaly, of which, for my own part, I can form no conception. If they were not inspired now, they might be uninspired also at other times. And there does seem to me no little presumption, in admitting the supposition of their ever acting *officially*, without acting *by inspiration*,—whether in settling doctrine or in settling duty. Their very office was, in my apprehension, an *inspired office*; and to suppose them divested of inspiration, is to suppose them stripped of their official status. Let any man attempt to answer the question to himself—What was an apostle, in the Church of Christ, without his inspired authority?—and he will find himself not a little at a loss. Should it be alleged, that in the church at Jerusalem they exercised a description of *pastoral care*,—the suggestion will not suit the present case; for they here stand as “*apostles*” in distinction from “the *elders*” as well as

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the “brethren:”—nor was it at all a case pertaining to the church at Jerusalem alone, that was then to come before them, but one of which the decision was to determine the privilege the faith, and the duty of “all the churches of the Gentiles.” Indeed, when we look for one moment at the *occasion* of this convention, the supposition of their being then divested of their inspiration appears to me absolutely monstrous. One should have thought, if ever there was a juncture in the history of the infant and rising church, when inspired authority was more than ordinarily required, it was now. What are we to think or say of the hypothesis, which would divest the vice-gerents of the exalted Son of God of what constituted their sole claim to be regarded as speaking with divine authority, at a time, and on an emergency, when the very foundations of gospel

truth were assailed;—when all that renders the gospel saving to man was brought into question;—and when the spiritual privileges and liberties of the entire Gentile world were suspended upon the result of the appeal made to them? When was there a necessity for an authoritative,—a divinely authoritative, settlement of a question, if not now? Surely, in no view that can be taken of the argument before us, can there be any comparison between having a divine sentence on what involved the spiritual rights of the Gentile world and the very salvation of the human race, and having a mere exemplar for the government of the church!

On such grounds as these, the supposition of the suspension of apostolic inspiration, the occasion under review, appears to me pregnant with all that is unreasonable. And if I have succeeded in making

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good this point, any farther question respecting the finding of a model in the recorded proceedings, for the imitation of the church in after ages, may be considered as superseded. If the decision was the result of apostolic inspiration, then it was not the decision of an ecclesiastical council, or a synod of official representatives, such as was to be the pattern of councils and synods when the period of inspiration and miraculous agency should have passed away. The proof of *inspiration* drives from under the argument of both our episcopalian and presbyterian brethren, in favour of their respective systems, the very basis on which it rests; there being, confessedly, nothing to their purpose in the example, if there was inspired authority at all in the deliberations and decision.—But, although on this ground we might, we do not, stop here. We have still another position to occupy. We have still to demonstrate, on other ground, the untenableness of that assumed by both episcopalians and presbyterians, respecting the contents of this celebrated

chapter.—Before proceeding to this, however, I must be permitted to press a little more strongly the observation—how strange, how “passing strange,” has ever appeared to me the solicitude to prove that, in the case in question, the decision given was *not* given by inspiration. We often hear a great deal about *essentials* and *non-essentials*:—and, although the distinction between them has too frequently been pushed to an unscriptural extreme, (as when it has led christians to regard any part of their divine Master’s will as a matter of indifference,—to consider any thing which he has thought it worth his while to command as being hardly or at all worth their

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while to obey, or to be much concerned whether they obeyed or not)—yet, beyond a doubt, there *are* matters of greater and matters of inferior importance. Now, how stands the fact in the present instance? It happens, that, on the one side, we have, as just observed, the very essence of “the glorious gospel of the blessed God,”—the great doctrine of grace,—the very “truth as it is in Jesus,”—along with the most precious privileges and liberties, requiring to be secured by a valid tenure to us Gentiles;—while, on the other, we have a point of ecclesiastical order, of the government and discipline, of the church.—Now, the latter, I am far from undervaluing. It is important. I contend for its importance. I am not one of those who plume themselves on their exemplary liberality, when they treat as quite beneath them, unworthy of a thought from enlarged minds like theirs, whatever relates to the constitution and forms of the church. But the latter is not to be placed on a level with the former; the former,—THE TRUTH—being the sacred deposit of which the church is the deputed guardian, and foe the due and efficient guardianship of which it is its constitutipn that specially fits it.—And it does appear, I confess, “marvellous in my eyes,” to find any of

my fellow-believers exerting their skill in dialectics to set aside inspiration, when the object to be gained is a warrant for their form of ecclesiastical government; while the admission of inspiration sets the seal of Heaven to all our privileges and immunities as Gentiles, and to all our blessings and hopes as sinners!

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SECTION II.

EXAMINATION OF THE CONTRARY HYPOTHESIS.

IN proceeding to this remaining branch of my subject, I shall not spend much time with episcopacy.—The principles of that system must find their basis, if a basis is to be found for them at all, somewhere else than here. It is, with episcopalians, a favourite mode of talking to call this assembly at Jerusalem “*the first christian council.*” But in fact, there are no points of resemblance whatever between it and the *councils*—whether provincial or oecumenical—of after ages. With the origin of such councils in the early history of the church I have nothing to do. I adhere pertinaciously to my avowed resolution, not to go beyond the limits of the sacred record.—The question before us at present is—*To whom*, on this occasion, was the appeal from Antioch made? And on this point the terms of the narrative are clear and repeated. We have them in verse 2,—in verse 6,—and in chap. xvi. 4.—“It was determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem *unto the apostles and elders* about this question:”—“and *the apostles and elders* came together, to consider of this question:”—and as Paul and Silas “went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees to keep, which were ordained *of the apostles and elders* who were at Jerusalem.” The appeal, then, was made *to the apostles and elders*. We have formerly discussed the meaning of the desig-

nation “Elders,” and do not resume it. It is not necessary to our present argument, and would only

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therefore, encumber it. What we have specially to notice at present is—the absence of all evidence whatsoever of any such convocation of clergy from one, or many, or all, of the regions into which Christianity had by this time penetrated, and in which it had made disciples and found a settlement,—as, in after ages, was requisite to constitute a council. The appeal was made “to the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem.” They were at Jerusalem at the time when the appeal was determined upon, as well as when it was actually made. The language in chap. xv. 2, and chap. xvi. 4, is utterly inconsistent with the idea of a *convocation to be convened* at Jerusalem for the purpose from other quarters. Those to whom the reference was made were there already. They had not to go there.—That any were added to their number, between the adoption of the determination to appeal and the carrying of the determination into effect, is as perfectly gratuitous a supplement to the history as it is possible to conceive. That the appellants sent to Jerusalem a notice of their purpose, and then waited till the propriety of that purpose was examined, and till the supposed convocation could be summoned and assembled,—is fancy, not fact.

It has an exceedingly delusive effect, when men get into the habit of using terms regarding this assembly, taken from subsequent practice, which then had no existence. By calling it a *council* and *ike first christian council*,—and representing one apostle as “opening the debate,” and another as “giving his opinion,” and the council as eventually coming, either unani- mously or by a majority, to an agreement,—many minds are greatly misled. Having in their thoughts the councils of subsequent times, and inconsiderately

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assuming their resemblance to this, which they have been accustomed to read, and hear, and speak of as the first in the series, and the pattern of the rest, they have formed totally mistaken conceptions of this,—fancying *it like them*, instead of taking *them in contrast with it*.

On the subject of this “council at Jerusalem,” I may be allowed to strengthen my opinion of it by that of a man whom all will admit to be a judge as impartial as he is able:—“The pretended first council at Jerusalem,” says Archbishop Whateley, “does seem to me a most extraordinary chimera, without any warrant whatever from sacred history. We find in the narrative, that certain persons, coming from Jerusalem to Antioch, endeavoured to impose on the Gentile converts the yoke of the Mosaic law,—pretending, as appears plainly from the context, (Acts xv. 24,) to have the authority of the apostles for this. Nothing could be more natural than the step which was thereupon taken,—to send a deputation to Jerusalem, to inquire whether these pretensions were well-founded. The apostles, in the midst of an assembly of the elders (or clergy as they would now be called) of Jerusalem, decided that no such burden ought to be imposed, and that their pretended sanction had not been given. The church of Jerusalem, even independently of the apostles, had of course, power to decide this last point,—i. e. to declare the fact, whether they had or had not given the pretended sanction: and the apostles, confessedly, had plenary power to declare the will of the Lord Jesus. And the deputation, accordingly, retired satisfied. There is no hint throughout, of any summons to the several churches in Judea, and Galilee, in Samaria, Cyprus,

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Cyrene, &c., to send deputations as to a general council; nor any assumption of a *right* in the church

of Jerusalem, as such, to govern the rest, or to decide on points of faith.”*

Let me now come to what, in the Northern part of our Island, we have most immediately to do with,—the scheme of *presbyterianism*, as supposed to be exemplified in this “*first synod at Jerusalem.*”

The essential principle of the presbyterian system is—*representation*.—It is based on this principle. It is throughout, in its constitution, *representative*.—Congregations are represented in sessions:—Sessions are represented in presbyteries:—Presbyteries are represented in synods:—Synods are represented in General Assemblies. It is an understood principle of the system, that, in order to any *act* or *decree* being obligatory, those on whom it is binding shall have been *duly represented* in the court that passes it. So that, in the supposed case of a meeting of synod being summoned, and one of the presbyteries within its bounds being omitted in the summons, the ministers and congregations belonging to that presbytery would not hold themselves legitimately bound by its decisions.—This being admitted—the question comes to be—*Was there such representation in the instance before us?* If there was, there was the principle of presbyterianism, and the case must be admitted to be one in point;—if there was not, the essence of the presbyterian form was wanting, and the case proves

* “The Kingdom of Christ delineated, in two Essays, on our Lord’s own account of his person, and of the nature of his kingdom, and on the constitution, powers, and ministry of the christian church, as appointed by himself.”—By Richard Whateley, D.D., Archbishop of Dublin. 2d Ed. pages 105,106.

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nothing. There is no need here for long, learned, and laboured argument. The inquiry comes into this very narrow limit.—Observe, then—

1. “We have already seen to whom, in the narrative, THE APPEAL IS BEPBESENTED AS HAVING BEEN MADE; not to a synod TO BE CONVENED at Jerusalem, but to “the

apostles and elders WHO WERE AT JERUSALEM,"—who were already there.

It is not affirmed, indeed, that *all* the apostles were then at Jerusalem; nor, for the object of the appeal, was the presence of every one of them at all indispensable. That the apostles had, if I may so express it, their *head-quarters* in Jerusalem, will not be questioned by any reader of the history. They are excepted from the statement of the dispersion of the church there, at the time of "the persecution which arose about Stephen;—"they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, *except the apostles;*"—and, although they might multiply and extend their occasional journeys afterwards, there is every reason to believe that, with the exception of such journeys, they were usually at Jerusalem, and that a considerable number of them were always to be found there. That this was the case now, the narrative, taken in its simplicity, without the supplementary interpolations of conjecture and fancy, plainly—I will not say implies, but affirms.—The apostles—all or most of them were at Jerusalem—when the appeal was made:—and when the object of their assembling with the elders and brethren was effected, and the assembly itself was dissolved, there is not the least appearance of their having immediately set out again on their respective tours into the adjacent countries. On the

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contrary, after Judas and Silas had gone to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas,—and had "continued there a space," (how long does not appear) "they were let go in peace from the brethren *unto the apostles.*" Indeed *Jerusalem* and *the apostles* are, throughout the history, associated.—There is an absolute negation of all evidence that any others besides those then understood to be at Jerusalem were included in the authority appealed to. *To* them the matter was referred:—*by* them it was settled. The convocation

and presence of others, as members of the supposed court, are not at all in the narrative. They are entirely a human addition—introduced (may I say?) by the exigency of a system. The supposition made by the late eminent and able Dr. Mason, of New York, of the apostles, on the present occasion, “*returning to Jerusalem from their excursions in preaching the gospel, accompanied with elders or presbyters from the churches which they had planted, and meeting together in ecclesiastical council to consult about their common interests,*”^{*} is a presumptuous apocryphal interpolation:—it is not only unsupported by any thing whatever in the narrative, and supplied from imagination alone; even that were saying too little:—the *former* part of it is contradicted by the obviously *immediate sequence* of the mission of the deputation from Antioch to the resolution of appeal. It is clear, that no sooner was the resolution come to, than the deputation was dispatched. There is no question asked, or difficulty hinted, about getting the scattered apostles recalled from their missionary tours, some

* Diocesan Episcopacy refuted, &c. By the late Rev. John M. Mason, D.D., of New York. Chap. v. Lond. Ed. 1838—page 83.

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of them possibly distant,—or the remotest appearance of delay, to allow time for this being effected:—and as to the *latter* part of it, about their bringing representatives from all the churches along with them,—have the supporters of presbyterianism any right to blame us for declining to own ourselves bound by such apocryphal matter, or for marvelling at the presumption of foisting it into the text? But of this more immediately.

2. EVEN THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH ITSELF WAS NOT REPRESENTED IN THE ASSEMBLY AT JERUSALEM.

“Paul and Barnabas,” and the “certain others” that went up thence to Jerusalem, were no more than the *messengers* of that church to the apostles and

elders, who were the *referees*. They were not themselves *representatives*, in any sense that implied their having a voice at all in the decision. They were, simply and exclusively, *appellants*,—or, in the terminology of modern presbyterian church courts, *commissioners*, who set forth the claims of parties in a contested case, and are then withdrawn, leaving the case to the discussion and decision of the court. This, be it observed, does not at all affect the question (already discussed) of the inspiration or non-inspiration of the apostles on the occasion. There had been at Antioch two parties, Paul and Barnabas on the one side, and the judaizing teachers—the “certain men who came down from Judea”—on the other. It was to have the point of disputation between these two parties settled, for the satisfaction and peace of the church, and for the guidance of all Gentile believers,—that the reference was made. “Paul and Barnabas,” and the “certain others” were only the bearers of the reference. They had

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no more to do with the final settlement of the question, than the parties in any suit have a seat on the bench or a place among the jury; or than the litigants in any reference are themselves to be reckoned among the referees on whom they devolve the settlement of their difference. Paul and Barnabas were admitted *to state facts in evidence*; but no more. What they said in “declaring how great things God had wrought among the Gentiles by them, was all of this description. It was illustrative and confirmatory of what Peter had said of the mind of the Spirit respecting the calling of the Gentiles. They took no part in the decision. On the contrary, those who (by divine authority as we conceive) settled the controversy on their side, only expressed their affectionate approbation of their principles and labours, when, along with their own “chosen messengers” the bearers and expounders of the “decree,” they sent

them back to the church at Antioch, designating them “their beloved Barnabas and Paul,” and commending them afresh to their regard, as “men that had hazarded their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

3. There is, as we have already said, NO EVIDENCE WHATSOEVER OF ANY REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER CHURCHES, WHETHER JEWISH OR GENTILE, HAVING BEEN PRESENT.

To take it for granted, because Paul mentions his having at that time “taken Titus with him” to Jerusalem, that Titus was, in technical phrase, a *member of court*, is fitted only to provoke a smile at the power of habit, in accommodating itself with proofs in the mere easy use of customary terms. For any thing like evidence it never can pass, with persons capable

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of putting two links of proof together. We have just noticed the *gratis-dictum* of one of our most able presbyterian theologians. Let me again refer to another, one well-known and held in most deservedly eminent reputation,—the late Rev. Dr. Dick. In setting aside the case under consideration, as containing no support of *independency*, he says: “How could the members of one church issue a decree that should be binding on all christian churches?”—On this question we shall say a few words immediately. We grant its conclusiveness. But we introduce it now, only for the sake of the connection in which it stands. “The fact, however,” he continues, “*presents no difficulty to us.*”—This is a bold statement. We therefore expect it to be sustained by proofs clear and unexceptionably decisive, in proportion to its boldness. What, then, are they? “There were present on the occasion, not only the elders of Jerusalem, but probably deputies from the other churches that were interested in the controversy:—and some suppose them to be meant by the brethren mentioned in the superscription of the decree.”*

And is this all?—"Probably!"—"Some suppose!" This, surely, is rather a feeble following-up of the averment, so unqualified—"the fact presents no difficulty to us!" Is the main support of presbytery, then, a *probability* only? Is it a mere *supposition*, and that supposition the supposition only of "some?" If we are allowed the free use of probabilities and suppositions for getting over difficulties, they can seldom be long in our way.

The acute writer, accordingly, does not seem satisfied with this ground. How was it possible he

* Lectures on Theology, Lec. xcix., vol. iv., pp. 361, 362.

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should? He immediately, without any attempt at proof, or at anything beyond the *probability* and the *supposition*, subjoins another:—"As this point is doubtful," (we shall see immediately how far even this is true) "I shall not insist upon it; nor is it necessary to the argument. Besides the elders, the apostles were members of the council, and their presence was sufficient to constitute it an oecumenical one, and to render its decrees universally binding. We have indeed said, that they did not act by inspiration in pronouncing the sentence: but they did not therefore sink down to a level with the other members. Although they reasoned in concert with them, and on other occasions assumed the designation of presbyters or elders, and joined with the ordinary pastors and rulers in administering the affairs of the church, they never did, nor could, divest themselves of their apostolical character. They had at all times 'the care of all the churches,' and on every public occasion acted on behalf of them all. In this council, they were considered as apostles; and consequently, if deputies from other churches were not present, the apostles supplied their place, being the representatives of the Catholic Church. Thus the meeting in Jerusalem became a

general council, which had a right to give law to the disciples of Christ in every region of the earth.”*

With all deference to this justly respected authority, there appears to me, in this representation of the case, to be no little confusion of ideas. From a variety of observations suggested by it, I select the following:—

1. It is here said, and said truly, that the apostles

* Ibid, page 362.

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“had at all times the care of all the churches, and that, on all public occasions, they acted on behalf of them all.”—But my query is—Can any instance be produced of their thus acting on behalf of all the churches, *independently of their inspiration?* Unless *this* can be shown,—and shown of course from other cases than the one before us,—the assertion, considered as evidence that in this instance they did act, or even might act, with the authority of apostles although without their inspiration,—amounts evidently to nothing. As apostles, they were the *authoritative messengers* of Christ:—but an *authoritative* messenger must be an *inspired* messenger, one who “has the mind of Christ:”—and in what sense the apostles could retain their authority, and in the exercise of it have “the care of all the churches,” on the supposition of their being divested of that inspiration from which alone their right to dictate arises, I am quite at a loss to understand. I agree with Dr. Dick, that they could not “sink down to a level with the other members;” but the reason of this, I apprehend, is only to be found in their having *retained their inspiration*, and with it their legislative or dictatorial authority,—which was the “differential quality” of their office, and one with which they never parted. On this ground, I cannot but think Dr. Mason more consistent than Dr. Dick, when he speaks of the apostles as in “the *ordinary* govern-

ment of the church, or any part of it, not appearing to have enjoyed the extraordinary communications of the divine Spirit,—nor to have exerted their extraordinary powers,—*nor to have claimed a particle of authority above the presbyters.*”^{*} Apart from their

^{*} Diocesan Episcopacy refuted. page 85.

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inspiration, I do not see how they could. But in divesting them of their inspiration, I conceive both of them to be in the wrong.^{*}

2. Dr. Dick here speaks of the assembly having, by the presence of the apostles, been converted into “*a general council, which had a right to give laws to the disciples of Christ in every region of the earth.*”—I protest against this. I have no idea of any “general council,” even under the high title of *oecumenical*, having “a right to give laws to the disciples of Christ in every”—no, nor in *any* “region of the earth.” A law which binds the disciples of Christ, must be a *divine* law,—a law of their divine Master; and, in order to its being divine,—in order to its having the authority of Christ,—it must be “given by inspiration of God.” If in this assembly there was *no inspiration*, then, as we had occasion before to notice, the law enacted had in it no direct divine authority. It was an un-inspired enactment; and, as such, could not, by possibility, have in it the authority by which alone the conscience can be bound. We hold,—and our *dissenting* presbyterian brethren at least are in this of one mind with us, that, as subjects of Christ, we are bound, in religious matters, *by no human authority*. But to affirm that any *un-inspired* council “has the right of giving law to Christ’s disciples,”—is at once to set aside this great

^{*} Dr. Mason adds:—“Without such a distinction as we have now stated, their history is a tissue of inconsistencies, and their conduct in the synod of Jerusalem must be given up as a riddle which baffles solution.” Let the reader say, when he looks at the case as represented in the preceding section, or in the brief statement of Dr.

Whately with which it closes, whether he can find out wherein the "riddle" lies, which it defies the perspicacity of an Œdipus to solve. And the absence of any such insolvable mystery will be still more apparent ere we close our strictures.

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Protestant and Bible principles If the council at Jerusalem, although uninspired, possessed this right,—on what principle can the same right be denied to other uninspired councils?—It is vain to say, in answer to such a question—*the apostles were there*. The apostles, without their inspiration, (the reader must pardon the repetition—the point is one of vital consequence) were just the fishermen of Galilee; and their judgment was the judgment of the fishermen of Galilee. Call that judgment official; and hold their office, as such, as high as you please,—that does not alter the case; it was still *human*,—only human:—and by those who hold this view of it, the church of Christ is subjected to human authority,—to the authority of uninspired *laws*, because the authority of uninspired *lawgivers*. The truth is, that the ascription of such an effect to the presence of the apostles in this assembly, is only an exemplification of the difficulty—the impossibility—of dispossessing our minds of the sentiment of reverential deference and submission with which we have become habituated to regard the accredited ambassadors and authoritative vice-gerents of Christ. Dr. Dick could not do in his mind what he did in his argument. His argument divested the apostles of their inspiration; but his mind, in spite of himself, retained it, and retained the impressions of their authority arising from it; and under these impressions, he drew conclusions, such as nothing but their inspiration could justify, at the very moment that his argument required that inspiration to be set aside.

3. If the apostles, *as being the official representatives of all the churches*, gave this assembly, though *uninspired*, its authority to decide, it will evidently

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follow, that, had the accredited representatives of the churches, in Antioch, and Syria, and Gilicia, or, if you will, of all the then existing churches, been themselves in person convened WITHOUT THE APOSTLES, THEY WOULD HAVE POSSESSED THE SAME LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY.

This is a plain and necessary sequence. The supposition is, that of the apostles, in their official but uninspired character, concentrating in themselves the representation of all the churches,—that representation, of course, consisting of the office-bearers of those churches, or delegates from among them. The presence of these representatives, therefore, without the apostles, would have been the same thing as the presence of the apostles without them. It is an equation:—the apostles, in absence of the immediate representatives of the churches, equal those representatives;—therefore—the immediate representatives of the churches, in absence of the apostles, equal those apostles.—In either case, there is *no inspiration*; and the presence of the representatives themselves of the different churches would have been, one should think, even a more perfect pattern of an ecclesiastical court, than when it consisted only of the representatives of representatives, making up for the lack of their own presence.—How, then, would this do? Would the inspired apostle of the Gentiles—(who again, in such a representation, appears to be quite forgotten, and his inspiration put in abeyance)—would he, think you, have consented to submit the dictates of that inspiration to an assembly of the pastors or elders of those very churches which he himself had planted and set in order, giving them, authoritatively, their constitu—

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tion:—pastors, who had been chosen according to his direction, and of whom he had himself set apart

so many to their office? The thing is out of the question. The theory throws everything into confusion; “turning”—the church if not the world—“upside down,” by constituting the uninspired judges of the inspired, and so subjecting the counsels of God to the authority of men.

In the preceding quotation, Dr. Dick represents the presence of deputies from the different churches, or presbyteries, as “*not necessary to his argument.*” This is very surprising. It is founded, no doubt, upon the consideration of the presence of the apostles, as concentrating in their persons the representation of all the churches. We have seen, however, how unavailing such a resource is to the purpose of presbyterianism. The apostles were the *representatives of Christ*. It was as such alone that they could be regarded as concentrating in themselves the representative authority of all the churches. But in what capacity were they the representatives of Christ? It could not possibly be otherwise than *as inspired men*. If their inspiration is set aside, they cease to be the representatives of Christ; and, ceasing to be the representatives of Christ, they inevitably cease to be the representatives of all official power. Their own official power, being that of Christ, and above appeal, lay in their inspiration. Take away the inspiration, and you take away that which constituted the speciality and supremacy of their official power. And if that be taken away, the power itself is taken away:—and then the *greater* being removed, there is nothing remaining in which the *less* can be included.—The truth is,—

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the proof of the presence of representatives of the churches *is* necessary, indispensably necessary; and, moreover, *it is all* that is necessary. If our presbyterian brethren could make out this, they would do something satisfactorily to their purpose. But it cannot be done. We have seen how one eminent

writer, very coolly and very conveniently, inserts into the narrative a clause that is not to be found in it; and we have seen how another, more modestly, satisfies himself with a "*probably*."—But I have now to go a little further; and, in addition to questioning the probability, and affirming the absence of the very slightest evidence in its support,—to observe—

4. There is DIRECT EVIDENCE OF THE CONTRARY.

It is very simple; but it appears no less conclusive. The "decree" that was passed was a very short one,—being substantially contained in a single sentence. Had there been representatives sent to Jerusalem from the different churches, they would have brought back to those churches respectively the report of the decision. The matter was of essential importance,—one that admitted not of delay. The churches must have expected, with impatience, the return of their deputies, to determine the principles on which they were to act, and so to settle both their minds and their practice. How, then, stands the fact? In the beginning of the following chapter—(chap. xvi. 4.)—we read, respecting the travels of Paul and Silas, after their quitting Antioch—"And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees to keep, which were ordained of the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem." Now, had there been representatives there from these churches, this would have been rendered unnecessary; each of those

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representatives bearing with him, on his return, a copy of the brief but precious document. The churches would then, like that in Antioch, have "rejoiced for the consolation:"—and the effect stated in the subsequent verse (verse 5,) as having immediately arisen from the reception of the document—"And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily"—would have begun to appear still earlier,—even from the moment of the return of their deputed representatives.—The

very fact, moreover, of the document being thus committed to the churches, marks still more impressively the importance attached to it, and serves to confirm the conclusion that it was of *inspired*, or *divine, dictation*,—a part of *the word of the Lord*.

In one word, then, I desiderate, in the whole narrative of the case before us, the slightest evidence of that which constitutes the essential element of presbyterianism—*representation*.—It does seem to me surprising, that the entire system of subordinate courts of appeal and review should have been rested upon a basis so narrow and insecure. For there is not, that I am aware of, any other. And if, in freely discussing the merits of this bulwark of the system, I have dealt unfairly by any part of the argument, I can only say,—and I say it in all sincerity,—that I am unconscious of it, that I should be sorry for it, and that I shall be happy to be corrected.

But in wresting this case from my presbyterian friends, it is not (and from the remarks with which I set out the reader must have anticipated the observation)—it is not because I am anxious to secure it as an example in support of my own system.—I have no such anxiety. I admit, with all frankness, that it

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no more furnishes a pattern for independency than it does for presbytery. I mean, with regard to *the authority* by which the decision was passed. In this respect, the essential element of independency is wanting, as well as that of presbyterianism. I bow (as I have before hinted,) with perfect acquiescence, to the conclusiveness of the question of one of the writers on whom I have been commenting—“How should the members of one church issue a decree which should be binding on all christian churches?” They could not. Nay, I must go further. No one church could pass such a decree—or could pass any decree—*even for itself*,—far less, on independent principles, for others. The appeal, in this case, was

not made *to* the church:—the authority appealed to resided not *in* the church. The decree was binding on all:—it must, therefore, have had the sanction of an authority that was competent to impose obligation on all. That authority *we* hold to have been the authority of the inspired “apostles of the Lamb.” Our system does not rest on this passage. We can spare it. It does not rest on any solitary passage in the New Testament. But on the proof already adduced I cannot now go back.

And should the question be again put—If it was by apostolic and inspired authority that the decree was passed, how came *the elders and brethren* to be joined with them in the letter conveying it?—I first refer to the evidence already adduced of the consistency of this with the inspiration of the apostles, and the non-inspiration of the elders and brethren:—and I now further observe, what seems, after all, to constitute the true key to the whole case,—that there were evidently, in the appeal, *two points* to be ascer—

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ained;—a point of *doctrine*, and a point of *fact*.—The point of *doctrine*, as before observed, was one of the very first magnitude, involving the freedom of the Gentiles from the yoke of the Mosaic law, and the justification of both Jews and Gentiles “by faith without the deeds of the law;” the latter being the very first principle of the gospel. The point of fact was, whether those men, who had “come down from Jerusalem,” pretending that they had a commission thence to teach the doctrine of the necessity of subjection to the law for justification, *really had such a commission*.—When this twofold object of the message to Jerusalem is kept in view, it throws a clear light on the whole transaction, rendering all easily consistent. The point of doctrine, we repeat, was far too important to admit of being settled by any authority but that of inspiration. And, as it was the preaching of *one apostle* that was brought into

question by the Judaizers, it could only be a reference to *other authority of the same kind*, that the question of the identity of the doctrine taught by the one and by the rest could by possibility be satisfactorily settled. Paul delivered his doctrine *as an inspired man*,—one who “had the mind of Christ.” If he really was thus inspired, his doctrine would be found in harmony with that of the other apostles; and this could be determined only by an appeal to them in the same capacity,—*as inspired men*.*—But

* It is remarkable how both Dr. Dick and Dr. Hason seem to overlook the point to be thus determined. They argue, that there was no need for an appeal to inspired authority, seeing there was inspired authority already at Antioch in the person of the apostle Paul. “If,” says the former, “it had been the wish of the church at Antioch, that the dispute should be terminated by the authority of inspiration, there

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with the *point of fact* it was otherwise. It could be settled at once by the elders of the church, or by the church itself. In these circumstances, the union of the two, or of the three, in the superscription of the reply, is readily and naturally accounted for. It was a reply on both points. And while “the elders and brethren” attested what they were competent to attest, they at the same time united, with hearty acquiescence, in the apostolic decision on the point

was no reason for sending to Jerusalem, as Paul was among them, who was not behind the chief of the apostles; and Barnabas, who was endowed with supernatural gifts; and there were also prophets, as we are informed in the fourteenth chapter, who enjoyed the miraculous assistance of the Spirit” (Lect. on Theol., vol. iv., page 360.)—“Had the question been to be determined,” says the latter, “by *special revelation* or *apostolical* authority, *one* inspired man, or *one* apostle would have answered as well as a dozen. The dispute might have been settled on the spot, and by Paul himself. Had there arisen any doubt of his power, or distrust of his integrity, a hundred miracles, if necessary, would instantly have removed the obstacle. In every view, the embassy to Jerusalem would have been a useless parade.” (Diocesan Episcopacy refuted, pages 84, 85.)

The answer to this is surely not far to seek, nor hard to find. It is true that Paul was at Antioch;—it is true that he was “not a whit behind the chief of the apostles;”—nay even more, we feel confident, is true, than is by either affirmed,—namely, that the apostolical authority of Paul was accredited at Antioch, as it was elsewhere, by

miraculous attestations. These he calls to the Corinthians (2 Cor. xii 12,) "the signs of an apostle;" and, although no mention is made of them in the brief notice of his visit to Corinth in the Acts of the Apostles, he says respecting them—"Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you, in all-patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." These, then, he wrought at Corinth; these he wrought at Ephesus, Acts xix 11, 12; at Philippi, Acts xvi. 16-18; and, from his own words to the christians at Rome, there is reason to believe, wherever he carried his testimony,—“For I will not dare to speak of those things which God hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round

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of doctrine,—rejoicing that “through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ they should be saved, even as the Gentiles, and the Gentiles even as they.”

One observation only remains to be made:—That the union, on this occasion, of “*the brethren*” as well as “the elders” with the apostles, was rendered specially appropriate by the very nature and circumstances of the occasion itself. The subject involved

about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ,” Rom. xv. 18,19;—these words clearly implying that wherever he “preached the gospel of Christ,” he “confirmed the word” by “mighty signs and wonders.”—And yet in spite of all this, the dispute which caused the appeal *arose* at Antioch; and not only *arose*, but was maintained with Paul himself by the “men who had come down from Judea,” with all the keenness of a false and fiery zeal. How vain, then, to allege that there was no need for any reference to other inspired authority when Paul was there! If the inspired authority of Paul did not *prevent* the dispute, how was it to be expected that it should *settle* it? Nay, does not the narrative expressly tell us that it did not settle it? These men “taught the brethren” that the apostles at Jerusalem preached a different doctrine from that which Paul was teaching in Antioch; and, consequently, that the church at Jerusalem held a different doctrine from that which they were receiving at Antioch. The men were vehement and pertinacious in their assertions. It may seem strange to us, that Paul’s divinely accredited inspiration did not suffice, if not to silence them, at least to satisfy and secure against hesitancy and doubt the minds of the brethren. And yet there is little room for wonder. It was the accredited inspiration of the whole college of apostles, which, on the point in question, was by these men affirmed to be in opposition to the accredited inspiration of one; and that one not one of the original number. It became necessary, for the foil satisfaction of the brethren’s minds, and the establishment of their faith,—that this question—a question of inspiration against inspiration, and miracle against miracle—should be promptly, authoritatively, finally settled. And it could be settled in no other way than by an appeal to the inspired apostles whether they *taught* the doctrine imputed to them, and to the elders, in their own behalf and

in behalf of all the brethren, whether they *held* it.—Where is the “riddle”—where the mystery, here?

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in it the *principles, or terms, of communion between the Jewish and the Gentile believers*:—and the Jewish brethren thus delighted to certify to their brethren of the Gentiles the cordiality with which they embraced them, and with which they were ready to give them the right hand of fellowship, as joint debtors with themselves to the same grace for the same salvation; expressing, at the same time, their expectation, that, acquiescing as they did in the decision which asserted the freedom of their Gentile brethren from any obligation to conform to the Mosaic law, those brethren would be tender of the consciences of the Jewish converts, and avoid whatever was fitted to offend them, and to impede the freedom of their fellowship with the believing Gentiles.

While we contend, therefore, that this case, in the 15th chapter of the Acts, was a case quite special and peculiar, and deny the authority in it of either the church at Jerusalem or the assembled representatives of other churches,—we may take the liberty of observing in regard to “*the brethren*,” that they are not here treated with unceremonious exclusion, or supercilious oblivion. They are present:—they hear:—they acquiesce in the decision:—they are united with the apostles and elders in the communication of the result to the churches of the Gentiles. For to interpret “*the brethren*” of the supposed deputies from other churches,—and even to give “*all the multitude*” the same explanation, I cannot but regard as such an outrage on all candour as to deserve no serious refutation:—the introductory designations of the letter—“The apostles and elders *and brethren*”—so directly corresponding with the designations of the parties by whom it was

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determined that the letter should be sent—"Then pleased it the apostles and elders *with the whole church*, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas." If any one shall say, "the whole church" may mean the whole *assembly*, we ask him whether he believes it *does*. That the word is here used in its almost universal acceptation in the New Testament, is clear from the previous use of it in this very chapter, when it is said, in verse fourth, of the deputies from Antioch, that "when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received *of the church*, and of the apostles and elders;" and that before the assembly in question was convened.

The lesson that is really taught us by the whole transaction—and it is one of first-rate importance,—is the lesson of appealing, on all subjects, whether of doctrine or of duty, to *inspired authority*. The apostles of Christ, "though dead, yet speak." If we differ from one another respecting any point of what we should believe or of what we should practice, our proper and only resource is—to "GO UP TO THEM ABOUT THIS MATTER." If we cannot agree,—cannot see their recorded decision in the same light,—then must we, each for ourselves, follow what in our consciences we believe to be in conformity with their teaching. And, while with all humility of mind we do so, we must never forget the further lesson of "FORBEARING ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE."

CHAPTER VII.

ON CERTAIN OBJECTIONS USUALLY URGED AGAINST CON- GREGATIONAL INDEPENDENCY.

IT must be obvious, that, if we have at all succeeded in making out the position, in point of fact, that independency, or Congregationalism, was the form of church government in apostolic times, and that it has the sanction of New Testament authority,—we have done enough,—all that ought to be required of us, as the ground of our practice.—Theoretical objections, founded on considerations of expediency, can have no legitimate force in opposition to the facts of apostolic ministry, and the directions of apostolic inspiration. Still, it may be worth our while, to take a little notice of some of those popular objections, which are capable of being placed in very plausible lights, and which, when so placed, are apt to induce a doubt whether our representation of the facts, and our interpretation of the directions, can be correct and well-founded. All that is properly incumbent upon us, is to find an answer to the question—“What saith the scripture?” To ask a single question beyond that, when the answer to it has been found, must be considered as indicating want of faith. It should be assumed, as a settled principle from which there must be no exception, that whatever can be shown to have the sanction of the word of God—to have the seal of his

authority—must be expedient in the view of the highest of all judgments; and that, when our own notions of expediency are introduced, in opposition to what has “seemed good” to the wisdom of God, we are chargeable with most unseemly presumption.

What has “seemed good to the Holy Ghost” should seem good also “to us.” The language of Paul has its full force of application in such a case,—“If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.”—Still, for the reason mentioned,—that proofs are apt to have their power impaired in minds that have been pre-possessed by the objections alluded to,—it may be well to notice them.

I. The first of them I mention is one which might naturally be anticipated, because it is founded in all the ordinary systems of human rule, and is apt, on that account, readily to suggest itself:—and, as it involves general principles, and is at once the most plausible and the most important, we must discuss it the more largely.—It is alleged that independency is inconsistent altogether with the very idea of government; and the objection is generally thrown into the form of a question, which gives it, in not a few minds, an imposing plausibility—“IF ALL ARE RULERS, WHO AND WHERE ARE THE RULED?”

Our reply to this question is, at once, that ALL ARE NOT RULERS. We disown the hypothetical premise, from which the inconsistency and absurdity are thus, somewhat tauntingly, inferred. That the elders, bishops, or pastors, are ordained in the churches of Christ to “have the rule over them,”—to be “over them in the Lord and admonish them,”—to “feed the flock of God, taking the oversight thereof,”—we

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maintain as distinctly, and insist upon as firmly, as our brethren who differ from us.* Both, therefore, asserting the *existence of rule*, the question resolves itself into another—namely, *What is the nature and extent of the authority with which the Lord has invested the office-bearers in his church?*

* I am sorry to be under the necessity here of entering my protest against the representation invariably given by Dr. M’Kerrow (in his recent Prize Essay on the Office of Ruling Elder) of the views and

practice of Independents in this particular. His mode of stating these is fitted to lead his readers to conceive, not only that we consider the rule as lodged with the people, but even with the people apart from the officers. He makes the question between independents and presbyterians, regarding church-power—"Is it in the community of the faithful—the body of the people? Or, Is it in a class of office-bearers appointed by Christ for the purpose of bearing rule in his church?" "If in each congregation," he says, "all the members have the power of ruling, then the question presents itself, whom are they to obey? According to the doctrine which I am combatting, all rule, and yet they are commanded to obey. Obey whom? The only answer that can be given to this question, on the supposition that *all* rule, is, that they are to obey themselves. If this be not a contradiction in terms, it sounds very like one:—to speak of all ruling and all obeying—ruling themselves and obeying themselves. I do not see how such a conclusion as this, (absurd though it be) can be avoided, if we are to receive the doctrine that all the members of the church are invested equally with the power of government. They would, according to this supposition, have the double character of rulers and subjects."—My good friend "does not see how the conclusion can be avoided:"—and no more can I. But then, his premises are false. He ascribes to independents what no independent holds that "all the members of the church are invested"—and invested "equally"—with "the power of government." Was Dr. McK. not aware that we had pastors over our churches, and that we regard them as, in scripture phrase, "having the rule over them?"—and consequently, that the true and only question between us is, not whether or not there are rulers in the churches distinct from the members,—but what is the nature and extent of the power lodged in them; and whether it is to be exercised, in its judicial and executive functions, Independently of the people, or, with the people's presence and concurrent voice.

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1. And in answer to this inquiry, our *first* observation, although of a negative character is of no small amount of positive value.—It is one which is not peculiar to independents, but is held, in common with them, by most, if not even all, of their presbyterian brethren.—It is, that the power, whatever it be, is not legislative;—it is not a power to make laws.—We must insist upon it, that all power of this description ceased with the apostles. The authority to frame the constitution of the church, to enact its laws, and to institute its ordinances, was theirs, as the inspired vice-gerents of their exalted Lord,—himself the church's supreme and only Head. But with them the power expired. They had no successors. The result of their inspired authority

we now have in their writings. It is by these, that they, "being dead, yet speak." Be the directions complete or defective, explicit or doubtful, they comprise all we have that possesses authority; and beyond them we have no right to go. In following the word, we obey the apostles; and in obeying the apostles, we obey Christ. It appears to have been to the perpetual rule which they were thus to maintain in his new spiritual kingdom—the era of "the regeneration"—that he had reference, when he said to them—"In the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Matt. xix. 28. This commenced in their persons, and continues in their writings. In these their authority is now lodged:—and to the apostles, as speaking in them, we ought, agreeably to the inference in the close of last section, to make all our appeals respecting the laws of the kingdom, whether

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they relate to our personal or to our social and collective duties.—If any man, or any body of men, by how lofty a name soever distinguished, shall presume to venture on framing a statute-book of their own, or even on introducing additions to the existing statute-book, for which we search it in vain,—let them answer for it. They expose themselves to the charge of "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men," and should remember what is said of such, in regard to all which they thus presumptuously introduce—"in vain do they worship me." The divine injunction is—"Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."—We consider ourselves as having enough, for the direction of the churches, in the New Testament;—and regard everything of the nature of *legislation* in the church as involving the assumption of a power which died with the last of "the twelve apostles of the Lamb."

We have already applied these principles to the only ecclesiastical court which is even pretended to have a place in the New Testament Records; and have concluded, that such a court, *if uninspired*, whether consisting of the apostles, or of delegates from all the churches, or of both, could have had no authority to legislate for the kingdom of Christ, or to issue any mandate that should bind the consciences of his subjects. *Church-power*, then, whether vested in the office-bearers of the churches alone, or in them and the people conjointly, is *solely judicial* And *executive*; that is, it is the power of judging of the application of existing laws to particular cases, and of carrying into effect the law's punitive and corrective sentences.—It is an extraordinary senti-

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ment enunciated by an eminent clergyman of the church of England in our own day,—the Rev. Dr. Hugh M'Neile,—“The apostle enjoins upon the brethren to submit themselves to the rulers; which would be worse than useless, if the rulers had no authority to command any thing beyond the letter of scripture.”* Indeed! Is the injunction, then, “to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates,” an injunction “worse than useless,” unless the authority of these rulers be absolute,—their will law? Has the Queen of England no power, because she is the impersonation and representative of law, and by existing law the exercise of her power must be regulated? The constitutional legislature may alter the laws, and enact new ones; but according to the laws so enacted the sovereign must rule. And because she has no power in her own person to go beyond the laws, does this render obedience, on the part of her subjects a thing of naught, and the divine command to yield it “worse than useless?”—With regard to the churches of Christ, then, the question is,—where lies *their* constitutional legislature? Is it not with Christ and

his apostles? And where are the laws which they have enacted? Are they not in the inspired statute-book of the spiritual kingdom? If they are there, is there any ecclesiastical legislature on earth, that has any authority to alter, to cancel, or to add? Is it not the duty of the rulers to rule according to these laws,—and the duty of the people to “obey” and “submit themselves” to those rulers—so ruling,

* The church and the churches; or the church of God in Christ, and the churches of Christ militant here on earth: page 523.

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and only when so ruling? I am aware that when Dr. M’Neile uses the words quoted, he is speaking “as regards institutions and ceremonial order.” He says:—“The scriptures contain no detailed description of how things were ‘set in order’ by Paul at Corinth, or by Titus in Crete. And the omission was designed, that other churches, in different circumstances, and ages, and climates, might enjoy christian liberty, while with wisdom and discretion, they set things in order for themselves.” Alas! for the liberty! “What a latitude of allowance is embraced in the words “institutions and ceremonial order!” The Church of Rome, “with wisdom and discretion” no doubt, “set things in order for itself:” —the Church of England, with its share of the same “wisdom and discretion,” set things in order for itself! And, without at all meaning to bring into comparison what is antichristian in the former with what is christian in the latter, I need not surely say, to any one acquainted with the “institutions and ceremonial order” of the one and of the other, how far—how very far—both have gone, not only beyond, but aside from, and in contrariety to, the divine simplicity of the New Testament; and that, under covert of the very principle for which Dr. M’Neile pleads,—a principle noticed and exposed in our “introductory observations,” and on which we do not

again dwell. It is introduced here, from its immediate connexion with the subject of *church-power*, and for the purpose of impressing on the reader's mind the conviction, that such power, whenever it ventures to *legislate*, becomes impious and mischievous usurpation, having in it the essential spirit of antichrist,—“who sitteth in the temple of God, showing him—

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self that he is God.” I say nothing of the difference between “the letter of scripture” when Paul wrote his epistles to the Corinthians and to Titus, and “the letter of scripture” now that the revelation of the divine will is completed. What we contend for is, that the churches then were subject, in regard to all their “institutions and ceremonial order,” to apostolic authority in what way soever its dictates were made known to them; and that to the same authority they still continue subject, as its dictates are on permanent record.

2. In regard to the exercise of this power, I have formerly endeavoured to show what part the churches of Christ, when met in their collective capacity, are actually represented as taking in the most important function of judicial and executive administration,—*the separation of an offender from the communion of the church*—the highest act of ecclesiastical discipline. We have seen, that, as an assembled body, the church at Corinth is described as having “the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and, in the legitimate exercise of that power, is enjoined “to put away” from its sacred fellowship “the wicked person.”—Now, if I have succeeded in the demonstration of this,—then all that is said on the subject of authority and rule on the one hand, and of obedience and submission on the other, will require to be understood *in consistency with these representations*. The rule must, first Of all, be exclusively judicial and executive:—and then, in the second place, it will not be in the hands of the eldership apart from the brethren, but the

presence and concurrence of the brethren will be necessary to the validity of every judicial decision, and of every executive act.—The business, then, of

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the pastorate or eldership, we take to be this:—To preside in the church;—to see that “all things be done decently and in order;”—to point out the law of Christ in its application to particular cases;—to have these cases so matured for statement, as to make both their own nature and the bearing of the law of Christ upon them as clear and simple as possible;—to urge upon the brethren a faithful adherence, not to the letter of the law only, but also to the spirit in which all the discipline of the House of God ought to be conducted, the spirit of humble self-diffidence and compassion, of love to the offender, blended with indignant zeal against the offence, and grief for the dishonour done by it to the Head of the church.—“The pastor rules,” says my clear-headed friend Dr. Payne, “by making the Lord Jesus Christ rule. He has no authority independent of his Master, or separate from his. ... A right-minded minister will not desire to see *himself*, but the *Saviour*, reign oyer the people. Jealous for his Master’s honour, he will shrink from the thought of dividing the supremacy with him. He covets not the obedience of the church on his own account, but for the honour of his Lord: and thus placing before his people not himself but Christ, as the actual ruler, he secures, when the conscience is in subjection to divine authority, the obedience he enforces.”*—Thus, it is not properly a system of *popular rule*, but of *pastoral direction* and *popular concurrence* in the application and execution of the laws of Christ; his authority being, throughout, held and felt to be paramount. The submission enjoined is submission

* The Church of Christ considered: page 61.

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to the presiding and directing pastor or pastors, as the divinely authorised organ, by whom, in each case, the law of Christ is to be pointed out, and, with the concurrent judgment and voice of the church, to be carried into execution. A rule that is exercised by office-bearers entirely apart from, and independently of, the brethren, can never be made to harmonize with those passages in which the discipline is represented as carried on by the assembled church:—whereas, if rule be understood in the sense we have put upon it, all is harmonious and consistent. And that such *is* the rule intended, may be made further apparent by observing—

3. *The nature of the motives, by which the submission to it, on the part of the brethren, is enforced.* They are contained in such passages as Heb. xiii. 17. “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; *for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account; that they may do it with joy and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*”—and 1 Thes. v. 12, 13. “Know them who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and *esteem them very highly in love, for their work’s sake: and be at peace among yourselves.*”—Here, and wherever in the New Testament such topics are touched, the appeal is made, invariably, not so much to the claims of *authority* as to those of *affection*. The motive urged is not—Obey them,—for they are invested with an authority which it must be at your peril that you resist. Instead of any thing approaching to such a tone of domination, demanding implicit submission,—there is the earnest persuasion of love.—Do not, however, mistake me. I am “far from meaning to say, that by its nature the motive of

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affection is excluded from the obedience that is rendered to authority such as is even legislative and

absolute. But the frequent appeals to esteem and love seem to point out the principle, or genius, both of the authority and of the submission. And this beautifully accords with the language of Peter to pastors:—"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." 1 Pet. v. 1-3.

Let it not, then, be said to independents—Your pastors *have no power*. They have all the power with which it has seemed good to the only authority to invest them. They have no wish for more:—no wish for either the power to *make laws*, or the power to apply and execute the laws that exist *independently of the concurrence of their brethren*. They have no wish for this; because they believe that with such authority Christ has not invested any man, or any body of men. They desire to rule in the christian affections of their people; and, under the humble feeling of a common subjection to Christ, to carry "the brethren" along with them in the execution, not of *their* laws, but of *his*.—That a difficulty may at times be felt, respecting the precise boundaries of legitimate power, may, without hesitation, be granted. But this is a difficulty which will be found to press upon all systems of ecclesiastical administration whatever. And where, indeed, is the system, under

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which questions on *this* point have not actually been agitated? As no one will contend for a power that is independent and absolute,—there must be limits in the courts of assembled representatives, as well as with the eldership of individual churches.—The difficulty, it may here be remarked, is, substan-

tially, the same in kind, with regard to *laws*, as with regard to *doctrine*,—in the department of *rule*, as in the department of *instruction*; and the analogy between the two is deserving of notice, as illustrative of an important principle on our present subject. There is no power to add either to the laws or to the doctrines of Christ. The pastors are bound to rule according to existing laws, just as they are bound to teach according to existing doctrines. In the one department, as in the other, they have no authority either to keep within, or to go beyond, the revealed mind of Christ. And no church can be under obligation to obey any laws but those of Christ, any more than it can be under obligation to receive any doctrines but those of Christ. Their setting a pastor over them *to teach*, does not imply a surrender of the right, or a dereliction of the duty, to judge of his *doctrine*:—so neither does their setting a pastor over them *to ride*, imply a surrender of the right, or a dereliction of the duty, to judge of his administration. It is their right and their duty to judge his doctrine by the *instructions* of Christ; and it is equally their right and their duty to judge his administration by the *laws* of Christ. If it belongs to them to see that they are taught according to Christ's doctrine, it must belong to them, on the very same principle, to see that they are governed accord—

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ing to Christ's laws.—This right and duty of God's people may serve as a salutary check to the abuse of power, to which the temptation in the human mind is even stronger than that to the perversion of liberty. That a case is supposable in which a church, taken collectively, may differ from its pastor or pastors respecting the application of the law of Christ, who will deny? It will be found, however, under the administration of a well-instructed, discerning, and prudent pastor, (and such all pastors ought to be,—there is no provision for the contrary) a very great

rarity. No pastor, more than the pope, is infallible; and he who is humbly sensible of his fallibility will keep his ear and mind open to suggestions from even the most obscure member of his flock, when they are brought forward with becoming respect and diffidence, and will be ready to modify by them at times his own previous judgment. But, generally speaking, when a pastor has studied the nature and bearings of any case, and the law of Christ under whose operation it falls to be ranged,—although he may lay his account with the occasional impenetrability and refractoriness of individuals, will be able to carry the aggregate of the church harmoniously along with him. “The difficulty referred to,” says Dr. Payne again, “is rather speculative than practical. When there exists fervent love between the parties; when there is no tendency to an improper assumption of power on the one hand, and no proneness to groundless and factious opposition on the other, there will be no disputes on this delicate point” (the point of the limits of power and obedience, a point about which there is much the same difficulty

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as about this) “and with respect to which disputes are especially to be deprecated and avoided.”*—The tenor of this particular leads me to notice—

4. All obedience to Christ ought to be *the obedience of conviction,—the obedience of an enlightened mind and conscience.*—This is obvious. Without this there is no real obedience rendered to Christ at all. When the power of intermediate investigation, and of final judgment and execution, lies entirely with the officers apart from the people, the effect inevitably is, that the people become indifferent. They do not feel,—they cannot be supposed to feel,—the necessity of their studying and knowing the laws of Christ in regard to the discipline of his House. That belongs to their rulers. Having nothing themselves to say in the matter, why need they put themselves to the

trouble of inquiry? Communicants are admitted, are tried, are censured, are excluded, without their being privy to the grounds of procedure, and in a manner that leaves them in entire ignorance. They submit in the dark. Their submission is not properly an act of enlightened obedience to Christ.—Now, in his kingdom, there is no subjection of the conscience to any other than himself. It is, therefore, desirable, and in congruity with the principles of enlightened spiritual freedom by which his kingdom is distinguished, that whatever is done in the churches should be done as an act of obedience to the law of Christ, explained, understood, and brought home to every conscience. This is one of the excellencies of the system of apostolic church order, as it appears, in its simplicity, in the New Testament,—

* The Church of Christ considered: page 63.

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that whatever is done is felt by all to be something in which they are themselves concerned;—in which they are doing homage to Christ, acting the part of enlightened subjects of his authority;—and not merely assenting in ignorance to what others are left to do for them. The spiritual interests of each individual of the brethren become so far the common concern of the whole; and the bringing of the rules of Christ's kingdom to bear upon them in cases when their souls are in jeopardy, is felt by each as a matter of personal responsibility. And thus, every act of the church becomes an act in which each member bears a part; and has the satisfaction of knowing and feeling that he is uniting with his brethren, not in yielding a careless and ignorant submission, but in rendering enlightened and reverential obedience.—Hence I have to add—

5. The system by which all are thus invited and bound to take part in what is done,—whether in the admission of members or in the exercise of discipline,

—contributes eminently to the purity of communion in the churches.—I am speaking, of course, of the theoretical tendencies of the system, when rightly administered.—That laxity and corruption may find their way into congregational churches, I am so far from wishing to deny, that I would ever anxiously lift my warning voice to my brethren against the danger. Danger there is. I do not, however, resume the subject, formerly discussed, of the materials of which christian churches ought to be composed, and the mischievous effects of introducing materials of a different description. “What I now say is this. Assuming the duty of preserving the churches pure, —and without affirming (what cannot be affirmed in

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the face of facts not in modern independent churches alone, but in some of the apostolic churches themselves) that any system whatever can present an insuperable barrier against the evil of impurity,—I can hardly fancy any candid person making it a question, whether the *tendency* of the system is not to secure the end of pure communion:—the thing is bo very evident. When every applicant for admission, after having conversed with the pastor, must be named to the assembled church; a competent number of the members nominated for farther conversation; and, after every needful inquiry, by them and the pastor, into profession and character, a report of the case publicly made, and all called upon to judge of the propriety of admission, and formally to give or withhold their assent, or, in case of doubt, to request delay for satisfaction on the doubtful point;—all seems to be done that can be done, for the attainment of the end. All are warned. And circumstances with regard to character may frequently be known to individuals in a church, which are unknown to its office-bearers, by which means improper admissions may be prevented;—the question of admission becoming, in the minds of all the members, a question

of personal and conscientious responsibility. If improper characters are received, no one has it in his power to lay the blame off from himself upon the minister and the elders. All become so far responsible; and in proportion to the number of the members, and the extent of the feeling of responsibility, is the unlikelihood augmented of unworthy intruders making their way into the “fellowship of the saints.” I freely admit, that a minister and his session, duly impressed with the importance of purity

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in this fellowship, and acting conscientiously, have a great deal in their power. It were most uncandid to deny, or to question, that, with due care, their success maybe equal to that of any independent church. I am speaking of adaptations and tendencies:—and all that I say is, that an independent church affords facilities still more ample, and checks still more stringent, for the end desired. When I speak too of a minister and session having so much in their power, I speak of them simply as the representative agents of a presbyterian congregation. I do not now enter into the sources of corruption in *national* churches. In these, corruption is indigenous. The causes of it are in the nationality of the church-and-state system; and with these it would be very unfair indeed to charge either presbyterianism or episcopacy. In forming a comparative estimate of the different schemes of ecclesiastical policy, we are bound to take them as they are in themselves, unassociated with extrinsic and adventitious sources of evil. In all national establishments, there are sources of impurity which are inherent in the principle of the nationality of religion, and in every system founded on that principle:—but since both episcopacy and presbytery may exist without connexion with the state, the corruptions which spring from such connexion should be imputed to their own proper cause.

II. It has'often been said, that the scheme of independency makes a FINE THEORY; but that it is only as a theory it has any claim to admiration; that IT WILL NOT DO IN PRACTICE.—When such things are said, there are generally, in the minds of those who say them, instances of abuse, or of cases that have

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been of a troublesome character, and have even, it may be, given rise to dissensions and divisions in particular churches.—Now, that abuses may occur in the administration of any system whatever, may surely be admitted, without giving ground for such an inference as that the system itself is an impracticable and visionary one. What system is there, or can there be, whether of man's construction, or of God's, which when administered by human agency, could stand for one moment before so absurd and unreasonable a test!—Of those who have professed to have given independency a trial, and whom experience has induced to abandon it, it will, generally speaking, be found, that they are persons whose grounds of dissatisfaction, were they candidly and fully investigated, would turn out more honourable to the churches they have forsaken, than to themselves. It would, indeed, be a wonderful system, which, under human administration, amid all the varieties of judgment and temper which, even amongst fellow-christians, are still to be found,—should go on without any difficulties or trials, or any indications of the weakness or the depravity of its administrators. When I consider the terms in which Paul expresses himself to the church of Corinth, in anticipating his coming to visit them, and intimating what he was apprehensive of finding amongst them, I am led to conclude, that it would Jbe wrong to derive, from even a very considerable amount of occasional and temporary insubordination and anarchy, any conclusive argument, to prove the constitution of a church unscriptural, whatever that constitution

might be. His language is affectingly strong:—"For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as

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I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not; lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults: and lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many who have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness, and fornication, and lasciviousness which they have committed." 2 Cor. xii. 20, 21. If such was the state of things in one of the churches constituted by Paul himself, and under apostolic supervision; surely different parties of christians should beware of hasty and harsh severity in their conclusions respecting the systems held and practiced by each other, from any outbursts of turbulence and passion which may, on particular occasions, break forth in their respective communities.—Such outbursts are most inconsistent with the genuine influence of the gospel: they give occasion for no little penitence and shame, when for a time they do deform the peaceful and harmonious loveliness of christian communion:—but alas! while corruption continues to operate, no system can be long perfectly free from them, nor can any one be ever altogether secure against them. We should not allow ourselves to forget, that, were we to proceed on such a principle of reasoning as that to which we have been referring, the constitution of the apostolic churches themselves would be the very first we should be constrained to disown.—As every divine institution must be perfectly adapted to its purpose, I am fully satisfied, on this ground, as well as from long experience, that the more closely we adhere to the scheme of church government which we have endeavoured to prove to be that which existed under apostolic sanction, the

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more productive will it be found of spiritual benefit so the church, and of glory to Christ. Making due allowance for human frailty, the system *does* work well. It answers the various ends of christian association, better than any other. And although, from what has, sarcastically, and yet, in the *good* sense of the designation, truly, been called its *democratic* character, it may be conceived that we stand in need of more of this allowance than others, we can say, with truth, we feel no anxiety to *have* more, not being at all sensible of our requiring it.

III. It is alleged that THE PEOPLE—THE MEMBERS OF A CHURCH GENERALLY—ARE, IN MANY CASES, QUITE INCOMPETENT TO JUDGE OF THE PROPER APPLICATION TO THOSE CASES OF THE LAWS OF CHRIST.—This may be so represented, as to sound plausibly: but it is contradicted by fact. I speak the conviction of forty-five years' pastoral experience, when I say, that there are comparatively few cases, in which a church of Christ, including its office-bearers, having the law of Christ in his word before them, with simplicity of heart to understand and obey it, and united supplication for the direction of God's Spirit, will find any very great, far less any insuperable, difficulty. With their variety of gifts, and with "the wisdom that is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and of good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy," they will be enabled to "judge righteous judgment;" they will find "darkness light before them, and crooked things straight."

They who object on such a ground, indeed, if we judge from what Paul says, must be considered as "speaking to their own shame:"—for even with

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regard to questions of civil and secular difference, that apostle allowed no toleration to brethren in

church fellowship to carry those questions for judgment out of the church with which they stood connected. The prohibition is peremptory; and the terms of it sufficiently show that he had no such idea of the incompetency of the brethren as the present objection assumes:—"Dare any of you, haying a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Enow ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers." 1 Cor. vi. 1-6. He thus (as I formerly had occasion to observe) charges them, in going to law with one another before the civil tribunals, with despising their brethren, as if there was not a man amongst them of knowledge and discretion sufficient to qualify him for arbitrating between the contending parties; and he enjoins them to "set them to judge" whom, in so passing them over, and preferring the judgment-seats of the heathen, they were treating with unworthy scorn and distrust. And when he says—"I speak to *your shame*:—is it so that there is not a wise man among you?"—he uses language which should make our opponents *ashamed* of their objection.

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Generally speaking, too, a church may be considered as best acquainted with its own members and its own affairs;—and in many, if not even in most cases, better able to judge respecting them than strangers.—And then,—even when differences takes place that are material and serious in their nature,

the evil, it may be observed, in churches constituted on independent principles, is confined to the particular society in which they occur. Even if some, whether conscientiously or factiously, should separate from their brethren, the mischief does not spread. Unless in very peculiar cases, it stops there. But courts of Appeal serve to spread it. That which divides a session and a congregation, may, when appealed, rend a presbytery, and throw the fire of strife into a synod; the very appeal which was meant to terminate a difference only diffusing it. Every man's cause seems -right in his own eyes. And if cases be supposable in which a party may be wronged by the judgment given, and in which, therefore, it may be a happy thing that he has a higher appeal in his power—(and such cases, we are far from denying, there may be;)—yet, on the other hand, to self-sufficient and litigiously disposed men, the very knowledge that they have such an appeal in their power is apt to operate as an encouragement to regard with comparative lightness the decision of the inferior court. If the session fail him, he has the presbytery; and if the presbytery are against him, he can brave them before the synod. And I believe it will be found, that there are just as many-cases of persons remaining dissatisfied with the final judgment, when they have gone the full round of appeal, as of persons who have been thus dissatis-

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fied with the first final decision of a congregational church. And I am very doubtful if the cases be numerous, or even if there be any, in which justice is ultimately done in the one way more effectively than in the other. If a man is proud, unreasonable, and obstinate, (and, unlike the christian character as such tempers are, individuals of this description may everywhere be found) his dispositions will find occasion to manifest themselves, be the administration of the church what it may.

There is one species of wrong against which the discipline of an independent church has been conceived not sufficiently to provide, and for the rectification of which courts of appeal have been held to be necessary,—the wrong which may arise from *partiality in judgment*.—Dr. Dwight—a high authority, and unquestionably impartial, thus expresses himself—(Theology, Serm. clxii.) “*There are many cases in which individuals are dissatisfied on reasonable grounds toith the judgment of the church.*”^{*}—It is perfectly obvious, that in a debate between two members of the same church, the parties may in many respects stand on unequal ground. One of them may be ingorant; without family connexions; in humble circumstances; and possessed of little or no personal influence. The other may be a person of distinction; opulent; powerfully connected; of superior understanding; and of great personal influence, not only in the church, but also in the country at large. As things are in this world, it is impossible that these persons should possess, in any controversy

* The Italics are the author’s own; the sentence being the *heading* of a paragraph.

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 between them, equal advantages. Beyond all this, the church itself may be one party, and a poor and powerless member the other. In this case also, it is unnecessary to observe, the individual must labour under every supposable disadvantage to which a righteous cause can be subjected. To bring the parties in these, or any similar circumstances, as near to a state of equality as human affairs will permit, it seems absolutely necessary that *every ecclesiastical body should have its tribunal of appeals; a superior judicature, established by common consent, and vested with authority to issue finally all those causes which, before a single church, are obviously liable to a partial decision.*”—He then

goes on to mention different ways in which, among the congregationalists, in some of the States of the Union, supplied this *desideratum*,—condemning one and commending another. But, besides expressing my deliberate and entire dissent from the statement that “there are *many* cases in which individuals are dissatisfied *on reasonable grounds* with the judgment of the church,”—and avowing my firm belief that such cases are very rare,—I have to remark, that, with regard to the various modes of supplying the alleged defect, our previous question presents itself—“What saith the scripture?” If such tribunals of appeal were indeed “absolutely necessary,” might we not have expected to find them in the Bible?—and, if they are not to be found there, is there not some little presumption in pronouncing them thus indispensable? Our presbyterian brethren profess to find them there, and they act consistently in having them;—but not so any congregationalist.—It so happens, however, that we have the very case des-

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cribed by Dr. Dwight brought before us hypothetically by an inspired apostle, and counsel given how it should be dealt with. The apostle James thus states the case, and thus counsels:—“My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before

the judgment-seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convicted (convicted) of the law as transgressors." James ii. 1-9.

I am aware that this passage is generally understood of the ordinary or casual entrance of the rich and the poor into their places of worship, and the marked difference shown in providing the one and the other with accommodation. I cannot but agree, however, and that unhesitatingly, with those who regard it as relating to the case of two parties in a cause,—the one rich and the other poor. The following are, in brief, my reasons:—1. We know

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from other passages,—such as 1 Cor. vi. 1-7, already more than once adverted to, that the churches did take cognizance of differences, even as to secular matters, which arose amongst their members; and that they were under a divine prohibition of carrying their causes before heathen or worldly tribunals.—2. In all the other occurrences in the New Testament of the word rendered "*respect of persons*," it has reference to judicial distinction,—to the undue preference of one to another in judgment. See Rom. ii. 11; Eph. vi. 9; Col. iii. 25; Acts x. 34. The probability is, therefore, that it has the same reference here.—3. The terms of verse fourth strongly confirm—I had almost said fully ascertain—this reference:—"Are ye not then *partial* in yourselves, and are become *judges* of (that is possessed and actuated by) evil thoughts?" Is not the natural interpretation of this that which explains it of *partiality in judgment*? "Judges" was not their appropriate designation, when they were only assembled for ordinary worship.—4. It is established farther by the association of judicial proceedings in the apostle's

mind with the subject of his remonstrance and admonition: “Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seats?”—Strange, then, that you should manifest such a partiality to the riches of this world at *your* judgment-seat!—5. And further still, by his pointed reference to “*the law*,” as “convicting them of transgression,” when they thus acted partially:—“But if ye have respect, of persons, ye commit sin, and *are convicted of the law as transgressors.*” I grant that by the law may here be meant “the royal law” of love to our neighbour, to which, under this designation, he had just referred:

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—but from what immediately follows—“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all,”—with the proof of this somewhat startling maxim subjoined,—it is evident that he had the law in his mind distributively, as well as in its summary principle; and that when he speaks of their being “convicted of the law as transgressors,” he had in his eye, along with this principle, the many strong and peremptory prohibitions to be found in it of partiality in judgment, and the heavy denunciations against such as were guilty of it. See Lev. xix. 15; Deut. i. 17; Exod. xxiii. 2, 3; Deut. xvi. 18, 19; xxvii. 19; Psalm lxxxii. 2; Prov. xxvi. 23, 24.

Supposing it, then, to be thus made out, that the case referred to in the passage is that of a matter in dispute between a rich brother and a poor, who “come into their assembly” for judgment, and the temptation to partiality in its administration; how does the apostle dispose of it? Does he speak of the necessity of a “tribunal of appeal” to which the poor man, when the victim of such partiality, might have recourse, and threaten the evil-minded judges with the reversal of their sentence, and their own reprehension and punishment by that tribunal? Nothing of the kind. He simply warns the believers

against the principle of partiality; remonstrates with them on its strange inconsistency; reminds them of its extreme offensiveness in the eyes of that God who hath “chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom;” and of its exposing them to the danger of condemnation and banishment from his presence, in the day of coming judgment,—in which he who is the Saviour of the poor will be

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their vindicator and avenger. To him the poor, in such circumstances, must “commit himself,”—counting it “a light thing to be judged of man’s judgment,” and anticipating the time when a higher judge will “bring forth his righteousness, as the light, and his judgment as the noon-day!”

But why should I dwell on such topics? It is easy thus to compare system with system, in regard to their respective theoretical tendencies; and it is easy to advance very plausible considerations in behalf of each. But the question ever recurs—*What saith the scripture?* We may urge special benefits, and we may charge special disadvantages, in favour of our own and in opposition to each other’s schemes; and, in doing both the one and the other, we may, on either side, be biased and partial in our judgments. We are quite sure that if a system, accused and condemned on theoretical principles, could be proved to have the sanction of the word of God, all our abstract reasonings, and all our pleas of supposed expediency, would at once be proved fallacious. One express precept of an apostle would put to flight a thousand of the most ingenious and specious objections. One “Thus saith the Lord,” or one example of a divinely sanctioned ordinance, would at once, if it did not silence, at least refute, all the reasonings of men; putting the impress of sophistry upon all their seeming wisdom.

Notwithstanding this, however, there are still two observations remaining, which I must not omit:—

IV. The form of government for which we plead, it has been alleged, BEINGS THE MEMBERS OF CHURCHES TOO MUCH INTO CONTACT; and, since in every church there must be an aggregate of the weakness and

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corruption of its members, as well as an aggregate of their wisdom and grace, it is, from its nature, SPECIALLY APT TO ENGENDER COLLISIONS, IRRITATIONS, AND FEUDS.

Now, that such things *may* take place, has already been freely admitted. As they were found in apostolically constituted churches themselves, we need not hesitate to admit what, if it bears against *our* system, bears equally against *theirs*. That in certain circumstances such evils may arise more frequently under the congregational administration of church government, than under some others, might be granted, without at all affecting the validity of my ground. Yet I am not sure if, when granted, it would be true. Variety of tempers, as well as of judgments, is to be found everywhere: and it would be no pleasant, but rather a very invidious and painful task, to set about instituting a comparison between the displays of temper in the controversies of independent churches, and in those of church courts. Surveying the history of the latter, I should have no great fear of harming my cause by such comparison. I would much rather, however, avoid it altogether. To lay hold of particular instances of "strife and division," and magnify them, and exult in them, is as dishonourable to those who differ from us, as it is unchristian and unlovely in the spirit of our own minds. "There must be also heresies among you," says the apostle Paul, "that they that are approved may be made manifest among you." Divisions and separations will at times occur in all christian bodies. They are greatly to be deprecated;—yet it may, perhaps, be laid down as a sound general maxim, that *an enlightened and con-*

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scientious separation is preferable to an ignorant and unprincipled union.—And it may be added, that an infusion of the popular element, though, in some respects, it may bring with it its risks, is yet, in other respects, a salutary safeguard. From the beginning, the propensity, on the part of the rulers of the churches, discovered itself, to “lord it over God’s heritage;” and all are aware, how fatally this principle has operated, both in the earlier and in the later history of the church. And the same has been the case in the history of states as well,—as of churches. What friend of civil liberty would divest the British constitution of its popular element, merely because that element gives rise to an occasional collision of parties or outburst of anarchy? And what christian community, but one that has ignominiously bowed its neck to the yoke of a usurping Erastianism, would yield the right of its congregations to choose their own ministers, because the exercise of that right has at times been attended with unseemly strife and division? Who, if he had the power, would change the constitution of our earth’s atmosphere, because it does not admit of perpetual calm, but is now and then agitated by the breeze, the storm, the tempest?

V. The former particular suggests this, which shall be the last. So far from being disposed to question, or to fear admitting, I am rather forward to grant, that, from the popular form of their constitution, churches constituted on independent principles do require a larger amount than others of the operation of certain christian graces, in order to their prosperity. I am far from thinking it any derogation from the claims which independency has

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to christian acceptance, to allow, that the churches formed upon its principles cannot possible prosper,

—can hardly continue to exist,—without the prevailing and dominant influence of humility, and love, and self-denial, and meekness, and forbearance. They cannot thrive,—they cannot be held together,—without these. Is this an argument against them? No man who attentively reads his New Testament can think so. It cannot fail to strike every snob nader, with what frequency and earnestness snob virtues as these are inculcated upon the churches. And are we not from this warranted to infer, *that there was a deep-felt conviction in the minds of the inspired writers, that the system of government instituted by them, under the direction of their divine master, was one which could not be so maintained as effectually to answer its ends, without a general prevalence of such principles in the hearts of the brethren?* A system of rule by which the brethren are excluded from taking any part in the administration of the affairs of the church,—in which all goes on without their knowledge, or independently of their concurrence,—may certainly have the advantage of bringing them less into immediate contact, and so diminishing the consequent hazard of collision. But then, does it not demonstrate its unapostolic character, by the very circumstance of its rendering comparatively useless—limiting entirely to the intercourse of private life—the many and earnest injunctions and admonitions to the exercise of those affections of mind and heart of which we now speak? It is, in my apprehension, a presumption against the divine authority of any system of church government, that it can be carried on with but little comparative requisition of these

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christian graces,—little, at any rate, among “the brethren,” to whom the epistles are addressed. And, on the other hand, it is a presumption in favour of any system, that the exercise of them is indispensable. One of the obvious reasons of the fervid and frequent inculcation of the dispositions in ques-

tion is, that in their christian fellowship they were continually coming in contact, and requiring the repression of all that was selfish and irritable, and the exercise of all that was gentle, and generous, and kind? And, in accordance with this remark, is it not notorious, that by the body of the people in other christian communions, the passages of scripture which inculcate these tempers and graces are seldom if ever felt *as having any application to their fellowship in the church?* They apply them, as already hinted, to the intercourse of private life. And so far they are in the right. But with what spirit and force do they come home to the churches, when, besides their private intercourse, they have a joint concern in the discipline and government of the house of God!—when they do not merely meet to engage in the exercises of worship, and to sit in silence as hearers of the word, or participants in the supper of the Lord,—but have a part to act in all that pertains to the purity, and prosperity of the body! To societies so constituted, how peculiarly appropriate are such exhortations as these:—“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit,

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even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in-you all!”—“If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Eph. iv. 1—6; Phil. ii. 1—5.—Such admonitions, all are aware, abound in the apostolic epistles:—and this comes among the proofs of the constitution of the church having been such as specially to require them. This, we not only grant but plead, the popular constitution of the congregational churches does, in a manner and measure peculiar to itself. It is not the dishonour, but the glory, of such churches, that they cannot thrive but in the atmosphere of humility and love;—that these are the bonds by which they are held together,—so that if the bonds fail, the churches fall to pieces and dissolve.

I might add, that the very consciousness of their necessity has the effect of inducing their cultivation, and the repression and crucifixion of their opposites. And the observation may be made with still greater force, with regard to the influence on their maintenance and growth of the common interest felt by the brethren in the concerns of the church, and their participation in all that relates to the admission of members and the exercise of discipline, and thus in

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whatever tends to the preservation and advancement of its purity, prosperity, and spiritual efficiency for all the purposes of its institution. If occasionally there arise temptations to the slumbering passions of the old man, the general tendency is much stronger and more constant to cherish and strengthen, by exercise, the uniting affections of the new.—“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but

many. If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? if the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. * * * that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." 1 Cor. xii. 12-26.

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CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE UNION OF CHURCHES, AND THEIR COMMOTION WITH EACH OTHER.

IT has been often said to congregationalists,—“You have no visible union:—your system is a rope of sand: it has no cohesion. Be your real or pretended excellencies what they may, as to superior purity of communion and strictness of discipline, here you fail. Your churches are all insulated from one another,—each within itself,—unassociated by any recognized or visible bond. In sessions, and presbyteries, and synods, and general assemblies, we see palpable union; many congregations—one church. The union is discernible in the system; which exhibits at once extension and concentration.”

Now, were it true that our system is incompatible with union, I at once admit that the objection would be a serious, and even a fatal one; fatal, because showing it to be destitute of an essential feature of resemblance to the constitution of the churches in the New Testament. There, there *is* union. The churches are distinct, yet one. And my object in this concluding chapter is, to explain the nature of that union, and the different ways in which it manifested itself; and to show the reader that the same kind of union exists among congregationalists still. Of late years, we have been giving practical demonstration in Scotland, England, and Ireland, that in

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the designation of "*congregational union*" there are no elements whatever of contradiction. It is, indeed, rather hard, that our good brethren should first twit us with our having no union, and then, when we show in practice that we have union, twit us again as in that union making an approach to themselves, and consequently, as finding it necessary to do in practice what we disown in principle. No well-informed and candid episcopalian or presbyterian will allege this, unless it be in the way of a good-humoured and harmless joke. The whole mystery is, that ours is a union of *fellowship* and *co-operation*, but not a union of *jurisdiction* or *authority*. Such we believe to have been the union subsisting among the apostolic churches; each independent of all the rest in whatever related to its internal government, but all connected with each other in one universal communion, by the bond of common principles and common interests. Of this kind of union we are fondly tenacious. So tenacious of it, indeed, have some congregationalists been, that they have even rejected the designation of *independents*, solely on the ground of its being apt to be misunderstood as if it disclaimed such union.—“When he (Robinson) asserts the independency of particular churches on

each other, he is undoubtedly to be understood to mean, that one church cannot be authoritatively controlled by another, and this is precisely the doctrine which has been firmly maintained by congregationalists since his time, although it has often been strangely misunderstood, or misrepresented.—The opinion which has been held to is, that particular churches are independent of each other, so far as this, that no other church, or body of churches, can

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enforce its opinions upon it by means of bonds, penalties, imprisonments, or bodily inflictions.* If one church can control another by means of its superior knowledge of the scriptures, by the illustrious excellence of its example, by moral means and not by force, there is no objection. This is the independency which was undoubtedly meant to be asserted by Robinson, and which is claimed by congregationalists at the present day,—and no other: for no churches more unanimously and zealously maintain that there is a heavenly bond of union, a golden chain, which binds together not only the churches of Christ, but the individual followers of Christ. In particular is it necessary, that the churches of the same communion, following the same discipline, and professing the same views as to the true doctrines of scripture, should hold intercourse, should meet together for worship, for mutual instruction, and for consultation, relative to the extension and peace of the city of Zion. And this is a principle so very important, and it is so necessary to avoid all mistake in relation to it, that the congregational churches, especially those of America, have ever decidedly rejected the name of *independents*, and have consented to be known by that only which is now commonly applied to them.”† This statement, as it respects the rejection of the

* May it be presumed that by “bonds” here, as distinguished from

the three other particulars, are to be understood, inclusively at least, authoritative and obligatory *decisions* and *enactments*? If not, something equivalent to these ought to have held a place.

† *Ratio Disciplinae*, or the Constitution of the Congregational Churches. By Thomas C. Uphara, Bowdoin College, Maine, U. S. 1829.

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name of independents, is too unqualified; nor should I conceive the reason for such rejection sufficient, when the import of the name is duly explained and understood, as implying simply the independency of the churches, in their government, of each other, and of all foreign authority. I give the quotation for the purpose merely of showing the value set upon union, and the extremely sensitive jealousy of any imputation of the want of it.

My present subject is, not the union in Christ of individual believers, a union comprehending all that are partakers of his grace on earth and of his glory in heaven; a union, of all with one another, springing from the union of each with Christ; a union, spiritual, indissoluble, eternal;—but the *union of churches*,—or the relation in which they are to be considered as standing to each other, and the ways in which that relation should be maintained and manifested.—And, in the first instance at least, it is the relation of such churches to each other as, from sameness of views respecting doctrine, government, and discipline, acknowledge each other under the appropriate designation of *SISTER CHURCHES*. What is the nature of this relation? What does it imply between the kindred societies? What is the reciprocal conduct to which it ought to lead? If we mean any thing definite by the designation at all, it must be that we regard ourselves as standing on the same footing, relatively to each other, and maintaining the same kind and degree of fellowship, as the churches of primitive or apostolical times. To every attentive reader of the New Testament there cannot fail to

present itself in it a union more extensive than that subsisting between the members of each separate

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christian society; even a union among all these societies, in their collective capacity;—all of them being linked together in one wide and harmonious brotherhood,—independent societies, but recognizing one another as sections of the same great family,—or (to use another scripture metaphor) separate flocks, each with its appropriate pastor or pastors,—but all the joint property, and the constant and equal care, of “the good Shepherd who gave his life for the sheep.”

To every mind that has been framed, under divine influence, on the principles of the gospel of peace and love, such a scene cannot but appear unspeakably delightful:—while, on the contrary, nothing can be more revolting, because nothing more unlike the bible, than the idea of churches all in a state of entire insulation from each other,—such an insulation, as that, instead of the lovely harmony of reciprocal confidence and friendly intercourse, each should appear like a separate fortress, surrounded by its walls and ramparts, with spies on the battlements, and sentinels at the gates, watching, with anxious jealousy, to prevent the entrance of intruders from the rest.—That would be a state of things as opposite to the condition of the apostolic churches as division is to unity, enmity to love, darkness to light.

1. In pointing out the ways in which the connexion of churches with one another may be maintained and manifested, in accordance with New Testament principles and examples, I begin with that which naturally first suggests itself, and which most directly belongs to the essential idea of union. It is—that A MEMBER OF ONE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES WAS VIRTUALLY A MEMBER OF THEM ALL; and that such,

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therefore, ought to be the case still with churches professedly constituted after their model. When any one, by direct recommendation or otherwise, was known to be a member of any particular church, he was freely admitted, on that knowledge, to the fellowship of the saints in other churches, wherever he came. We have exemplifications of this, to which the reader is requested to turn, in Acts xviii. 27. 2 Cor. viii. 23. Rom. xvi. 1. 3 John 9,10.—In the last of these cases, “the brethren” whom Diotrephes “would not receive,” had gone out from the church where the apostle John then was:—and the fault found with this “lover of pre-eminence” for *not* receiving them, makes it evident that in the apostle’s judgment the reception of them was an incumbent duty.

As this is a subject of great general importance, we may be allowed to lay down the following rules respecting it, as having the sanction of the word of God.

In the *first* place:—it is evidently proper, and for edification, that when members leave one church, to join the stated communion of another, they should be recommended *by the church* which they leave *to the church* which they are intending to join.—I say, by *the church*:—not only because this direct mutual recognition of each other in their collective capacity, serves to maintain and to strengthen the feeling of union among the churches; but also, because, although a pastor may be fairly warranted, when no evil has been reported of the character of a member, to take it for granted that there is nothing wrong,—yet cases may occur, in which particular circumstances have but recently happened, and, although

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known to some of the brethren, have not yet reached his ear, which, instead of an unqualified and affec-

tionate recommendation, might demand the immediate application of the rules of salutary discipline.

Secondly. Every church ought to be very cautious in receiving any who come to them *without such recommendation*. In neglecting this needful caution, they may be admitting unawares to their communion persons whom another church has, on just grounds, condemned, censured, and excluded; or persons who have come away from merited discipline during its progress, or, seeing it before them, have separated themselves for the purpose of avoiding it; or persons who, in their removal, have been actuated by motives, trifling, capricious, vindictive, or in other ways unchristian.—Withdrawing from a church of Christ is, like joining it, a serious and solemn act,—never to be done with lightness and precipitation: and therefore no such encouragement should be held out to it as that which arises from one church being the ready receptacle for the dissatisfied of another. It is true, no doubt, that a society as well as an individual may err; and that there may, therefore, be cases, in which sentence of exclusion has been hastily and harshly passed, and in which one church may be more than justified in affectionately remonstrating with another. Such cases, however, behave to be very strong ones; extraordinary exceptions to the general rule. And even in them, reason, justice, and brotherly confidence all require, that the first step taken should be a modest request for information from the church by which the sentence has been pronounced. The propriety of such precaution is obvious. It generally happens that such cases come

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abroad in a misrepresented and partial form:—and it would be equally foolish and culpable to lend an open ear, in the first instance, to the varnished tale of the separated party and his friends. The rule must, in all reason, be, that the church, rather than the individual, is to be presumed in the right. The

case must be palpable and flagrant indeed, that warrants any departure from this rule; for, were a general disposition shown to listen to the complaints of dissatisfied offenders, we should immediately have churches, and especially those in the same place or neighbourhood, erected into a kind of *courts of appeal* from one another's decisions; which would betray a want of mutual confidence, utterly incompatible with "keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." It is very plain, that mutual confidence in each other's discipline is the only ground on which the union of churches can be maintained.

Thirdly. Every church ought immediately to receive such as come to them recommended from a sister church, *unless they themselves know of any thing against them, on the ground of which they have reason to question their christian profession.*—It is obvious, that to receive any applicant when this exception has place, would be to sacrifice substance to form, and to act in opposition to the very purpose for which the recommendation itself is given and required. The exception proceeds on the supposition, that circumstances may be known by the church to which application is made for admission, which were unknown to the church by which the attestation of character was given. Be it remembered, however, that those to whom it *was* known, must bear the blame (no light one) of unchristian want of faith—

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fulness in never haying before divulged it; for having thus "suffered sin upon a brother," and allowed a church of Christ to retain, in communion and "without rebuke," one whom, had proper intimation been given them, it would have been their duty to deal with as an offending brother, and even, perhaps, to have put away from among them.

If one church, by want of caution in its admissions, and by neglect of discipline, has fallen into a state of corruption, it can never, surely, be the duty of other

churches to participate in such corruption by the indiscriminate reception of its members,—thus to defile themselves, because others have become defiled. For example: would one of the seven churches of Asia have been justified in receiving from another, how formally soever recommended, a member whom they knew to “hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans,” in the face of the Redeemer’s solemn declaration, “which thing I hate?” Would it have been the duty of the church in Philadelphia, in the state and character of which Jesus expresses so much complacency, to hold unrestricted intercourse with the church in Sardis, where there were but “a few names which had not defiled their garments,” and of which the general character was “a name to live, while dead?” Surely, no. The general rule, then, is not without exceptions. What general rule is? For one church to admit to communion “the uncircumcised and the unclean,” because they have been admitted by another, would only be sanctioning and augmenting the evil. Churches must not, any more than individuals, “be partakers in other men’s sins.” But churches, like individuals, may be highly censurable, guilty at once of unfaithfulness to their Lord and to

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their brethren, as well as to the souls of such as, in principle or in practice, are “departing from the faith,” if, when they are aware of the existence and tolerance of such Christ-dishonouring trespasses, they fail to remonstrate, in the spirit of christian love, with the church or the churches that are chargeable with them.

Such, then, is the great principle of fellowship, which, with the manifest exceptions specified, was acted upon by the New Testament churches, in the apostolic age. Individual believers, in every place, were “all one in Christ Jesus;” and the churches, as consisting of individual believers, were also one, so that the actual admission of any convert, on a credi-

ble profession of his faith, to the communion of one of the churches, was his virtual admission to the communion of all the rest. It was making him free of the whole community of the faithful. And this is the primary article in church-union. It ought to be so still, with all churches that profess to conform to the New Testament model.

II. There were, at the same time, other ways in which their union and communion was, "in the beginning of the gospel," maintained and manifested. We find them, for example, sending to one another, on suitable occasions, their *salutations*,—that is, their affectionate remembrances, and wishes of prosperity. Rom. xvi. 16; 1 Cor. xvi. 19, "The churches of Christ salute you." "The churches of Asia salute you:"—and in other places, under different forms. There can be no doubt that the apostle Paul sent these salutations by the concurrent desire of those churches in whose names they were expressed. They were not words of course,—the mere forms of empty

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courtesy and compliment. They were the sincere tokens of brotherly affection and christian unity.—It appears to have been Paul's practice, wherever he went, to impart to the churches tidings of the success of the gospel, and of the condition, both spiritual and temporal, of the disciples in the countries through which he had been travelling. Thus he at once expressed the fulness of his own loving heart, and cherished in the churches a generous interest in each other's concerns, as well as in the state and progress of the cause of Christ at large. We like to be remembered. The assurances of such remembrance and kind wishes between friends individually, are pleasing and animating. They knit heart to heart. They draw forth, confirm, and strengthen love. And the same is their effect between churches. Paul knew this. He delighted in every opportunity of expanding and enlivening christian affection; of

binding saints, and binding churches, together in love. It was for this purpose that he sent and carried individual and social salutations. In his visits and in his correspondence alike, he was the messenger of love.

III. But the churches of that early age went farther. They were not satisfied with embracing such opportunities of sending the assurances of their affection and best wishes as thus incidentally occurred. In particular instances, they dispatched messengers, even to considerable distances, for the express purpose of establishing new converts and newly-formed churches in their christian profession. How interesting and edifying the example of this recorded in Acts xi., on occasion of the remarkable success of the gospel in the Syrian Antioch “coming to the ears of

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the church in Jerusalem!” See verses 19–24. The account in these verses is, in no ordinary degree, delightful; not only as an exemplification of the power of the gospel in turning sinners to God, but as a specimen of that sympathy of mutual love by which the first churches were united,—and of the influence too of personal and social character—the character of ministers of the gospel and of churches—in contributing to the multiplication of the subjects of the christian community—the extension of the kingdom of Christ.

And why should not the same things be done still? Why should not pastors of churches be the bearers from church to church of salutations and assurances of love,—of interest in each other’s condition, and prayers for each other’s prosperity? And why should not churches, as such, feel, and be eager to express, the same interest, in the same way, in the state and prospects of infant societies of the saints; animating, by similar means, in its incipient stages, the blessed cause of the Redeemer? A society is a collection of individuals, and contains an aggregate of individual

feeling; so that the same thing which gives an impulse to the individual will give a similar impulse to the collective mind. When Paul, on his arrival at Appii Forum, found the deputation of brethren from the church in Rome awaiting him,—a deputation sent by that church, in token of their affectionate esteem and sympathy, especially in the circumstances of trial in which he then stood, as an ambassador of Christ in bonds,—“he thanked God, and took courage.” And what Paul individually felt, the church at Antioch felt collectively. Why, then, should not corresponding encouragement and

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impulse be given still to the affections and the active energies both of the servants of Christ and of his churches, by such well-timed expressions of interest in their prosperity and increase, whether in the form of congratulation or of condolence?

IV. But further still. The tokens of love between the early churches was even more substantially practical than in either the sending of salutations, or the dispatching of special messengers. There was the *fellowship of giving and receiving*. Two remarkable exemplifications of this are on record; the one relating to a single church,—the other to the churches of the Gentiles at large. For the first of the two, see Acts xi. 27–30. This is an interesting case, when taken in connexion with circumstances before adverted to. The church at Jerusalem, we have seen, had manifested an affectionate interest in the converts at Antioch:—and here, we have the church at Antioch eagerly embracing the occasion presented to them, of testifying their gratitude by a substantial requital of the kindness. There was a number of churches in Judea—Gal. i. 22; 1 Thes. ii. 14. To the elders of these respectively, it would appear, certain proportions of the sum collected were sent; that, in the coming season of scarcity, “distribution might be made to all, as every man

had need.” It was a social act; the act of *a church* to *churches*, as a token of unity and brotherly love.—The other instance referred to is of a more extensive description; the contribution which was collected by Paul from the Gentile churches generally, “for the poor saints who were at Jerusalem.” A full view of this case may be had, by comparing Rom. xv. 25–27, with 1 Cor. xvi. 1–4, and 2 Cor. chapters

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viii. and ii.: the whole of these two last-cited chapters having reference to the same collection.—The principal design of this eminent servant of Christ, in desiring this expression of affection from the Gentile churches to their Jewish brethren, was, “not only to supply the wants of the saints,” but to promote union; to root out any remaining prejudice from the minds of the latter towards the former; to do away every feeling, whether secret or avowed, of coolness, and jealousy, and distance; to enliven the reciprocal cordiality of both; and to quicken, throughout all the churches, the circulation of that love, which is the life-blood of the body of Christ,—supplying at once, to that body, its vital warmth, and its healthful and growth-promoting nutriment. The Gentile churches, it appears, appointed messengers, to accompany the apostle, with the fruits of their bounty, to Jerusalem. While this, agreeably to his own prudent suggestion, was designed for the protection of his own integrity from the malicious imputations of his numerous and inveterate enemies; it was calculated also to render the expression of regard from the Gentile to the Jewish christians the more marked and impressive.—And observe,—although the apostle beautifully, and not less justly than beautifully, represents the former as “*debtors*” to the latter, because it was through the instrumentality of the Jewish believers that the Gentiles had received their spiritual blessings,—blessings, which, from their nature and their inestimable preciousness,

could never be repaid in money; yet he at the same time affirms the obligation of affection and liberality to lie equally upon both:—"For I mean not that other men be eased and you burdened: but by an

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equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want; that there may be equality." 2 Cor. viii. 13-15.

This, therefore, is another way, in which, now as then, the churches ought to manifest their unity:—attending to, and mutually supplying one another's temporal necessities; necessities, which may be various in their kind and degree, and in the circumstances out of which they originate. Here is the voluntary principle; the only principle, in such matters, sanctioned by the statute-book of Christ's kingdom. It is the principle of the strong helping the weak. On churches, as well as on individuals, the duty is incumbent of "considering one another to provoke unto love and unto good works:"—and by the aids which, in the spirit of union, they are thus enabled to afford to one another, the apostle teaches us to regard them as at once manifesting the grace of God bestowed upon themselves, and causing thanksgivings to abound unto God from the grateful recipients of their bounty; as well as, at the same time, augmenting social love and the common prosperity. 2 Cor. viii. 1; ix. 12-14.

Such are some of the ways in which the New Testament churches manifested their union;—and in which the same union may and ought to be manifested still. And there are others. Provided there be no usurpation of authority,—no framing of yokes for the necks of the disciples,—and no departure from the principles and practices which the constitution of the churches, as laid down in the New Testament, renders imperative,—there is no such tying of the hands of either individuals or churches,

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as that they must do nothing for which there is not an explicit precept, or of which there is not a distinctly recorded example. There are two or three particulars which this observation is intended to introduce, and with a few remarks on each of which it is my purpose to close.

1. I plead, in the first place, for the freedom, between churches and their pastors, of *mutual consultation and advice*.—While we acknowledge no authority of one church over another,—and no authority of any representative court over churches within its jurisdiction;—yet if in the proceedings of any church, a case should occur which is felt to be one of great general interest, and, at the same time, from the peculiarity of its nature and circumstances, to be involved in some considerable measure of perplexing difficulty, so that a desire should be felt to ask the prayers and the counsel of any sister church or churches respecting it, or the advice of pastors in those churches, of long-standing and experience, and of approved intelligence and discretion; there is nothing in the New Testament,—nothing in the constitution and order of the churches there prescribed,—that interdicts them from following out that desire,—no principle that would suffer violation, no law on which there would be the slightest encroachment. On the contrary, the great general duty of rightly applying the laws of Christ in every case, involves the obligation to use every accessible-means for enabling them clearly to apprehend both their generic import and their special relations, so as to maintain them in due exercise, And to avoid every possible misapplication of them. Reference for advice and prayer, supposing it ever to be made,

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is an entirely different matter from appeal for authoritative interference and decision. We may, as

individuals or as associated bodies, solicit friendly counsel, and yet retain, unimpaired, our right to determine for ourselves. If any one allege that this amounts to an admission of imperfection and insufficiency in the laws of Christ, and that a constitution cannot be his which involves any such reflection on the infinite wisdom of the Lawgiver; the reply is obvious,—namely, that the occurrence of such cases, and the having recourse to such means for their satisfactory settlement, no more implies any imputation against the completeness of the rules given by Jesus for the direction of his churches, than the occurrence of cases in which one individual feels his need of counsel from another, implies an imputation of the same kind against the completeness of his rules for the direction of personal behaviour. It cannot surely be necessary to the appropriateness and perfection of a law, that there should exist no possibility of the occurrence of any case in which the wisdom of imperfect creatures can experience a doubt about its right and sanative application. The imperfection, in such a case, is not in the law, but in its administrators. And a church, in applying for advice, throws no reflection on the wisdom of the Supreme Legislator, but humbly acknowledges the imperfection of its own.

2. Allied to the free right of soliciting advice in difficulty, is *the right of one church to remonstrate with another that has embraced serious and soul-endangering error*. This, indeed, is not only a right, but a duty,—not competent only, but incumbent. Although independents disown the right of any one church to

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interfere authoritatively in the concerns of another,—as well as that of any number of churches, or any court of the representatives of such churches, to take upon them such authoritative interference; yet in the supposed predicament, when among churches of the same order, professing to walk in fellowship with

each other, one is discovered to have “departed from the faith,” whether in regard to truths of which the belief is essential to the soul’s salvation, or to articles of doctrine akin to these, and by which their divine integrity is endangered,—other churches—those more especially in the same neighbourhood, who are aware of the existing and spreading heresy, are called upon to deal, in faithfulness and love, with their erring brethren, remonstrating with them, calling them back from their heretical wanderings, and, by reasoning and persuasion, endeavouring to effect their restoration to the true faith; and, should they fail of success, to “shake off the dust of their feet against them,” and renounce their fellowship, till the Lord may himself be pleased to bring them to a right mind.—To require the production of an express precept or example for such dealing of church with church, is an unreasonable requisition. The necessity and the duty of it are involved in every precept, every example, and every principle, by which the obligation to purity of communion is enforced upon the churches. For if the fellowship of sister churches implies such universality of membership as has before been stated to be essential to it,—then

“Tua res agitur, paries cum proximus ardet;”*

—the members of that erring church are, by virtue

* “Look to your own house, when your neighbour’s burns.”

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of this comprehensive principle, members of your own; so that such dealing with it as has just been described becomes necessary for your own sake as well as for theirs. And, indeed, the principle of such dealing is identical with the principle of the enjoined dealing with an erring individual. If “a man that is heretical” is, “after the first and second admonition,” to be “rejected,”—surely, *a fortiori*, so ought a church that is heretical, after similar repeated admonitions, to be thrown off. The right

and the duty are manifestly, in both cases, the same. If there be any difference, it lies in this,—that a church has authority over its own individual member, while, on the principles of independency, it has none over another church. It is true. But the difference, in such a case, in regard to effect, is not great:—we *excommunicate* the heretical individual; we *withdraw from* the heretical church. But the withdrawing church, *by such withdrawal from fellowship with the other*, bears its testimony as impressively and effectually against important error, as if it had been clothed with all the authority of a presbytery or a synod.*

* Should the reader be desirous to see a practical exemplification of such dealing of churches with churches, he may be referred to a pamphlet entitled “The entire correspondence between the four Congregational Churches in Glasgow, and the Congregational Churches at Hamilton, Bellshill, Bridgeton, Cambuslang, and Ardrossan; on the doctrines of Election and the Influence of the Holy Spirit in Conversion.”

In his valuable Work—“A comparative view,” &c., formerly referred to, Dr. Adam Thomson represents this power of remonstrance with, and separation from, erring churches, as if it were altogether inconsistent with the independency of the churches on each other:—“When a number of churches,” says he, “are ready to admit to this solemn ordinance (the Lord’s supper) the members of any particular church

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3. The third thing I have to mention, is—*freedom of combined action for purposes of common interest*.—Such purposes are far more than conceivable. They can hardly fail to exist. There are concerns that affect the condition, or that engage the affections and desires, of—not one church and another merely—but all the churches alike. They may arise out of causes that are incidental and temporary, or out of such, as are indigenious and permanent. For the more successful prosecution of them, the union of counsels, contributions, and active energies, may be requisite.—Now for such cases, there is perfect freedom of voluntary combination and voluntary effort. There is nothing—nothing whatever—in the princi-

ples of congregational independency, that is in the least degree affected by the fullest use of this liberty.

in the district, do they not recognize it as a sister church? But if they should find at length that dangerous heresy, or gross immorality, had crept into it, would they not very properly refuse any longer to hold fellowship with the members of that church? Would they not thus implicitly pass sentence of condemnation on it, and thus show that the idea of the independency of churches on each other was, after all, visionary and absurd?" pages 262, 263.—But would it not be a fairer view of the case to say, that while the general principle, and the practice founded upon it, of receiving each other's members to fellowship, is the manifestation of the union of the churches,—the right of each to decline such free admission of the members of another into which heresy or immorality has crept, and the following out of that right in practice, is a manifestation of their *independency*? *Exceptio firmat regulam*. The general rule is union, and the admission of each other's members. The exception is just in such a case as Dr. T. supposes. But the very exception, instead of showing the independency of the churches of one another to be "visionary and absurd," is no more than the legitimate exercise, and practical exhibition, of the very principle of that independency:—each church judging for itself whom it should admit to its fellowship,—what churches, as well as what individuals. The union and the exception are perfectly compatible.

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Where all is voluntary,—where there is nothing of the nature of authority,—no decreeing and ordaining of what the churches, as such, must do, or abstain from doing,—no interference with scriptural church-rule,—there is full scope for combined zeal. In regard to such union and co-operation as this, there is no occasion why the most rigid and uncompromising independent should startle, even at the word *delegation* itself. I am aware it is to such an obnoxious word; and pastors and others are not a whit the worse for a little of this jealousy amongst the members of churches, to keep all right,—to preserve principle from violation. But the jealousy may become extreme and morbid. The evil to which Congregationalism is opposed is, not *delegation*, but *authoritative delegation*. If the delegation relates to objects that are altogether unconnected with the *government* of the churches,—involving no interference with their respective admissions of members, exercise of discipline, or in general the conduct of

their own affairs, whether spiritual or temporal;—if it regards only the prosecution of such common ends—as the local or the more extensive, the home or the foreign, propagation of the gospel,—the efficient aid of churches that are weak in numbers and in secular resources,—and, in a country laden with the incubus of an Establishment, the protection of their rights and privileges as dissenters; we are not sensible of the slightest infringement, by such delegated combination, of any one principle of the strictest independency. District associations, formed on this principle, have, in many instances, been instrumental in the excitement of the churches to an augmented interest in the spiritual condition of the surrounding

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neighbourhood,—as well as to a stronger feeling of their own unity, and of a common solicitude for each other's prosperity:—and unions on a more extended scale, framed on the same principle, associating the churches in the joint expression of a common love, and the joint exercise of a common zeal, may be proportionally beneficial in their results,—both to the churches themselves and to the world. Such delegates might be regarded—(to use an apostolic designation, and to use it in a sense very closely analogous to that in which it was originally employed,) as “messengers of the churches”—2 Cor. viii. 23. What else are they? What were these messengers, nominated, in compliance with the apostle's desire, by their respective churches, for the execution of a special commission,—what were they but delegates? They were (the apostle says) “*chosen of the churches* to travel with us with this grace (this gift or benefaction) which is administered by us, to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind.” They were thus *delegated* on a special commission, connected with the common good. Why, then, may not the same thing be done still, for objects of common interest, whether more occasional or more

constant?—Without doubt, in this, as in every thing else, we ought to be on our guard against the danger of perversion and abuse. But, at the same time, the apprehension of such danger should not be permitted to reach a crisis so morbidly nervous, as to lay an unqualified interdict on the introduction of a principle in itself legitimate and salutary.

4. The last point on which I have a remark or two to offer, is,—*freedom of fellowship with other denominations.*—We live—happily live—in an age of growing

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liberality of sentiment and expansion of love among fellow-christians. I do not add the seemingly restrictive clause—*holding evangelical principles*; because I regard it as a mere tautology,—“holding evangelical principles” being the same thing with *believing the gospel*, and believing the gospel being essential to any man’s being a *christian*. Fellow-christians are subdivided into various sections, or denominations. And when I speak of a growing liberality of views and feelings amongst them, I would be understood as referring to them, not individually in the intercourse and intimacies of private life,—but collectively, or denominationally. I rejoice in this. My delight in it made me a member of the EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE; which, whatever diversity of opinion may exist respecting its constitution and objects, none will deny to be one of the great manifestations in our age. of the growing tendency to christian union.—Other striking exemplifications of the same tendency we have also in our day been privileged to witness. Different bodies of christians in Scotland have, at remoter and more recent dates,—“like kindred drops, been blended into one:” and the time has gone by, when, in one or more of these bodies at least, it would have been, looked upon as a species of practical heresy for any one so much as to hear a sermon, how sound soever in doctrine, and how glorifying soever to Christ, if preached by a minister whose “uncir-

cumcised lips” could not frame themselves to the *Shibboleth* or the *Sibboleth* of the denomination! God-speed to this spreading fraternization! A spirit of catholicity is perfectly compatible with a spirit of conscientiousness. The whole secret of the compatibility lies in this,—that, while conscious of our own

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conscientiousness, and regarding ourselves as entitled to have it believed, we cherish such an amount of charity as to concede to others the claim which we assert for ourselves,—simply giving them credit for the same conscientiousness in differing from us, of which we are sensible in differing from them. That is all. And is it any more than fair play?

On this subject of the fellowship of churches, it has long been a favourite sentiment with me, that, so far as *principle* is concerned, the communion of *churches* with each other and the communion of *individual christians* with each other, are in the same category,—that they rest on a common ground. The mutual conviction and acknowledgment of a common Christianity, is the one and essential requisite to both. An independent gives the right hand of fellowship to an episcopalian or a presbyterian, because he believes him to be a *fellow-christian*. All, then, that is wanting to the same fellowship between churches is neither more nor less than this,—the presbyterian church having the conviction respecting the independent church, and the independent church respecting the presbyterian church, that each, respectively, is *a church of such fellow-christians*. And the same may be said of an episcopalian church, in relation to both the presbyterian and independent. If the principles of christian communion and christian discipline are understood, adopted, and acted upon in each,—(those who in each, according to their respective constitutions, have the official charge being godly and conscientious men,)—no independent, unless he be a thorough bigot, will question the possibility of

a congregation of episcopalians or presbyterians
being a congregation of genuine fellow-believers;

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nor will any episcopalian, or any presbyterian, but one equally bigotted, doubt this possibility, as to either of the two systems of polity different from his own.—There is but one case of exception. I am sorry to make it. But make it I must. When I speak of episcopacy and presbyterianism, I speak of them simply as forms of church government,—not as *nationally established*. I make this exception, because it does not appear to me to be within the limits of the possible, that a *national* church should be a *pure* church. I can fancy, indeed, a single congregation, under a presbyterian establishment, where the minister and the session understand the nature of christian communion, and, by the indifference of those whom they decline to receive, are allowed to carry out consistently its principles, in which a scriptural measure of separation from the world may be attainable:—but it is, I fear, the result of sufferance alone,—and a state of things, on this very account, necessarily rare; being one which any man in a parish, if a nominal christian and free of what is termed church scandal, though giving no satisfactory evidence of his being “born of the Spirit” and a child of God, may, even by law, force into disturbance. In the chapter on the materials of christian churches, we have seen how Dr. M’Neile expresses himself respecting the various established churches in this and other countries; and expresses himself, not with regret and reprehension, but with approval and gloriation. If “that witness be true,”—if it be even an approximation to truth,—no one can be surprised that, holding the principles avowed and defended in that chapter, I should except from the description of intercommunion of which I am at present speaking, all national

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churches,—not as episcopalian or as presbyterian, but as national;—admitting indeed to fellowship individual fellow-Christians who, under the influence of what we deem mistaken views, may be members of such churches, but keeping aloof from all amalgamation with the system, and from all that might give countenance to it, as a system essentially and necessarily corrupt.—With this exception, I see my way clearly. The principle of church-intercommunion is simple and plain. It is, as I have just said, a favourite one with me. It would delight my very heart to see it adopted and brought into full practice among the churches of various denominations on earth, ere I take my departure for the church of one DENOMINATION in heaven. It is gaining ground, and will gain it. Christians are more and more feeling the happiness of expanding love and enlarging union, and will not long be *die* to keep separate. The elective attraction of the common faith, and of the Name of the common Saviour, will force them, by a sweet necessity, together;—so that, although “the government and discipline of the church may necessarily remain denominational, there will not only be the acknowledgment of a common discipleship and the cultivation of the christian affections and a catholic spirit by private intercourse, but this acknowledgment and this spirit will be carried out into more open and public manifestation by free communion among them all.” And, wishing as I do to forward this tendency to union,—placing it, at the same time, so far as this intercommunion of *churches* is concerned, on its only legitimate—its only possible—basis, I may be allowed the liberty of making the conclusion of one work the conclusion of another,—

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the close of an Essay the close of a volume.—“If it be so, that the more of the *christian* I see in my

fellow-professor of the truth, considered *individually*, the more pleasure must I feel in taking part with him in any or in all of the acts and exercises of christian fellowship, whether that individual be an episcopalian, a presbyterian, or an independent;—then, upon the same principle, the greater the amount of *true Christianity* I see in any professedly christian society, the greater must be my satisfaction and enjoyment in holding fellowship with that Society *collectively*,—whether it be episcopalian, presbyterian, or independent. As my freedom and comfort would be greater in the fellowship of the more spiritual, devout, and consistent episcopalian or presbyterian, than in that of the less spiritual, devout, and consistent congregationalist,—so, should my freedom and comfort be the greatest in that christian community where there was the largest aggregate of the spirituality, the devotion, the consistency. I should take my place at the Lord's table with far more pleasure,—with feelings far more in harmony with the nature of the observance,—amongst a congregation of episcopalians or presbyterians in whose Christianity generally I had reason to confide, than with a church of independents, respecting any considerable number of whom I had reason to stand in doubt.—As I delight, then, in the *communion of christians*—simply as such—individually, I long for the collective *communion of churches*. If a difference as to church-government does not prevent the fellowship of the individuals, there seems no reason why it should prevent the fellowship of the churches. There is nothing whatever

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necessary to the gratification of this longing (a longing in which I believe I have the sympathy of multitudes of my fellow-christians of other denominations) but the adoption and the reduction to practice of a common principle on the subject of church-fellowship. The principle is a very simple

one. It is—that in order to any one's being received and retained as a member of a christian church, he, or she, should give satisfactory evidence of being a true christian,—a believer in Christ,—a child of God; or, more shortly, that a *christian church* should be, what its name imports, a *church of christians*. If it be but granted, in the bible sense of the terms, that *Christianity* is a necessary qualification for communion,—and if this principle be so acted upon by the different denominations of christians, as that a certificate of membership may be held as a sufficient certificate of Christianity, or of a consistent christian profession,—the thing is done. There might then be a universality of occasional intercommunion,—the testimonial of an independent church satisfying the episcopalian or presbyterian, and that of the episcopalian or presbyterian the independent. There is no need for more; and less, it is obvious, will not do.—O for the time when, by all christian denominations, true Christianity *will* be required as a term of communion,—and when too it will be the only term that *is* required!

“It will be obvious to the reader,—and with the observation I must come to a close,—that in this there is nothing in the remotest degree inconsistent with *conscientiousness*, or involving the slightest compromise of principle. I am not at all arguing for the breaking up of the distinctions between episcopalians,

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presbyterians, and independents, or for their amalgamation into one body. It is quite manifest, that, retaining respectively their conscientiousness, this can never be. The systems cannot, from their very nature, be amalgamated. While there are conscientious episcopalians and presbyterians, there must be an *episcopalian* and a *presbyterian denomination*; and while there are conscientious independents, there must be an *independent denomination*; it being impossible that the same church can be governed upon all

the three models. Let them remain as they are,—though neither of them deaf to argument, but each with an open ear and an open mind to the reasonings of the other. Let each manage their own churches in their own way. But let them, at the same time, so act upon the principle of communion just laid down, as that, confiding in each other's practical attention to that principle, they may 'receive one another, as Christ hath received them all, to the glory of God.' The more thoroughly *christianised* each church becomes, the more efficient will it be on the surrounding world, both by the influence of example and by the efforts of zeal. * * * * It is not *number* that is strength,—it is *union*,—union in principle,—union in affection,—and consequent union in prayer, in contribution, and in effort. And then, in proportion as such churches, though denominationally differing, are in spirit one;—in proportion as, while sensible of the divellent forces that would keep them asunder, they feel the superior and overpowering force of the 'one faith' that draws and binds them together;—in proportion as they thus exemplify to the world this one faith 'working by love;'—in proportion as they make common cause in

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all that they hold in common and value in common, and so present a united front to the common enemy, —striving, by combined exertion, in 'the good fight of faith,'—or by such exertions as, although distinct, are yet all carried on in the same spirit, and bearing on the same end, 'Ephraim neither envying Judah, nor Judah vexing Ephraim,'—and the one end to bring an outcast world into subjection to Christ:—in proportion as these desirable objects are realized, may we anticipate the near arrival of that happy period in the world's history,—predicted and promised in the divine word,—when 'men shall be blessed in Jesus, and all nations shall call him blessed,'—when there shall be 'one Lord, and his

name one,'—when the divine assurance, confirmed by the divine oath, shall be verified—'AS SURELY AS I LIVE, ALL THE EARTH SHALL BE FILLED WITH THE GLORY OF THE LORD!'"*★

* Num. xiv. 21.—"Essays on Christian Union"—Essay VI., pp. 344-348. I have made the sentiment more comprehensive by the insertion of *episcopalian* along with *presbyterian*. There is a difficulty, however, in the one case, in regard to fellowship, at the table of the Lord, that does not exist in the other. According to *episcopalian* practice, there cannot properly be said to be either *table of the Lord*, or *christian* communion; each participant of the bread and the wine receiving them from the hands of the officiating minister, in a kneeling posture, at the altar; thus, it may be, having individual communion with his Lord, but none, visibly at least, with his brethren. Now a conscientious *presbyterian* or *independent* might, without incurring the charge of bigotry, scruple at himself conforming to practices deemed by him so unscriptural, and so inconsistent with some of the leading designs of the ordinance, while yet, with open arms, he might welcome to fellowship, at the joint communion table, any fellow-believer holding *episcopalian* views, who felt himself at liberty to take his place there. [The omitted sentences in the extract contain a sentiment and figure which have occurred before.]