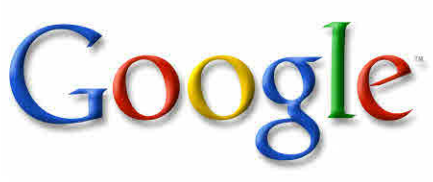

Congregatio... Church polity, the first two books of A manual of ...

Robert William Dale

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH POLITY.

BEING THE FIRST TWO BOOKS OF A MANUAL OF CONGREGATIONAL PRINCIPLES.

BY

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R. W. DALE,

MALVERN,
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INTRODUCTORY.

I.

At a time when Christendom is agitated by controversies reaching to the very roots of the Christian Faith, and when all Churches are struggling with practical duties which are beyond their strength, questions of ecclesiastical polity may appear to have no claim to consideration.

We have to assert the authority and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ against the assaults of speculative unbelief. We have to preach the Gospel to those who have never heard it. We have to lessen the miseries as well as the sins of mankind. There are hundreds of millions of heathen men to whom the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ is altogether unknown; there are vast numbers of our own countrymen who have drifted beyond the reach of all the ordinary institutions of Christian instruction and worship; there are the hungry to be fed and the naked to be clothed; there are miserable homes to be made decent and healthy; there are low conceptions of morality in domestic, commercial, and public life which the Church ought to elevate; there is selfishness in the Church itself which ought to be inspired with the charity of Christ, indolence which ought to be set on fire by the zeal of Christ for the honour of God and the righteousness and happiness of mankind. It may be thought that when these great tasks are done it will be time enough to consider

whether Episcopacy, Presbyterianism, or Congregationalism is the best form of church polity.

But, meantime, churches actually exist, and they cannot exist without some form of organisation. We are surrounded by Churches differing very widely from each other in the principles of their polity; and we have to elect the Church with which we will become associated. New Churches are being founded, and it is necessary to determine how they shall be governed. The question—What form of Church polity is most favourable to the maintenance of a firm and intelligent faith in Christ among the members of the Church, to the increase of their knowledge of Christian truth and duty; to the energy and joy of their spiritual life; to their mutual affection as brothers and sisters in the household of God; to the development of their Christian morality; to the discipline and effective use of whatever powers they possess for the service of God and of mankind?—this is a question which cannot be evaded or postponed.

The subject of ecclesiastical polity is of grave importance in relation both to the controversy with unbelief and to the practical work of the Church. For the ultimate triumph of the Christian Faith depends far less upon the genius and the learning with which it is defended by Christian apologists than upon the nobleness with which it is illustrated in the lives of Christian people. It is also true that the energy of the work of the Church will be determined by the extent to which Christian people are penetrated with the thought and animated with the spirit of Christ.

But it may be said that no particular form of church government is more favourable than another to the perfect development of the Christian life; that a beautiful sanctity, a spiritual

worship, a noble morality, a large and profound knowledge of Christian truth, efficiency and zeal in all works of Faith and Charity, may exist in connection with the most dissimilar types of ecclesiastical organisation. It may be maintained, however, with equal force, that nations have been strong and prosperous with the most dissimilar political institutions. Waste lands have been reclaimed and brought under cultivation, forests cleared, roads made, bridges built, under the most despotic governments as well as by nations enjoying political freedom. Absolute monarchies as well as republics have had splendid capitals, powerful fleets, victorious armies; they have had wealthy merchants, judges of stainless integrity, statesmen of great genius; they have had scholars, artists, and poets. Under every kind of political organisation a race with noble qualities in its blood may exhibit courage, industry, patriotism, and may achieve national greatness. And yet we believe that, other things being equal, a nation will reach the highest form of national life under free institutions; and that the responsibilities which rest upon the citizens of a free municipality and upon the people of a free State, discipline some of the most robust and generous virtues. When political rights have been enjoyed so long, and have become so secure, that only the duties associated with them are remembered, they encourage in the whole community an interest in public affairs, a zeal for the public good, a readiness to undertake the most laborious tasks in the public service, which are strong guarantees of the security of the State, and noble elements in the life of the people. Political institutions are at once an expression and a discipline of the character of nations; ecclesiastical institutions are at once an expression and a discipline of the character of churches.

The connection between organisation and life is never accidental or arbitrary.

It is the chief purpose of this Manual to state the principles of the Congregational polity, and to show that they determined the organisation of the apostolic churches, and are intimately related to some of the greatest truths and facts of the Christian Faith.

II.

The New Testament does not contain any law declaring that a particular scheme of church government is of universal and permanent obligation. In the directions which Christ gave for the treatment of an offending brother,* He assumed the existence of a Christian Assembly, or Church; but nothing is said about the manner in which this Assembly or Church is to be organised.

In the Acts of the Apostles, and in the apostolic epistles, it is possible to discover the general outlines of the organisation of the first churches; but there is no precept by which this organisation is enforced on the churches of all countries and of all times.

A certain presumption is created in favour of Congregational principles when it is shown that the polity of the apostolic churches was Congregational; but the presumption falls far short of a proof that the Congregational polity is of permanent Divine authority. That the apostolic churches were Congregational does not even amount to a proof that Congregationalism is permanently expedient. Between a form of church government and those great truths concern-

* Matt. xviii. 15—17.

ing Christ and the Christian redemption which form the chief part of the substance of the New Testament there is an obvious difference. What is true once is true for ever. That the Lord Jesus Christ was the Son of God, that He died for the remission of sins, that He rose from the dead, and received "all authority . . . in heaven and on earth," must have been just as true in the second century as in the first, and in the third century as in the second. But a form of church government which was the best possible organisation for the Church of the first century may, perhaps, have been the worst possible organisation for the Church of the third.

A political constitution which is admirably fitted to secure the ends of civil society when a nation has a small population inhabiting a small territory may be altogether unsuitable to a great empire with many millions of subjects and extending over half a continent. As Burke says, when the conditions of national life have greatly changed, "the beaten path is the very reverse of the safe road." Since the times of the apostles immense changes have taken place in the Church itself, and in its relations to society. Its numbers have increased. In Europe and America its members are not converts from Paganism or Judaism, but are the descendants of ancestors who have been nominally Christian for more than a thousand years. It has wealth and learning. Instead of suffering persecution, it is able to exert great political power. Statesmen profess the Christian faith, and ministers of the Church are the councillors of kings. It may be alleged that, with these great changes in the resources and position of the Church, great changes must have become necessary in its organisation; and that if

the same general laws that affect the polity of nations affect the polity of churches, to prove that the churches of Corinth and Ephesus were Congregational is only to create a presumption against adopting or maintaining the Congregational polity in London and New York.

The apostolic churches consisted of those, and of those only, who made a personal profession of their faith in Christ, and who, on the ground of this profession, were received into the Christian assembly; they are therefore addressed in the apostolic epistles as "faithful brethren," and as "saints in Christ Jesus." But it may be said that in those early days the Church necessarily consisted of such persons, and only of such persons. For a man to separate himself from the Jewish synagogue or to break with Paganism and to become a Christian, some force of personal conviction was necessary. In apostolic times the people outside the Church were not nominal Christians, but Jews and Pagans. It may therefore be argued that the precedent of the primitive churches gives no sanction to the endeavour of Congregationalists to limit church membership to those who, in response to their personal faith in Christ, have received the pardon of sin and the gift of eternal life.

The apostolic churches exercised discipline on their members, and excluded from membership those who were guilty of flagrant immorality. But it may be contended that the necessity for discipline arose from circumstances which do not exist in a country like our own. The Christian churches of the first age were surrounded by a hostile civil society; their power as witnesses to a higher religious faith and a purer morality would have been diminished if they had not marked with the severest disapproval church members

who were guilty of flagrant moral offences. And, further, the relations of church members to each other were so intimate that it was impossible to tolerate the presence of such persons in the Christian assemblies.

Every Christian church in apostolic times was independent of every other church, and governed itself without the interference of any external ecclesiastical authority. But it may be alleged that this was only because the number of Christians in each city was so small that it was possible for all of them to meet together for worship and for the transaction of church business, and because the physical difficulties which prevented free and frequent intercourse between Christian societies in cities remote from each other had not yet been overcome by the strong desire to realise in their church life their unity in Christ. Meanwhile, the influence of the apostles and of men like Timothy and Titus held the scattered churches together, and answered the purposes which were secured in a later generation by synods and diocesan bishops.

It may be even contended that, though it was according to the will of Christ that the apostles gathered their early converts into churches, we have no right to suppose that societies of this kind were intended to be permanent. Churches may have been necessary when the Christian Faith was maintaining a hard struggle for existence, when those who held it required all the support which they could derive from the sense of comradeship and from close and constant intercourse with each other; but in a country like this, in which the Christian Faith has been triumphant for centuries, no such combative organisations are necessary. When there was no Christian literature in existence, it was imperative that those who

believed the Christian Gospel should receive constant oral instruction in the facts, the truths, and the ethics of the new Faith; this involved frequent meetings; and frequent meetings were not possible without organisation. But the rise of a Christian literature has made oral teaching unnecessary.

To those who contend that the Episcopacy of the Romish Church and the Anglican Church has apostolic authority it is a sufficient answer to show that the apostolic churches were not Episcopal. To those who claim apostolic authority for Presbyterianism it is a sufficient answer to show that the apostolic churches were not Presbyterian. But the argument on behalf of Congregationalism drawn from the polity of the apostolic churches may be met by the reply that there is nothing in the New Testament to make this polity of permanent obligation; and that the organisation of churches, like the political constitutions of nations, must change with the changes in their life and circumstances.

It is not enough to prove that the apostolic churches were Congregational; it is necessary to prove that Congregational principles are permanently rooted in the central truths of the Christian revelation, and that the Congregational polity is at once the highest and the most natural organisation of the life of the Christian Church.

BOOK I.

The Principles of the Congregational Polity.

CHAPTER I.

PRINCIPLE I.—IT IS THE WILL OF CHRIST THAT ALL THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN HIM SHOULD BE ORGANISED INTO CHURCHES.

THE Christian churches of apostolic times were societies of persons professing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of men. These societies met at appointed times to offer prayer, to sing hymns, and to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The members of each church received instruction in Christian truth and Christian duty from those who were "apt to teach;" they were reminded in times of trouble of the great consolations and hopes of those who are "in Christ;" and they were exhorted to be loyal to Christ and to keep all His Commandments. A church was the natural centre and support of efforts for making the Christian Gospel known in its immediate neighbourhood. In some cases churches assisted evangelistic work in distant countries.

It is the common belief of Congregationalists—

I. That these societies were founded by the apostles in Christ's name and by His authority, and that all converts to the Christian faith were required to belong to them; and

II. That these societies were intended by Christ to be permanent, and that now, as in apostolic times, Christian men are required to be members of Christian churches.

If these two propositions can be maintained, the first principle of the Congregational polity, that *it is the will of Christ that all those who believe in Him should be organised into churches*, will be demonstrated.

I.

That the apostolic churches were organised in obedience to the will of Christ is proved by the following considerations:—

(I.) *Our Lord declared that He Himself is present in church assemblies, and that He confirms their decisions.* This declaration implies that churches were formed by His authority.

He knew that there would be causes of quarrel among those who received His Gospel. One Christian man would be guilty of offences against another. He directs that the man who has received an offence shall first go alone to the offender and endeavour to secure redress and reconciliation: "If thy brother sin against thee, go, shew him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother" (Matt. xviii. 15). But this private appeal may fail: "If he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established" (Matt. xviii. 16). Even this may fail. What is to be done next? "If he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church (*or* congregation): and if he refuse to hear the church (*or* congregation) also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile or the publican" (Matt. xviii. 17). These directions imply the existence of a Christian society which can meet for the purpose of adjusting differences between its members. No such function can be discharged without organisation. It must be known who are members of the society, and who, therefore, are under an obligation to take

part in its decisions. Some authority is necessary to convene a meeting and to control its proceedings. Persons who do not submit to the will of the society are to be separated from it; and it is implied that separation carries with it loss and penalty.

And the decisions of an organised church are sustained and confirmed by Christ's own presence in its meetings: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. xviii. 20). These words, though legitimately extended to the most informal and accidental assembly of Christian people gathered together in the name of Christ, were intended to illustrate and explain the authority with which Christ invested the action of an organised Christian church.

The offending brother who refuses to submit to the decision of the church is to be excluded from its communion: "let him be unto thee as the Gentile or the publican." The exclusion involves something more than separation from a visible human society. "Verily I say unto you, What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 18—20). To bind and to loose is to exercise the authority which belongs to regularly constituted governments; and our Lord declares that the acts of the church on earth in binding and loosing are confirmed in heaven. The ground on which He rests the supernatural force which sustains the decisions of Christian brethren when united in a church is this:—"For where two or three are gathered together in My name there am I in the midst of them." Whenever a church meets in Christ's name Christ Himself is present in the assembly; its decisions are His as well as theirs; its decisions are confirmed by His authority.

(11.) *The special promise of Christ to united prayer, which rests on the same ground as the declaration of the authority which*

belongs to the decisions of the church in relation to questions of discipline, gives His sanction to the organisation of Christian churches for purposes of worship. "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. xviii. 19, 20). Christ is speaking of a Christian assembly: it may be a very small one; only "two or three" may be "gathered together" in His name. But as the decisions of such an assembly are confirmed in heaven, its prayers are also certain to be heard. It is a Divine society, for He Himself is present when it meets either for discipline or for prayer. Its prayers are His, as its decisions on questions of discipline are His. Christ has thus given the most impressive sanction to the organisation of Christian societies for the purposes of prayer and worship.*

(III.) *The institution of the Lord's Supper is a proof that our Lord intended that those who believe in Him should be formed into Christian societies.* He meant His friends to hold together after He had left them. They were not to live an isolated life, but were to meet to eat bread and to drink wine in remembrance of Him. We learn from Paul's first epistle to the church at Corinth (chap. xi. 23—26) that this service was

* It is not denied that the promise, "if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask," justifies exceptional confidence in the certainty of obtaining answers to all prayers in which Christian men unite, whether they are the prayers of a regularly constituted church or not. But it is of great significance (1) that the promise was given in immediate connection with our Lord's declaration of the supernatural force attaching to church decisions; (2) that the ground of the promise is Christ's presence in an assembly of Christians—"Where two or three are *gathered together* in My name, there am I in the midst of them. The promise is a strong discouragement and condemnation of that un-Christian temper which leads men to live an isolated Christian life, for it attaches supreme efficacy to prayer when it is offered in fellowship with other Christian people.

not to be celebrated by the apostles only, or only by those who had been the personal friends of Christ during His earthly ministry, but by all converts to the Christian Faith.

But those who meet regularly as Christian men to celebrate the Lord's Supper confess their common faith in Christ; they implicitly recognise their union with Him and with each other; they constitute a Christian church.

The organisation of such an assembly may be very imperfect; it may have no exact regulations as to who shall be present and take part in the service; it may keep no register of members; it may appoint no officers; many of the ends for which churches exist may not be attained; but, if the service is to be held regularly, some rudimentary organisation is necessary.

Churches must be founded if those who believe in Christ are to meet regularly to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

(IV.) *The apostles founded churches, and it may be regarded as certain that for the great acts of their ministry they had the authority of Christ.* They did not believe that the Christian life of their converts would reach the perfection of its power and blessedness in religious solitude, or that it was sufficient for a man to trust in Christ for eternal redemption and to regulate his personal conduct by the will of Christ. They required the outward acknowledgment of the authority of Christ as well as inward loyalty to Him (Rom. x. 10). They insisted on baptism as well as on faith (Acts ii. 38). They gathered their converts into organised societies. For the defence of those who had received the Christian Faith against great moral and spiritual perils they relied largely on the vigilance of the ministers of the churches (Acts xx. 28—35). Those who had believed in Christ were taught of God, but this did not render unnecessary the instruction of the recognised "teachers" of the churches (1 Tim. v. 17; Eph. v. 11). The members of the churches were required to care for each other; the strong were to support the weak; the courageous

were to encourage the faint-hearted; and those who were living a disorderly, idle, fanatical life were to be admonished by their wiser and more sober brethren (1 Thess. v. 14).*

The apostles were charged by Christ Himself with the great work of making known to mankind the blessings and the laws of His Kingdom, and they believed that the Divine method for the protection and development of the Christian life required that those who professed faith in Christ should be gathered into Christian societies. On a point of such capital importance as this it is inconceivable that they could have mistaken the mind of Christ.

(V.) *In organising churches with regularly constituted officers the apostles received the sanction of the risen and glorified Christ.* "He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, *pastors and teachers;* for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. iv. 11, 12). Apostles had an immediate call from Christ, and were commissioned to make known the Gospel to all nations; they were the founders, not the officers, of churches. Prophets were men who, under the special illumination of the Holy Spirit, had a keen insight into the things of God; they exercised their ministry in Christian assemblies; but—as prophets—they were not church officers. Evangelists were, in our modern phrase, missionaries. But pastors and teachers were then, as now, the ministers of particular churches. There were teachers who were not pastors, but when Paul wrote his later epistles "all pastors were required to be 'apt to teach.' As pastors, they had a real but undefined authority over the church; they had control over the conduct of worship; they were exceptionally responsible both for the purity of the faith of the church and the purity of its morals.

* I agree with Meyer that in 1 Thess. v. 14 Paul is not addressing the officers of the church specially, but the members generally.

They discharged their principal pastoral duties by the instruction they gave to the church in its ordinary assemblies; and, as this function of teaching was so important a part of their ministry, Paul describes them as 'pastors and teachers,' giving a double title to the same office."*

(VI.) *Through the ministers of organised churches, Christ conferred the highest spiritual blessings.* "Pastors and teachers," as well as apostles, prophets, and evangelists, were given "for the perfecting of the saints," "unto the building up of the body of Christ." Their work was to be consummated when those to whom they ministered reached the same "faith" in "the Son of God," and the same full and sure "knowledge" of Him; when they touched the ideal maturity of the Christian life, and every one of them became a "full-grown man," and in the complete development of Christian righteousness attained "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. iv. 12—14). If a Christian man remained outside the Church, he incurred great loss and great guilt; for through the ministers of the Church Christ disciplined, developed, and perfected Christian life and character.

(VII.) *The organisation into churches of those who believed in Christ received the special sanction of the Spirit of Christ.* Speaking to the ministers of the church at Ephesus, Paul said: "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in the which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops, to feed the Church of God, which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts xx. 28). Since men were made "bishops" of churches by the Holy Ghost, it must have been the will of Christ that churches should be organised.

From the preceding considerations it follows that it was

* "Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians," by R. W. Dale, pp. 278, 279.

the will of Christ, in apostolic times, that all who acknowledged His authority should be associated with Christian churches. The Christian church was an institution founded by the authority of Christ for the discipline and development of the Christian life. Its institutions were means of grace.

II.

It may be conceded that the churches of apostolic times were founded under the authority of Christ, and that it was the duty of all converts to the Christian Faith to belong to them; but it may be alleged that these societies were not intended to be permanent, and that the reasons for founding and maintaining them have long disappeared.

It rests upon those who take this position to show that *all* the reasons for organising Christian churches in apostolic times were accidental and temporary. It is not enough, for instance, to say that, when those who professed the Christian Faith were surrounded by a hostile and Pagan society, it was expedient to place them under the shelter of Christian churches, and that churches are now useless, since the necessity for this shelter has ceased. For Christian churches may have had other ends than the protection of their members against apostasy and against the gross moral corruptions of Paganism. Churches were founded by the authority of Christ; they must not be suffered to fall into decay unless it can be shown that all the reasons for which He founded them have passed away. The burden of proof lies upon those who contend that the institution was a temporary expedient to answer temporary purposes.

But decisive reasons can be alleged for believing that it is still the will of Christ that His people should be organised into churches.

(I.) *There is nothing in the New Testament to suggest that Christian churches were regarded as temporary institutions in-*

tended to meet the temporary exigencies of the first Christian age. Since there is clear evidence that it was Christ's will that those who believed in Him in apostolic times should be formed into churches for purposes of Christian instruction, worship, and fellowship, there is the strongest presumption, in the absence of any intimation to the contrary effect, that these institutions were intended by Him to be permanent.

(II.) *There is nothing in the New Testament to suggest that the Lord's Supper was intended to be a temporary institution.* There is nothing in the nature of the service to suggest it. There is nothing in the objects of the service to suggest it. The Apostle Paul declares that when the friends and disciples of Christ eat the bread and drink the cup they "proclaim the Lord's death till He come." The memorial service is to last until the appearance of our Lord in glory. But it has been already shown (p. 12) that wherever Christian people meet regularly to celebrate the Lord's Supper there is at least an informal Christian society; and such meetings cannot be maintained long without giving to the society a more or less definite organisation. But a society of Christian men organised for the celebration of the Lord's Supper is an organised Christian church.

(III.) *There is no reason for supposing that the great words of our Lord,* "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them," *are less true in our days than they were in the days of the apostles.* There is no limitation to suggest that they were intended as a promise of exceptional honour and blessedness to the Christians of the first century. Indeed, they are not a promise at all, but the revelation of a fact. Christian men are so related to each other as well as to Christ that when they are "gathered together in His name" He is "in the midst of them." They find Him when they find each other.

This exceptional presence of Christ in an assembly of Christian men is the ground of all the power and dignity of the

Christian Church. Churches are founded that this presence may be realised. Christian men should associate themselves with churches in order that they may share the strength and blessedness which this presence confers, and discharge the duties which it renders possible. It is still the will of Christ that His people should be gathered into churches, for where two or three are gathered together in His name there is He in the midst of them.

(IV.) *There is no reason to believe that the promise to united prayer has been recalled.* "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven" (Matt. xvii. 19). The promise stands in immediate connection with what our Lord said about the authority of the Church to bind and loose, and with the great declaration, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." In an assembly of Christians, however small, gathered together in Christ's name, whether to reconcile brethren who are estranged from each other, or to offer common prayer to God, Christ Himself is present. As His presence gives authority to the acts of the assembly, it also gives power to its prayers. God listens to us and blesses us when we pray alone; but when we pray with our Christian brethren our union with them draws us into closer union with Christ; our prayers become more truly the prayers of Christ Himself, and are more sure to obtain an answer.

The general experience of Christian people, that united prayer and united worship contribute to the activity and elevation of spiritual thought, and to the energy of the spiritual affections, is explained by the presence of Christ among us when we are gathered together in His name. Solitary worship has its own peace and blessedness, and is sometimes environed with a wonderful glory; but most Christian men are surer of a vivid sense of the presence and greatness and power and love of God when they worship

with others than when they worship alone. The reason is that when we are in the closest fellowship with our Christian brethren we are in the closest fellowship with Christ, who is the "Way" to the Father.

The great promise to united prayer is a law which requires the organisation of Christian churches, for, apart from organised churches, assemblies for prayer will be uncertain, irregular, and precarious.

(V.) *No essential change has passed upon the spiritual life, which is the gift of Christ; and organised Christian societies are still necessary for the satisfaction of some of its strongest cravings.* The spiritual life which Christ gives is a present revelation of Christ, and where the spiritual life is vigorous and healthy there is a strong desire for fellowship with Christian brethren as well as for fellowship with God. It must be the will of Christ that this desire should be satisfied, and it cannot be satisfied except by the creation of organised churches.

It was under the strong constraint of the cravings and affections of their new life that the earliest converts to the Christian Faith drew together. They could not live apart. They were not content with occasional meetings for Christian worship and instruction in Christian truth. "All that believed were together, and had all things common. . . . And day by day continuing stedfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." New converts joined the Christian society as a matter of course; "the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved" (Acts ii. 44—47). It is not to be supposed that they knew as yet what our Lord had said to His apostles about the Church, but "the law written in their hearts" enabled them to anticipate positive precepts.

When the fervour of that early enthusiasm sank, the Jewish Christians still held together, and it was not till they were

in danger of drifting away from the Gospel and neglecting the "great salvation" (Heb. ii. 1—3) that it was necessary to insist on the duty of maintaining their fellowship with the church and attending its meetings: "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as ye see the day drawing nigh." And the charge is immediately followed by the awful menace: "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. x. 24—27). To withdraw from the church was a step towards apostasy from Christ. When Christian faith was firm and the Christian life fresh and vigorous, fellowship with the saints was a delight; now it had to be enforced as a duty.

Love for those who, in virtue of the Divine life which they and we received in the new birth, are our brethren in the household of God is an instinct of the Christian heart. It was necessary that Paul should warn his converts in Thessalonica against committing the vices of heathenism, but he says, "Concerning the love of the brethren, ye have no need that one write unto you; for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another" (1 Thess. iv. 9). John says, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (1 John iii. 14). But where there is love for the brethren isolation from them will be intolerable. If we love them we shall feel that we are in "partnership" or "fellowship" with them in all the higher interests of life. We shall be anxious for the forgiveness of *their* sins as well as of our own, for their righteousness as well as our own, for their joy in God as well as our own. We shall long for their sympathy with us in our sorrows and struggles, in our triumphs and defeats. We shall, therefore, desire to confess sin

together, to invoke God's pardon together, to ask for the light and strength which come from the inspiration of the Holy Ghost together, and to dwell together on the infinite blessedness of the love of God which is theirs as well as ours, ours as well as theirs. The consciousness of a common life, of a common faith, of common memories, of common hopes, of common troubles, of common joys, and of a common relationship to God will demand expression in united worship and united prayer. But apart from a regularly organised church there can be no adequate provision for the complete satisfaction of those cravings for "the communion of saints" of which united worship and prayer are a noble but incomplete expression.*

(VI.) *Christ's "new commandment," requiring Christian people to "love one another"* (John xiii. 34) *with a special love, is still in force, and organised Christian churches contribute to the development of brotherly affection.*

In the discipline of the Christian life the organised church fulfils a purpose very analogous to that which is fulfilled by

* John Owen has described the craving for spiritual fellowship in admirable words. He says that it is "the instinct of the new creature and those in whom it is to associate themselves in holy communion for the joint and mutual exercise of those graces of the Spirit which are the same, as unto the essence of them, in them all. The laws of Christ in and unto His Church, as unto all outward obedience, are suited unto those inward principles and inclinations which, by His Spirit and grace, He hath implanted in the hearts of them that believe. Hence His yoke is easy, and His commandments are not grievous. And, therefore, none of His true disciples, since He had a church upon earth, did or could satisfy themselves in their own faith singularly and personally, but would venture their lives and all that was dear unto them for communion with others, and the associating themselves with them of the same spirit and way, for the observances of the commands of Christ. The martyrs of the primitive churches of old lost more of their blood and lives for their meetings and assemblies than for personal profession of the faith; and so also have others done under the Roman apostasy."—*Works* (1851), xv. p. 256.

the Family and the State in the discipline of the natural virtues. It is our duty to love our neighbour as ourselves; to love all men; to care for strangers as well as for those of our own name and our own blood. But it is by the dear affections of home that we are trained to a wider charity; and experience shows that those who are loosely held by the ties of the Family are not conspicuous for their generous affection for all mankind. Nor, as a rule, are those who have released themselves from the special obligations of patriotism conspicuous for the energy of their devotion to the general interests of the human race. A universal philanthropy is the natural outgrowth of a genuine compassion for those of our own nation who are suffering from misfortune or injustice, and of that noble temper which makes a man care for the fortunes of his country as for his own.

The concentration of affection strengthens it and prepares it for a wider development. If in our common life we were under no special obligations to love and serve some particular persons, we should not love and serve the whole world better; we should neither love nor serve it at all. And so an organised church, by concentrating brotherly love, and defining a special area for our Christian service, disciplines us to that larger love which we are required to cherish for all that are in Christ, and to that larger service which we are under obligations to render them.*

III.

In the preceding sections of this chapter it has been contended that, since the apostles were commissioned by our Lord to "make disciples of all the nations," and to teach them "to observe all things" that He had commanded them, it may be assumed that the founding and organising of Christian societies, which was a very large part of their work, was done

* See NOTE I. at close of this chapter.

with His authority. The proof that it was the will of Christ that those who believed in Him, in apostolic times, should be organised into churches has been strengthened by an appeal to particular commands and promises of our Lord recorded in the four Gospels, and by passages in the discourses of the apostles and in their epistles, in which they attribute to the risen and glorified Christ an active part in the administration of organised Christian societies. It has been further contended that there is nothing in the New Testament to suggest that churches were temporary institutions, and that they are still necessary for the satisfaction of the cravings of the spiritual life and for the development of brotherly affection.

But, on a subject of such grave importance as this to the spiritual life of the race in all countries and all ages, an argument, however strong and firm, built on the foundation of particular texts seems incomplete. Christ treats us, not as slaves, but as friends. He does not merely give us authoritative commands, to be obeyed blindly; He enables us to discover the reasons and grounds of His commands, that we may obey them intelligently, with the full concurrence of our reason and conscience. We ought to be able to see that the particular precepts and promises which oblige us to form organised churches have their root in the substance of the Christian revelation. It should be possible to discover that Christian churches are the natural and necessary creation of the Christian Faith.

The wonderful sentences in the prayer which our Lord offered immediately before His Passion express the great thought of Christ concerning the redemption of the human race: "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in us. . . . And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given unto them, that they may be one,

even as we are one; I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected into one" (John xvii. 20—23).

Preserving their separate and independent personality, those who believe in Christ are to reach the perfection of their power and blessedness in their union with each other as well as with Him. Christ came to found a "kingdom," not merely to be the Teacher, the Saviour, the Ruler, of individual men. When we repent of sin and receive the Christian redemption, we are restored not only to our heavenly Father, but to the "household of God." "Saints" are not called to an isolated righteousness and blessedness, but to be "fellow-citizens" in an eternal and Divine city. They are "one body in Christ, and severally members one of another."

But their union with each other, which is created by their possession of a common life in Christ, cannot be actually realised unless they are united by a strong and tender mutual affection; and their perfect union with each other is necessary to their perfect union with Christ. This explains the urgency with which our Lord insists on the new commandment, that His disciples should "love one another."

To draw together those who believe in Christ, and to prevent them from living an isolated life, is necessary to the achievement of the Christian redemption. This was one of the purposes for which the Lord's Supper was instituted. It was meant to recall to Christian people their unity in Christ: for they were to eat of the same bread, the symbol of Christ as the Bread of Life, and to drink of the same cup, the symbol of His blood which was shed for the remission of their sins. It was to renew, to strengthen, and to make intensely vivid, their consciousness of a common redemption from common perils. It was to deepen their love for each other by the power of Christ's love for them all.

There is a direct relationship between Christ and every man that has received the Christian salvation; but, according to the Divine order, we are largely necessary to each other, and

the gifts of Christ's grace often reach us through the ministry of brotherly affection. We do not learn the meaning of some of Christ's promises till we see them fulfilled in the lives of others; our faith in them is strengthened by the faith of our brethren. We do not learn the meaning of some of His commandments until we see them illustrated in the character and conduct of others; we find courage to obey them when we learn from the obedience of our brethren that obedience is possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. Great revivals which have changed the religious condition of millions of men have begun in the fire kindled from heaven in a solitary heart; and these are but large illustrations of a law which is being constantly illustrated on a smaller scale in the lives of all of us. We are led into a fuller knowledge of Christian truth by those to whom God has made clear some things which He has not made clear to ourselves. We are made more devout and more earnest by the devoutness and earnestness of our brethren. The law under which Christian people are largely dependent upon each other for the greatest spiritual blessings is directly related to the great end of the Christian redemption. We are to be restored to each other as well as to God. The law of mutual dependence prevents us from standing apart. We are bound together by mutual obligations and mutual services.

Our Lord's declaration that where two or three are gathered together in His name He is in the midst of them is an expression of one of the central laws of His redemptive work. While we stand apart from each other our union with Him is incomplete; we realise our union with Christ in just the same measure in which we realise our union with each other. This law is also the root of the promise to united prayer. Apart from Christ we can do nothing: righteousness is impossible to us; access to the Father is closed; prayer is ineffective. When we are in real spiritual fellowship with our brethren we are also in fellowship with Him; our

prayers become His as well as ours, and are sure to be heard and answered.

That Christian people who live near each other should worship together and pray together; that they should recognise the law of mutual dependence and the obligations of mutual service by placing themselves in each other's care, by asking one or more of their brethren to whom God has given a large knowledge of His truth to teach them, and by asking others to whom He has given practical wisdom and maturity of Christian life to watch over them—this is but the carrying out of Christ's great purpose of drawing into union with each other those who are in union with Himself, and of drawing them into closer union with Himself by their closer union with each other.

An organised Christian church is the natural creation and expression of the great law that those who are in Christ are to reach the perfection of their righteousness and blessedness in their union with each other as well as in their union with Him.

When Christian churches are described by Congregationalists as "voluntary societies," it is not meant that Christian people are at liberty to please themselves whether they will form churches or not, but that churches are to be formed in free obedience to the authority of Christ—not by the power of the State. Nor is it meant that where churches exist Christian people are at liberty to please themselves whether they will be members of these churches or not, but that membership is to depend on the free consent of those who enter membership; that no man ought to be a member of a Christian church by birth, and that no civil law should enforce membership. The only ground on which a Christian man can properly refuse to remain outside a Christian church is that the churches within his reach impose conditions of membership to which he cannot submit without,

in his judgment, disobeying the will of Christ; they may, for example, require him to assent to doctrines which he believes to be false, or to sanction practices which he believes to be pernicious.

Worship must be "voluntary," or God will not accept it; but to refuse to worship God is to neglect a great duty. Membership of a Christian church must be "voluntary," and in this sense a Christian church is a "voluntary society;" but for a Christian man, apart from such reasons as those stated in the preceding paragraph, to live an isolated life, and to refuse to enter into fellowship with the Church, is to disobey the will of Christ.

NOTE I.—THE PARTICULAR CHURCH A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH.—"One great end," says John Owen, "for which our Lord instituted a particular church was that we might have a direct exercise of His great command and of that other great duty of love to believers. 'I will try you here,' said Christ. 'I require this of you indispensably to love all the saints, all believers, all My disciples. You shall not need to say you must go far, this way or that, for objects. I appoint you to such an order as wherein you shall have continual immediate objects of all that love which I require of you.' . . . The Lord Jesus Christ hath given us this great command of love, and hath plainly declared that if we love not one another we are

not His disciples. 'I will give you an instance whereby you may be tried,' saith He; 'cast you into such a society, by My order and appointment, as wherein you may have immediate objects for the exercise of love to the utmost of what I do require.' If we find a person that is orderly admitted into church society, he is as certain and evident an object of our love as if we saw him lying in the arms of Christ. We walk by rule; He hath appointed us to do so. Let none, then, pretend that they love the brethren in general, and love the people of God, and love the saints, while their love is not fervently exercised towards those who are in the same church with them. Christ hath given it you for a trial; He will try your love at the last day by your deportment in that church wherein you are."—JOHN OWEN: *Works*, ix. p. 262.

NOTE II.—MATTHEW XVIII. 17—20.—The importance of this passage requires that it should be very carefully studied.

The following extracts are from Stier's "Words of Jesus":—

"The Church is the society, called together in unity of faith and love, of those who believe on Him, who are united in His name; a society in which is carried out, and exercised upon earth, what is valid in heaven (before its exalted Lord and Head). This is the simple fundamental idea here clearly expressed. It is at the same time certified here with equal clearness that it cannot be without sin and offence in the midst of it, for it happens that a brother sins and must be admonished. It is rather precisely the institution of Divine faith and love, the design of which, as it is to call the sinners of all the world to repentance, and to receive every one for the sake of Christ who only begins to humble himself, and to admit him into the ever open gates of the Kingdom of heaven—so also to admonish those who already belong to it, and to carry this out in the exercise of long-suffering and severity until those who are entirely disobedient shall be again separated from it. . . . That the injunction, 'Tell it to the church,' can in the

first place mean only the church in the place where thou art, the nearest united society of believers to which you belong, is clear; but the church of every place represents again the entire Church, as is evident from verse 20; and this also is the basis given in the apostolic constitution, which represents in many churches the one Church. Only thus is the manifestation of the Church in the world at any time possible. True, according to circumstances, in so far as this can be done in truth, the 'Tell it to the church' is, even in the case of sinning churches, to be further applied by bringing it before the greater society; still, every little individual society retains its right in the name of the whole, so long as it truly exercises it in His name, in the name of Christ.

"The power of rebuke which the individual brother exercised in private, at the first stage, was not only his duty, but his right—a right which emanates from the church to every member of it. But if, now, further, the sinner is rebuked in vain by many (2 Cor. ii. 6), before all (1 Tim. v. 26), in the name of Christ—then let him be to thee—who broughtest his case before this court of jurisdiction, and art now discharged of thy brotherly obligation, because he must now also be to the whole Church as the heathen and the publican.' (The article has here the force of the plural, denoting the class by the individual example.) The 'to thee' is now said to every one. Heathen are those without, not belonging to the people of God; publicans those who, although within, are yet to be reckoned with the heathen; the typical expression taken from the relation and usage then existing implies the corresponding truth in the future. He has, in the first place, forfeited his name as a brother, and his right as a brother to be exhorted, for it has become manifest that there is no principle of brotherly feeling in him upon which to take hold; no one in the Church owes any further duty to him as a brother. It is altogether self-evident that on the further development of the relations

involved in the Church this implies the denial of church privileges, exclusion from the Sacrament, &c. . . That by this binding and loosing, even here, where the keys are not again expressly mentioned, Christ understands, in the widest scope of the terms, all expression of power and exercise of authority on the part of His Church, which He will one day (if the Church thus acts upon earth in His name) ratify also in heaven; this is not less clear than that the expression still refers most directly to what was said before, consequently to the denial of grace, the withholding of forgiveness from the heathen and publicans, who are shut out, as in the other case, to the assurance of grace to penitents. That in this decisive word all precedence of any Peter whatsoever disappears, and that every exercise of any power upon earth, relating to the things of heaven, is represented as an emanation of that power which the Church possesses in its unity, every member of it (were he even an earthly head), only in virtue of his union with the body. This has already been repeatedly said, and yet cannot be enough considered. The Church possesses the word of truth (and with it the spirit of truth), which it rightly interprets in itself, and by consequence validly applies to those cases that occur; therefore is its binding and loosing, forbidding and permitting, denying and affirming, by this word, true and valid in the whole and in particular cases. The Church is the body upon earth filled from the heavenly Head with all the fulness of God—*i.e.*, with the holy love of the Father in the Son; therefore, if it has loved as God and with God, so as to seek the lost brother, it may and ought to pass judgment with God upon every one who will not let himself be found and restored. Let us now again connect together the beginning and conclusion of Christ's discourse upon this occasion; let us attentively consider to what a height it has risen from that word with which it began—viz., 'Become as children; only thus can ye belong to the Kingdom of heaven.' This is the

ruling conquering power which the Father prepares for Himself in the little ones. Over the door of the Church it is written, 'He who comes not hither as a child, where only children, alike great and alike little, dwell together, let him stay without.' But within, these children are sovereign in their sphere against, and over, all that would disturb the holy and blessed fellowship. Christ, who builds this Church for Himself, and indeed alone governs it, from whose supreme prerogative alone all prerogative and all power that are valid in it must proceed, yet says not, 'I will keep the keys by Me; I will Myself on every occasion give the decision directly from the throne.' But according to His manner of acting in all His works upon earth, in the kingdom of grace as of nature, He appoints an intermediate agency, in which He transfers the keys to His followers, and yet at the same time keeps them Himself. It is said, 'I in them, as Thou in Me' (John xvii. 23). For whatever His followers do that is valid, is so only in His name—*i.e.*, because He is in the midst of them (verse 20). The case, then, is not at all possible that they should bind upon earth what He looses in heaven, or loose upon earth what He binds in heaven. Whenever such a case occurs, then they are no longer the persons to whom the 'Verily I say unto you' applies. . . . An irrevocable, irredeemable ban is far from being spoken of here. In its highest exercise of power the Church looses again precisely that which it has bound; it has, however, only bound in order that it may be able again to loose when this is possible. The final exclusion of the incorrigible, in virtue of which they are accounted as heathen and publicans, as it is requisite on its own account, so at the same time it is only the last and strongest expression of that love which seeks their recovery, for the heathen and publicans are certainly not excluded from the preaching of the Gospel, which is to be continued in all the world until the end. And if in this instance brotherly love has come to an end, there yet remains general

love—nay, more than this, the love that weeps and intercedes for the lost brother. All this might already be found in verse 18 did it not come into still clearer prominence in what follows.

"Verse 20.—According to Jewish statute a synagogue, to which the Shechinah of the Divine presence and hearing descends, must consist at least of ten; a smaller number God despises and reproaches: 'Wherefore do I come when there is no one there?' Yet, on the other hand, we find in 'Pirke Aboth.,' chap. iii., 8, the saying, 'Wherever two are sitting conversing on the law, there the Shechinah is with them.' Here Christ names the smallest society that is possible, two or three (as at verse 16, united witnesses before the throne of God), and ascribes to them the right and power of a church in virtue of His presence with them. 'He who can say, "Thou and I" 'can speak of a church and can lay claim to the common grace."'

"'There I am in the midst of them' (comp. 1 Cor. v. 4), as the Mediator through whom their prayer is heard, as the Giver of that which they ask, as the Confirmer of that which comes forth from them as a testimony, either publicly or privately. Christ certainly speaks here already in the same sense as at John xiv. 13, 14, and we have here already a prospective glance into the period of His heavenly Omnipresence, which, at Matt. xxviii. 20, He promised when about to ascend to the Father. 'This must signify a spiritual presence or nothing; but it is a stupendous expression' (Pfenninger). Yes, the as yet future spiritualisation of His presence when He would be gone to the Father, He then in heaven and His Church on the earth, and yet at the same time He in the power of the Spirit everywhere, wherever His disciples are and unite together upon earth—this, and nothing else, is what clearly lies in these words. We ask, therefore, again: Has He not here spoken with reference to the future Church? Therefore, of course, it is only what ye *shall* bind, for He could

not possibly speak of the present; and the final 'there am I is only a prophetic present connected with the foregoing futures. His presence depends not on the greater or smaller number of those assembled, and as little on any locality or place (which, in Old Testament fashion, He had again chosen to put His name there); but wherever He is in the midst of His believing and praying people, there is the church to which He has given this power. Could there be a severer judgment pronounced against all pseudo-Catholicism than is given in this word; and again, a more friendly consolation, a stronger call to make use of this power addressed to the weak Protestantism which seeks the 'invisible Church' elsewhere than upon earth in the assembly of the faithful, 'in all their and our places,' which never remains invisible, from which the testimony of the 'there am I' goes forth ever anew to the world?"

CHAPTER II.

PRINCIPLE II.—IN EVERY CHRISTIAN CHURCH THE WILL OF CHRIST IS THE SUPREME AUTHORITY.

It may be objected that this principle affirms nothing concerning the Church which may not be affirmed with equal truth concerning every other society and association into which those can enter who believe that Christ is the Son of God and the Lord of the human race. To a Christian man the will of Christ is the supreme authority in the conduct of the affairs of a manufacturing company, a scientific institution, or an organisation for promoting temperance reform.

But in every one of these voluntary societies the members determine for themselves the objects of their association. They can lay down terms of membership. They can draw up rules for the government of the society. They can reserve to themselves the right to reconsider and to vary the objects of the organisation, and to revise the original rules. Under these powers, they may relax the terms of membership, or make them more stringent. They may wholly change the methods in which the society elects its officers and conducts its business. They may engage in modes of action altogether foreign to the original scheme under which they agreed to unite. No such freedom belongs either to the officers or to the unofficial members of Christian churches, or to the officers and unofficial members combined.

The powers which belong to the members of a Christian church correspond more closely to the powers of the trustees and governors of a chartered foundation. The charter limits their freedom. It determines how the governors shall be elected and how their office shall be vacated; to what objects

they shall appropriate the revenues of the foundation; with what formalities they shall transact their business. They have no power to vary the objects of the trust, or the organisation of the governing body, or the general principles on which the trust is administered. For their own guidance in carrying out the purposes of the foundation they may be enabled and required to adopt by-laws or statutes; but these are limited by the charter, and must be in harmony with its general provisions; and to prevent governors from exceeding their powers these by-laws or statutes may require confirmation by some supreme authority. The analogy is imperfect; for a Christian church is not under the government of definite and formal rules corresponding to the clauses of a charter or of a deed of trust drawn up by the founder of a college or a hospital, and determining the objects of the institution and how it shall be governed; but the limitations imposed on the freedom of a church by the will of Christ are just as real as those imposed on the governors or trustees of a public foundation by the legal instrument under which they act.

I.

In every Christian church the will of Christ is the supreme authority. For—

(I.) *Christ is the Founder of the Church.* The Church is a society organised in obedience to His will, under His authority, to carry out the purposes for which He—the Eternal Son of God—became flesh, died on the Cross, rose again, and ascended into heaven. Through the Church and its officers Christ provides for the perfection of those who believe in Him, for the unity of their faith, the enlargement of their knowledge of Himself, the development of their moral and religious life (Eph. iv. 11—13). It is a society to which He has entrusted great duties, and on which He has conferred great prerogatives.

It must clearly be beyond our powers to suppress and disregard the objects for which Christ founded the Church or to use its organisation for any purposes which are inconsistent with them.

(II.) *Christ Himself is present in the assemblies of the Church* (Matt. xviii. 15—20). It is His presence which confers upon the meetings of the Church their dignity and authority. When the Church reaches its ideal perfection, the acts of the Church are the acts of Christ, and what the Church binds on earth is bound in heaven, and what it looses on earth is loosed in heaven. Whenever His will is not the first thought of the officers of a church or of its private members; whenever in their church action they aim at other ends than those for which Christ cares, and for which the Church was founded by Him; whenever they are influenced by a temper and by motives which separate them from Him, and prevent them, not only from doing His will, but from knowing it, the Church falls away from its ideal greatness. "Apart" from Him churches, like individual Christian men, "can do nothing."

The whole power of a church depends upon whether its action is Christ's action or not. He is not bound by majorities. In any action in which Christ takes part His will is necessarily supreme.

To maintain the supremacy of the will of Christ in the Church is to maintain that the Church is a Divine society of which Christ is the Founder and Lord, and in whose assemblies Christ is present.

II.

How are we to know the Will of Christ? The early Puritans and Congregationalists insisted on the production of definite authority from the Holy Scriptures in support of every detail of church organisation and of every church rule and practice.

Unless a church office or custom had the explicit sanction either of a Scriptural precept or of apostolic example, they condemned it as unlawful. They applied the same rigid test to the forms and circumstances of Christian worship.

It was a noble and, perhaps, a necessary error. In endeavouring to correct the enormous abuses and corruptions which had paralysed the Divine forces of the Church and obscured the glory of Christian worship—abuses and corruptions which had become inveterate by the usage of many centuries, and which were supported by the whole force of the Church and the State—they were driven to this incessant and exclusive appeal to the Holy Scriptures. It seemed to them that, as soon as they allowed any departure from the words of the written authority, no limits could restrain men from the grossest doctrinal errors and the most pernicious ecclesiastical innovations; and, if they themselves left the sure ground of Scripture, they felt it was impossible for them to make a firm stand against their opponents.

But the principle was false. The Church of Christ is not under the bondage of the "letter;" it has the freedom of the Spirit.

The will of Christ concerning the constitution and administration of the Church is to be learnt in precisely the same way in which we learn His will concerning the personal Christian life. There are duties, enforced by no definite precept recorded in the four gospels or in the apostolic epistles, that we cannot neglect without the gravest disloyalty to His authority. They are duties suggested by the characteristic spirit of the Christian revelation. We may know "the mind of Christ" when He gives us no definite commands. He treats us as "friends," not as "slaves."

On the other hand, some of His most definite commandments, though they illustrate a general law, do not impose upon us any direct and formal obligation; for they were given to

particular persons, and were suggested by their personal character and circumstances. The commandment addressed to the rich young man, "Sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven" (Matt. xix. 21), was not meant to be a universal and formal law; it was suggested by our Lord's knowledge of the character and perils of the person to whom it was addressed. We have to inquire whether there are similar limitations to what our Lord said, directly or indirectly, concerning the Church.

We have to make the same inquiry in relation to apostolic teaching and practice. The apostles were, in a very special sense, the representatives of Christ, and were charged by Him to make known to men the truths which He had revealed, and the laws of the Kingdom of heaven. But it is not to be assumed that every direction given by the apostles to the churches of their own times has authority for churches in altogether different circumstances. The financial arrangements, for example, recommended to the church at Corinth in order to secure the success of a special work of charity may be admirable in themselves, and deserving of adoption by modern churches for the purpose of providing for the relief of their poor, or the maintenance of their ministry, or any other objects. But a particular scheme proposed to a particular church for securing a particular financial purpose cannot be appealed to as authoritative for all churches and for all financial purposes; any more than a particular precept addressed to a particular person by our Lord can be regarded as requiring all rich men to sell their goods and distribute the money to the poor.

This is but a single and very obvious illustration of a principle which must be applied to all the acts and directions of the apostles in relation to the constitution and administration of churches. In the circumstances of apostolic times their methods for organising churches, and for the celebration of Christian worship and the instruction of

Christian people in Christian truth and duty, were covered by the general sanction and authority of Christ; but in circumstances altogether different it is not only conceivable, but probable, that these plans would have been modified, and modified under the same sanction and the same authority.

For example—that the apostolic churches celebrated the Lord's Supper in the evening does not impose the duty on us of celebrating in the evening instead of the middle of the day. Before the Sunday was secured as a day of rest Christians were obliged to meet for worship either early in the morning before the day's work began, or in the evening after it was over; and, at first, the evening seems to have been generally chosen as the more convenient. That they met in private houses, in workshops, or in hired lecture halls does not make our worship in buildings specially erected for the services of the Church illegitimate; they could not erect special buildings for their meetings, and were obliged to meet where they could.

In discussing whether it is according to the will of Christ that a church should use an organ in public worship it is irrelevant to ask for proof from the New Testament that the apostolic churches used organs. They did not even use hymn-books.

The real question at issue is whether the use of an organ is inconsistent with the Christian idea of worship. No one objects to the use of a complete New Testament in a Christian service; but apostolic example cannot be pleaded for the usage, for some of the documents contained in the New Testament were not written till towards the close of the first century, and even then it is extremely improbable that any church had a complete collection of them. For many years the only Scriptures which it was possible to read in the service of the Church were the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

Nor does there seem any sufficient ground for the con-

tention that, in investigating the constitution and practices of the apostolic churches for the purpose of discovering the will of Christ, we should limit ourselves to the New Testament. What the apostles did as founders of churches derives its authority from the commission they received from Christ—not from the historical account of their labours written by Luke. What Paul said to the Ephesian elders at Miletus was covered with the sanction of his apostolic authority before it was recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. What he did in organising the church at Ephesus was also covered with the sanction of his apostolic authority, though Luke has not recorded it. The only question is whether the evidence of apostolic methods derived from other sources than the New Testament is trustworthy. If it is trustworthy there is no reason for rejecting it.

Clement of Rome is a good authority for the fact that about thirty years after Paul's death the church at Corinth had in its possession the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and believed that Paul wrote it soon after the church was founded. Clement of Rome is an equally good authority for the fact that about thirty years after Paul's death the church at Corinth claimed, and exercised, the power to depose its presbyters.

But apostolic precedent is not a formal law. Principles remain; methods are subject to continual change. We have to distinguish between what was essential and what was accidental, between what was permanent and what was temporary, both in apostolic action and in apostolic precept.

CHAPTER III.

PRINCIPLE III.—IT IS THE WILL OF CHRIST THAT ALL THE MEMBERS OF A CHRISTIAN CHURCH SHOULD BE CHRISTIANS.

I.

PROOF has been already alleged that it is the will of Christ that *all* who believe in Him should be organised into churches. It has now to be shown that it is the will of Christ that *only* those who believe in Him—none else—should be members of Christian churches. That this is the will of Christ appears from:

(I.) *His own words in Matt. xviii.* 15—20, describing (1) the constitution, (2) the functions, (3) the power, and (4) the privileges of a church.

1. A church is *constituted* "where two or three are gathered together" in His "name." By this is meant that they are gathered together in acknowledgment of all that His name reveals concerning Himself and His relations to God and to man.* Christ is the bond of union between those who are "gathered together;" but this cannot be true except of a society of Christians.

2. It is one of the *functions* of the Church to deal authoritatively with causes of offence among Christian brethren. Such a function cannot have been entrusted by Christ to an assembly in which men who are not Christians have a right to be present, and to take part in its decisions.

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* The words mean this—but more.

Those to whom Christ commits authority of this kind must be persons who know His will, and desire to do it.

In the exercise of this function the Church may separate a man who resists its authority from the Christian community: "let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican." It is assumed that the Church itself consists of Christians: the man who refuses to submit to the decision of the Church is to be relegated to the community of unbelievers.

3. The *power* of the Church implies that the Church consists of those who are loyal to Christ. What the Church binds on earth is bound in heaven; what it looses on earth is loosed in heaven. This implies a union of the most intimate kind between the Church and Christ, in whom the Church is one with God.* The decisions of a religious assembly whose members are in revolt against God cannot be invested with the power attributed to the decisions of the Church. If any Christian society includes in its membership those who are not "in Christ," the power attributed to the Church must be diminished; if such persons are sufficiently numerous to determine the action of the Church, this power must disappear altogether. Christ's ideal Church consists only of Christians.

4. The *privilege* of a Church consists in the exceptional presence of Christ which is assured to those who are gathered together in His name. But those who have no faith in Christ, no love for Him, to whom He is not the Son of God and the Saviour of the world, cannot be gathered together in His name. If such persons are physically present in an assembly of the Church, they are spiritually apart from the Church as they are spiritually apart from Christ. To whatever

* This is a fuller account of what is meant by being gathered together in the name of Christ. Those who are so gathered together are one with Him.

extent their judgment and action control the Church, to that same extent is the Church brought under the power of an influence which divides the members of the Church both from Christ and from each other; and they prevent the Church from being "gathered together" in His name.

By the institutions of Judaism, the symbol of the Divine presence was assured to a consecrated place; by the laws of the Kingdom of Christ, the reality of Christ's presence is assured to an assembly of consecrated persons.*

(II.) *The manner in which the apostolic churches were formed.* The earliest Christian church—the church in Jerusalem—consisted, at first, of the apostles and of those believers in Christ who met with them day after day, and "with one accord continued stedfastly in prayer" during the interval between our Lord's ascension into heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit. "There was a multitude of persons gathered together, about a hundred and twenty." The three thousand "who received [Peter's] word" on the day of Pentecost were baptized, and "added" to the original company (Acts ii. 41); but they were baptized because they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.† The number went on increasing; but the new adherents of the Church were persons who received the Christian Gospel: "the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved" (Acts ii. 47).

(III.) *The contents of the apostolic epistles addressed to Christian churches.*

1. *The members of these churches are described* as "saints" (Eph. i. 2), "called to be saints" (1 Cor. i. 2), "saints in Christ Jesus" (Phil. i. 1), "called to be Jesus Christ's"

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* In the later ages of Judaism there was a glimpse of the blessedness of the nobler faith. See the passage quoted by Stier from "Pirke Aboth," *ante*, p. 32.

† The new faith which they professed showed itself in their new habits and conduct (Acts ii. 42—45).

(Rom. i. 6), "faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph. i. 2), "faithful brethren in Christ" (Col. i. 2), "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. i. 2); they are "beloved of God" (Rom. i. 6); they are "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. i. 1); they are "God's elect, holy and beloved" (Col. iii. 12); they are "a temple of God" (1 Cor. iii. 16), "the body of Christ" (1 Cor. xii. 27); being "many" they "are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another" (Rom. xii. 5).

2. *The Apostle Paul gives thanks that the members of these churches have not only believed in Christ, but are receiving the great blessings of the Christian redemption.* Quotations in support of this are unnecessary; but see Rom. i. 8; 1 Cor. i. 4—9; Eph. i. 2, 3; Phil. i. 3—6; Col. i. 3—5; 1 Thess. i. 2—10, ii. 13—16, iii. 6—10; 2 Thess. i. 3—5, ii. 3—14.

3. *The doctrinal teaching of the epistles assumes that the societies to which they are addressed have already believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.*

4. *The motives by which the moral teaching of the epistles is generally sustained would have no force with persons who were not already Christians.* It is meant for those who acknowledge the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and know that they have received through Him the remission of sins and a new life in God: *e.g.*, Rom. xiii. 11—17, xiv. 5—8, xv. 1—3; 1 Cor. vi. 1—4; Eph. iv. 25, v. 21.

II.

In reply to these arguments it may be alleged that the early churches necessarily consisted of those who really acknowledged the authority of Christ, and who had discovered in Him the Saviour of mankind. Only such persons were likely to break with Judaism or with Paganism, and to separate themselves from the religious and social life of their country and their age. But with the growth of the Church its relations to the society which surrounded it were changed,

and it soon became impossible to limit its membership to those who could be described as "saints," or as "faithful brethren in Christ Jesus." In a nation like our own, which inherits the Christian traditions of many centuries, the old contrast between the Church and "the world" no longer exists, and large numbers of persons must necessarily be admitted into the Christian Church who are Christians by education and by habit, but not by the power of a deep and serious faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But that the Christian Church should always consist of those—and of those only—who have personal faith in Christ, and are personally loyal to Him, is apparent from the following considerations :—

(I.) *Its distinctive character as a religious society.*

1. It is a society which was founded by Christ, and in which the will of Christ is the supreme authority. Those persons cannot claim to be received into the Church, or to remain in it, who do not acknowledge the authority of Christ, or to whom His authority is not supreme.

2. It is a Christian society; and to whatever extent persons who are not really Christians are included in it, the society necessarily ceases to be Christian.

(II.) *The purposes for which it exists.*

As a religious society it has to make provision for the maintenance of Christian worship, for the instruction of its own members in Christian truth and duty, and for the propagation of the Christian Gospel among those who have not yet received it.

If Christian Faith is not a condition of membership of a Christian church, the church *as a whole* cannot be entrusted with these responsibilities, and it will become necessary to limit the control of the worship, of the teaching, and of the evangelistic work of the church to its officers. Whether this limitation is consistent with the will of Christ will require discussion in a later chapter. Wherever the discipline of the

Church is relaxed, the power of the ministry or priesthood increases. The Christian commonalty must lose their authority unless the membership of the Church is limited to those who have a real personal faith in Christ.

Further, if one of the objects of the Church is to draw those who are in Christ nearer to each other, and so to enable them to value more perfectly "the communion of saints," the Church must include only those who are recognised by each other as "brethren in Christ." There can be no Christian fellowship between those who are not Christians.

In a word, as a distinctively Christian society the purposes for which the Church exists are distinctively Christian, and this implies that the members of the Church are themselves Christians.

(III.) The functions, powers, and prerogatives of the Church as described in Matt. xviii. 15—20 are necessarily lost when the Church ceases to be a society gathered together in His name. An assembly that is not one with Christ is not the kind of assembly in which Christ declares that He is present, and to which He attributes such a wonderful authority.

But there is, in fact, no serious difference of opinion on the general proposition that only Christians should be members of a Christian church. No one would contend that a Mahometan while still retaining his old faith in the Divine mission of Mahomet, or a Jew while still rejecting the Divine mission of the Lord Jesus Christ, or an Atheist while still disbelieving in the existence of God, should be admitted into the membership of a Christian church. If for any purpose such persons claimed admission, the claim would be rejected as intolerable. To concede it would be wholly inconsistent with the constitution of the Church, with its faith, with its history, and with the objects for which it exists. In some sense a man must be a Christian to be a member of a Christian church.

The only real question at issue on this point between different systems of church polity is whether personal faith in Christ should be made the condition of church membership; and this resolves itself into a still deeper and more vital question—whether, apart from personal faith in Christ, any man can be really a Christian.

It is of the very substance of the Christian revelation that such a faith is of infinite spiritual value. It determines a man's present relations to God and his eternal destiny. It is in answer to such a faith that God grants the remission of sins and the gift of a Divine life. Such a faith makes all the difference between those who are "in Christ" and those who are not; between those who are spiritually dead and those who have risen with Christ, and have passed already into the Divine Kingdom; between the wheat which is to be gathered into the garner of God and the tares which are to be "burned with fire."*

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* In this discussion, which is concerning church membership, no question arises concerning the present relations to God and the eternal destiny of heathen men who lie beyond the reach of the Church, and to whom the Gospel has never come. Nor is it necessary to consider the case of those who, in Christian countries, either as the result of a moral environment which has been practically Pagan or of a false presentation of the Christian Gospel, are absolutely indifferent to Christ or in conscious antagonism to Him. Such persons will not desire church membership; if in any case they do, they come under the general rule that only those who are in some sense Christians should be members of Christian churches. Their condition is morally identical with that of heathen men who have never been brought face to face with Christ, and their relationship to God must be determined by the same laws. What the New Testament declares concerning the infinite importance of faith must, from the nature of the case, refer to those to whom faith is possible. To reject Christ is to fail to discover in Him the supreme revelation of the righteousness and love of God; it is to hear the voice of God, and not to recognise it, or not to obey it; it is to see the light of God, and to shrink from it. But Christ cannot be rejected where He is not known.

In every variety of awful and glorious description, in every variety of menace and of promise, the infinite contrast between those who receive the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Sovereign and the Saviour of the human race, and those who reject Him is emphasised in the New Testament. The energy with which this contrast is affirmed cannot be sufficiently illustrated by the quotation of "proof-texts," though these are numerous, solemn, and decisive. It is enforced by the whole contents of the Christian revelation; by all that Christ has made known concerning the Divine ideal of human righteousness, as well as by all that He has made known concerning the Divine ideal of human blessedness; by all that He has revealed concerning God and concerning man in His incarnation, His teaching, His miracles, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension into heaven.*

Those whom a church receives into its fellowship it acknowledges as Christians. But if those only are Christians, in any deep and serious meaning of the word, who have personal faith in Christ, personal faith should be made the condition of church fellowship.

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* Nearly all this is true, even if we believe that the New Testament teaches or permits a belief in the ultimate restoration of all men to God. As long as a man who knows enough of Christ to believe in Him does not believe, he is among those who have received neither the remission of sins nor the great gift of eternal life. Christian righteousness is impossible to him, and he is in peril of what Paul describes as "the wrath of God." The theory of Christian universalism does not deny the existence of this awful difference between those who are "in Christ" and those who are not; it simply affirms that at last, either in this world or in worlds unknown, the difference will cease; but that it will only cease when, as the result of the Divine love revealing itself both in anger and compassion, the authority of Christ is no longer resisted and His grace no longer refused.

III.

The same conception of the Church that requires that only those who believe in Christ should be admitted into a Christian church requires that none who believe in Him should be refused admission.

(I.) *Christ founded the Church for all that believe in Him.* There is nothing in the account of the Church contained in the New Testament, there is nothing in the nature of the Church itself, to suggest that Christ required any other qualification for membership than faith in Himself. The Church is His society, not ours. It is a society for His brethren—for all His brethren; for His friends—for all His friends. To impose conditions of church membership that exclude any of those who are the brethren and friends of Christ is to defeat the purpose for which He founded the Church.

(II.) *Christ has made it the duty of all that believe in Him to enter the Church.* By refusing to receive any of those who believe in Christ, a church prevents them from fulfilling an obligation which Christ has imposed upon them.

(III.) *The blessings conferred by church fellowship are meant for all that believe in Christ.* If men are the friends of Christ, we do them a cruel wrong by refusing them a place as guests at His table. If they are the brethren of Christ, we inflict a grave injury on their spiritual life by refusing to receive them with brotherly affection and confidence. As the Gospel of Christ is intended for men of all races and all lands, and cannot be deliberately withheld from any man without guilt, the strength, the safety, the blessedness, and whatever other blessings come from membership of the Church are intended for all that have received the Gospel; and to withhold these blessings from any man that acknowledges Christ as the Son of God

and Saviour of men is to violate the obligations of Christian brotherhood, and it may even imperil his spiritual life.

IV. *A Christian society which imposes any other conditions of membership than faith in Christ is a sect, and not, in the highest sense of the term, a Christian church.* It is a private Christian club. It receives persons into membership, not because they are the brethren of Christ, but because they are the brethren of Christ professing certain religious opinions or observing certain religious practices. All others, though among them there may be many whom it also acknowledges to be Christ's brethren, it excludes. It is not enough that a man has faith in Christ and is loyal to Him; he must also accept the opinions and observe the practices which have commended themselves to the judgment of the persons by whom the religious society has been constituted. It is a society, not for all Christians, but for a particular description of Christians. It is a sect—not a Church.

The polity of every church has its roots in its theology, in its conceptions of the relations between God and man, and of the nature of the Christian redemption. Congregationalism, in affirming that only those who have personal faith in Christ should be members of the Church of Christ, asserts in its polity the unique and infinite importance which is attributed to personal faith by the whole contents of the Christian Revelation. But, if any other qualification for church membership is demanded, the force of this testimony to the unique and infinite importance of personal faith in Christ is broken. Faith in Christ is the only condition of the remission of sins and of eternal salvation; this great truth is obscured if a church insists on anything besides faith in Christ as a condition of church membership.

CHAPTER IV.

PRINCIPLE IV.—BY THE WILL OF CHRIST ALL THE MEMBERS OF A CHRISTIAN CHURCH ARE DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE TO HIM FOR MAINTAINING HIS AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH.

ASSUMING that the Church, like every other organised society, must have regularly appointed officers, the question to be considered in this chapter is, whether the officers alone are directly responsible to Christ for maintaining His supreme authority in the Church, or whether the responsibility—and the direct responsibility—lies upon all the members of the Church.

According to the will of Christ the Christian Church is to consist of Christians only, but no Christian is to be refused membership. To whom has Christ entrusted the responsibility of giving effect to His will? Has He given authority to church officers to receive men into the Church and to exclude from it? or does this authority belong to the whole Church?

On the assumption that it is the will of Christ that the Church should have regularly appointed officers, in whom has Christ placed the responsibility of determining whether particular persons have the necessary qualifications for office? If, as may happen, any church officers, after their appointment, prove to be incompetent or unfaithful, who are to judge of their incompetence or unfaithfulness? Is it the will of Christ that the Church as a whole should elect and depose its officers? Or has this power, with the corresponding responsibility, been vested in some other authority?

I.

To answer these questions we have first to examine the place and authority given to the Church as a whole in apostolic times and with apostolic sanction.

(I.) *The Church as a whole was responsible to Christ for the election of men to fill various offices in the Church.*

1. Immediately after our Lord's ascension to heaven, about a hundred and twenty of His disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem. There were women in the assembly as well as men. Peter reminded them that of the twelve apostles one had betrayed Christ and had come to a miserable end. It was necessary to fill his vacant office. "Of the men therefore with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day that He was received up from us, of these must one become a witness with us of His resurrection" (Acts i. 21). The apostles had exceptional powers and exceptional responsibilities. Their office was the very highest in the Christian Church. They were, in a very special sense, the representatives of Christ now that His earthly ministry was over. Every one of them had been selected for his position of authority by Christ Himself. If another apostle was to be appointed in the place of Judas, he, too, must be appointed by Christ; and nothing would have seemed more natural or more fitting than for the apostles themselves, as the representatives of Christ, to select and appoint their colleague.

But the responsibility was placed upon the whole company of believers. The Church as a whole was regarded as the true organ of the will of Christ, and the Church—not the apostles alone—"put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias" (Acts i. 23).

Between these two the Church could come to no decision. There was a concurrence of belief that it was the will of Christ that one of them should be appointed to the powers, and perils, and glories of the apostleship; but which of them was elect of Christ the Church could not determine. Peter and his colleagues did not attempt to decide the question which the Church had left undecided. But "they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew of these two the one whom Thou hast chosen, to take the place in this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas fell away, that he might go to his own place. And they gave lots for them; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts i. 24—26).

This remarkable narrative is a decisive proof of the place which, in the judgment of the apostles, belonged to the commonalty of the Church. *The whole Church was called upon to elect an apostle.*

2. One of the first and most characteristic manifestations of the power of the new faith was the sudden creation of a fervent brotherly affection among all who acknowledged the authority of Christ: "Neither was there among them any that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto each, according as any one had need" (Acts iv. 34, 35). In those early days the Church was a great charitable organisation. No Christian man was suffered to be in want while his Christian brethren were able to relieve him. The wealth of one was the wealth of all; for "not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common" (Acts iv. 32). The homeless were lodged; the naked clothed; the hungry fed. For the poor widows of the Church there seems to have been a common table every day.

At first the whole administration of the funds of the Church

was in the hands of the apostles. At least, they were responsible for it; though they must have entrusted many of the details to other hands. But "when the number of the disciples was multiplying," the financial and charitable organisation of the Church broke down. Some of the Hellenistic Jews complained that the Hellenistic widows "were neglected in the daily ministration." The apostles might have transferred to persons of their own selection and appointment the duties which they were now unable to discharge. But they took another course. They "called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not fit that we should forsake the Word of God, and serve tables. Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. . . . And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose" seven men, "whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them."

As the whole Church had elected an apostle, so now *the whole Church elected the men who were to administer the charity of the Church.*

3. Of the manner in which the "elders," "bishops," or "pastors" of the apostolic churches were elected to office there is no record in the New Testament.

The statement of Luke in Acts xiii. 14, "And when they [Paul and Barnabas] had appointed for them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they had believed," throws no light on the question, How were the elders elected?

Paul and Barnabas were on their way back to Antioch at the close of Paul's first missionary journey, and they were visiting the cities in which they had preached the Gospel and formed churches a few months before. On their first visit these churches were very imperfectly organised. For several weeks, perhaps for several months, groups of Chris-

tian converts—true churches—were probably meeting every Lord's-day for Christian worship and for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, with no regularly appointed ministers. But it would have been perilous to leave them any longer without a firmer organisation, and therefore, when Paul and Barnabas visited them a second time, they "appointed . . . elders in every church." The persons invested with office may have been chosen by the churches themselves; they may have been chosen by Paul and Barnabas. All that Luke tells us is that Paul and Barnabas "appointed" them to office.

It is reasonable to assume that, in the selection of the men who were to be invested with official responsibilities, the judgment of Paul and Barnabas would have great weight; but, considering the place and function of the commonalty of the church in apostolic times, it is equally reasonable to assume that the men who were appointed to office were in every case appointed with the consent and concurrence of the church.

From the epistle written by Clement of Rome, in the name of the Roman Church, to the Church at Corinth, towards the close of the first century (about A.D. 95), it is clear that in apostolic times the whole church not only concurred in the appointment of its elders, but had the power to depose them. The Corinthian Church was rent with strife, as it had been forty years earlier. "A few head-strong and self-willed persons" had raised what is described as a "detestable and unholy sedition" against some of the "elders" of the church. Clement tells the Corinthian Christians that to remove from office elders who had been properly appointed, whose character was without stain, and who had discharged their official duties faithfully, was a sin.

"Those, therefore, who were appointed by them [the apostles], or afterward by other men of repute, *with the consent of the whole church*, and have ministered unblame-

ably to the flock of Christ in lowliness of mind, peacefully and with all modesty, and for a long time have borne a good report with all—these men we consider to be unjustly thrust out from their ministration. . . . Blessed are those presbyters who have gone before, seeing that their departure was fruitful and ripe; for they have no fear lest any one should remove them from their appointed place. For we see that ye have displaced certain persons, though they were living honourably, from the ministration which they kept blamelessly."*

The testimony of Clement's letter to the supreme authority of the whole Church in apostolic times is remarkable and conclusive. Some of the Corinthian elders appointed by the apostles had died; others were still living;† but not even their apostolic appointment could shelter them from deposition by the Church. Clement is very strenuous in maintaining that reverence and submission are due to the presbyters; he denounces in unmeasured language the conduct of the men who led the "sedition;" he condemns the conduct of the Church as "utterly shameful." If the Corinthian Church had asserted powers which other churches did not claim, or which the apostles had not recognised, Clement would have known it; but from the beginning of the letter to the end there is no suggestion that in deposing its ministers—even if the apostles had appointed them—the Church had exceeded the limits of its authority. The power of the commonalty of the Church to remove ministers from office is implicitly acknowledged, though in the particular instance the use of the power is declared to be sinful. And as the Church had power to

* Dr. Lightfoot's translation, "S. Clement of Rome," Appendix, p. 369. The phrase "with the consent of the whole church" appears to refer both to the elders who were appointed by the apostles themselves and to those who were appointed "afterward by other men of repute."

† Dr. Lightfoot's "S. Clement of Rome." See Notes to Text, p. 137.

depose its "elders" its "consent" was necessary to their appointment.

(II.) *The Church as a whole was responsible to Christ for the exercise of church discipline.*

1. The power of discipline was entrusted to the Church by our Lord Himself in the words recorded in Matt. xviii. 15—20. To separate a man from the Christian community is to inflict upon him a penalty of awful magnitude. It is to exclude him from the assembly in which Christ Himself is present, and to deprive him of all the Divine aids to righteousness which are assured to the communion of saints. The excluded man is a Christian "brother" no longer; he passes out from the light of the Church into the darkness of the world that lies around it. Henceforth, and till he is restored, he is to the Church "as the Gentile and the publican." The act of the visible Church would have no real effect on the invisible relations of the man to God, and to the Divine Kingdom, if it were not sustained by the Divine authority; but when a Church is really gathered together in Christ's name, when it is of one mind with Him who is present in the assembly, the act of the Church is the act of Christ, and what is bound on earth is bound in heaven, and what is loosed on earth is loosed in heaven.

This august power of representing and carrying into effect the authority of Christ is not entrusted to church officers, but to the Church as a whole. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

2. The power of discipline was exercised by the whole Church in apostolic times.

One of the members of the Corinthian Church had been guilty of flagrant immorality—immorality so flagrant that it was not tolerated by the moral sense of heathen men. The church, "puffed up" with a conceit of its spiritual knowledge and of its brilliant spiritual gifts, had been indifferent to the moral offence. It was too excited by "visions." "tongues,"

and "revelations," by the "wisdom" and perhaps by the eloquence* of its teachers, to care about plain questions of morality. Paul tells the Corinthian Christians that the sin of which one of them had been guilty ought to have humbled their pride and changed their excited self-complacency into sorrow. "Ye are puffed up, and did not rather mourn, that he that had done this deed might be taken away from among you" (1 Cor. v. 2). The man ought to have been dealt with as soon as he committed the offence. As for Paul, his mind was made up, he was clear as to what their duty was, and he was ready to share the responsibility of excluding the man from the church. "I verily, being absent in body but present in spirit, have already, as though I were present, judged him that hath so wrought this thing, in the name of our Lord Jesus, ye being gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened. For our passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ" (1 Cor. v. 3—8).

The points which deserve consideration are these:—

(*a*) Paul condemns the church for having neglected its duty. It ought to have removed the wrongdoer from the Christian community without waiting for any rebuke from him (1 Cor. v. 2). His condemnation falls, not on the officers of the church, but on the church itself—"the church of God which is at Corinth," which he describes as consisting of "them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus,

* Some of the Corinthians said of Paul, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account" (2 Cor. x. 10). There is another suggestion of the value which the Corinthians attached to eloquence in 2 Cor. xi. 6: "Though I be rude in speech, yet am I not in knowledge."

called to be saints" (1 Cor. i. 2). There is no specific condemnation of the bishops or elders of the church; it was the church as a whole that was "puffed up" with the pride which made it careless about morals, and therefore negligent of discipline.

(*b*) It is to the church as a whole—not to its officers specially—that he addresses the charge, "Purge out the old leaven" (1 Cor. v. 7); and it is to the church as a whole that Paul attributes the authority to form a judgment on the moral conduct of members of the church, and to exclude those who were guilty of immorality. Neither he nor they had anything to do with judging men who were not in communion with the church; but for judging those who were in communion both he and they were responsible. "What have I to do with judging them that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within, whereas them that are without God judgeth? Put away the wicked man from among yourselves."

(*c*) Paul does not on his own authority exclude the wrongdoer from the church. He tells the Corinthian Christians their duty. He says that when they are "gathered together" he himself will be present with them in spirit, and will unite with them in the act of exclusion; but the act is to be theirs (1 Cor. v. 3—6). It is after the remarkable passage in which Paul declares his own judgment that he charges the church to "put away the wicked man" from their communion.

(*d*) The man was actually excluded from the church by the church itself.*

* This is the common opinion; but Paul's manner of referring to the action of the church (2 Cor. ii. 1—11) certainly contains some ground for the hypothesis that the church did not fully carry out the Apostle's directions, and that he recognised and acknowledged its right to adopt a more merciful course than he himself had thought necessary. Some "punishment" (2 Cor. ii. 6), however, was inflicted; and it was inflicted by the majority—a minority offering resistance.

(*e*) The exclusion made him penitent, and the Apostle believed that he might be safely restored to communion. "Sufficient to such a one is this punishment, which was inflicted by the many," or, as the Revisers have given it in the margin, "by the more" (2 Cor. ii. 6). The exclusion was not the act of Paul, which the church had only to accept and to register; nor was it the act of the officers of the church, which the church had only to approve; it was the act of "the many" or of "the majority"—that is, it was the act of the majority of the church itself, and not merely of its representatives or rulers.

(*f*) And it was the church as a whole that was to restore the penitent to fellowship. Paul recommends that, as the church had punished the sin, the church should now remit it. They were to "forgive him and comfort him." With affectionate earnestness the Apostle says, "I beseech you to confirm your love towards him" (2 Cor. ii. 8); the sin was to be forgotten, and the penitent to be received back with hearty affection and confidence. As Paul had united with the church in inflicting the punishment, he unites with the church in removing it: "To whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also" (2 Cor. ii. 9).

From first to last the church as a whole is made responsible for the exercise of discipline.*

II.

Why should the responsibilities imposed on the commonalty of Christian churches in apostolic times be withdrawn?

The members of the churches founded by the apostles had been recently converted, either from Judaism or from Paganism. Their knowledge of Christian truth must have been most rudimentary. They inherited no Christian traditions. For a

* See NOTE I. at end of chapter.

time they had no Christian literature. Even their "bishops," "elders," and "leaders" or "rulers" were without the sagacity which is disciplined by a long experience of church life. Nothing would have seemed more natural than to have created a strong centralised system of ecclesiastical government under the immediate control of the apostles themselves. Had the apostles selected and appointed all the officers of the churches, and reserved to themselves the power of removing them, this would have been natural. Had they entrusted to church officers of their own selection the administration of discipline, and reserved to themselves the power of dealing with cases of exceptional difficulty or of interfering authoritatively in cases in which the subordinate rulers of the church had not acted with sufficient vigour, or had acted unjustly or unwisely—this, too, would have been natural.

If the apostles had exerted this authority, no conclusive argument could have been drawn from their example in support of any system of polity which in later times withheld responsibility and power from the Christian commonalty. The imperfect development of Christian life and Christian knowledge in the primitive churches, and the unique position of the apostles, might have justified, and even required, the assertion of apostolic supremacy; and it would have been open to us to contend that when the apostles had passed away, and the churches had acquired greater maturity of Christian character and a deeper knowledge of the contents of the Christian revelation, it was fitting that their responsibilities and powers should be enlarged.

But in the judgment of the apostles it was necessary that, at whatever risks, the polity of the churches should be built, from the very first, on the eternal principles and facts of the Christian revelation. It belongs to the very substance of the Gospel that all who believe in Christ are made one with Him, share His life, and receive the illumination of His spirit. Not the apostles alone, but the most recent convert

from Judaism and from Paganism, were branches in the True Vine and members of the Body of Christ. The converts from Judaism might as yet know very little of the large spiritual freedom of the new Faith, might cling to the observances of the Jewish law as a necessary part of their obedience to God, might regard all Gentiles—even those who had received the Christian Gospel—with very much of the old Jewish contempt, and might shrink from contact with them; the traditions of fifteen centuries might in many ways repress and impair the energy of their new life; but still they were "in Christ." The converts from Paganism, like some of those in the Church at Corinth, might corrupt the purity of the Christian Faith by opinions derived from Pagan speculation, and might even deny the resurrection of the dead—one of the great promises of the Christian Gospel; or, like some of the members of the Church at Ephesus, they might need to be warned against the grossest and most shameful vices; but still they were "in Christ." And this wonderful fact could not be disregarded in the organisation of the Christian Church.

Christ is the true Lord of the Church, and His authority is to be exerted through the concurrent action of all the members of the Church, because, according to the Christian ideal, all the members of the Church are one with Him. It is not only the officers of the Church that are in Him, but the commonalty of the Church; and, therefore, it is through the commonalty of the Church, as well as its officers, that He maintains His authority and gives effect to His will. The great contention of Congregationalism is not that every Christian man has a *right* to share in the government of the Church, but that every Christian man is directly *responsible* to Christ for securing in the discipline, doctrine, and worship of the Church the supremacy of its Divine Founder and Lord. This responsibility rests upon the wonderful union between Christ and all who are restored to God through Him. He is the

life of their life. He reveals Himself through them. The *right* of all church members to take part in the government of the Church is an inference; they cannot discharge their responsibility unless the right is conceded.

There is another characteristic element of the Christian revelation which is expressed in the polity of the apostolic churches. All that believe in Christ are brethren, and the Church is "the household of faith." Whatever transient distinctions may divide them elsewhere, in the Church Christian men are the sons of God, and the heirs of immortal righteousness and glory. It is one of the chief ends of the Church to realise the ideal of Christian brotherhood; and this ideal would have been obscured, and one of the chief ends for which the Church existed would have been defeated, if the apostles had not entrusted the government of the Church to the whole Christian community. The poorest and most miserable men, when they were received into the Christian Church, were assured that they were the "brethren" of Christ and the brethren of all who were in the Church before them. The assurance was confirmed by the discovery that all the members of this new and wonderful society shared common responsibilities. There were differences of function, but there was equality of rights.

The dangers of this polity in apostolic times were enormous, and they are vividly illustrated by the schisms and party-spirit which broke up the ideal unity of the church at Corinth; by the disorders which destroyed the solemnity of its assemblies for worship; by its passion for rhetorical display in its teachers, and its indifference to the graver and nobler elements which give real value to all religious instruction; by its delight in adventurous speculation, and its want of care for common morality. In our own times, and in our own country, the dangers, though infinitely less serious, have not disappeared. But if the apostles had the courage to accept the ideal polity when its perils were greatest, we ought not to decline to accept it now.

Congregationalism is an attempt to assert the great truth that all Christian men are brethren. It is also an attempt to assert the truth that all Christian men are really "in Christ," and that, therefore, the whole Church is the organ of His will. It is a translation into polity of Christ's own account of the relations between Himself and His disciples in the parable of the Vine and the branches

NOTE I.—THE CHURCH AT CORINTH.—The argument for Congregationalism drawn from the manner in which the church at Corinth was required to exercise discipline is met by the suggestion that we are not sure that the church at Corinth had any regularly appointed officers when Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians were written.

It is true that there is no mention of the bishops and deacons in the salutation of either epistle. But from this omission nothing can be concluded. There is the same omission in the salutations of the two epistles to the church at Thessalonica, and yet it is certain that the church had its regularly appointed officers, for Paul writes: "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 exceeding highly in love for their work's sake"(1 Thess. v. 13). If it is said that in the Epistles to the Corinthians there is no recognition at all of church officers, the same may be said of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians. And this

omission is the more remarkable because Paul had heard that there were "disorderly" persons in the church—men that would not work, "busybodies." The church is exhorted to "have no company" with men of this kind, and to "admonish" them. But no special charge is given to the church officers to deal with them.

In writing to the "churches of Galatia" Paul does not separate the commonalty of the churches from the officers of the churches; he addresses them together; and the only reference to church officers is in the exhortation, "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Gal. vi. 6). In writing to the "saints which are at Ephesus" there is no special salutation for the "elders" or "bishops," and yet we know there were "elders" or "bishops" in the city long before the epistle was written. Nor is there any reference to the Ephesian elders in the course of the epistle itself; the only reference to church officers is of a general kind (chap. iv. 11).

Nor are "the bishops and deacons" specially named in the salutation to the "saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse," but in the body of the epistle there are the remarkable words—often quoted in early "Brownist" pamphlets to show that a church has the right to admonish its pastor—"Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it" (Col. iv. 17). Archippus, however, was probably minister of the church in the neighbouring city of Laodicea, and perhaps the writers of "Brownist" pamphlets would have said that this makes the words only the more remarkable.

The Epistle to the Philippians is the only one in which Paul begins by saluting "the bishops and deacons" separately from the saints. The omission in the salutations to the church at Corinth of any recognition of the church officers is therefore not remarkable. To have recognised them in the salutation would have been contrary to Paul's

usual manner. We have to ask why he recognised them in the salutation to the church at Philippi—not why he omitted to recognise them in the salutation to the church at Corinth. The modern distinction between "clergy" and "laity" did not exist.

It seems extremely improbable that a church like that at Corinth, which was evidently of considerable size and had been founded for a considerable time, should have been without "elders" or "bishops." In Lystra, Iconium, the Pisidian Antioch, and the other cities in that district, "elders" were appointed a few months after the first converts had been gathered (Acts xiv. 21—23). A very much longer interval separates even the First Epistle to the Corinthians from the foundation of the Corinthian church. Paul spent a year and a-half at Corinth on his first visit (Acts xviii. 11). From Corinth he sailed for Syria, and spent some time at Antioch; afterwards he went through Galatia and Phrygia "stablishing all the disciples" (Acts xviii. 18—23). Then he came down to Ephesus, where he remained three years (Acts xx. 31); and it was apparently towards the close of his stay in Ephesus that he wrote the First Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. xvi. 8). Four or five years must have passed since Paul left Corinth. It does not seem likely that during all this time the church was without officers.

Nor is it quite certain that the First Epistle to the Corinthians does not contain allusions to the officers of the church. Is it not possible that the "elders" or "bishops" themselves were leaders of the rival factions? May not this have been Paul's reason for transferring to himself and Apollos "in a figure" his account of the true position of the "ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God"? Perhaps, with his fine sense of courtesy, he was anxious not to pronounce a direct condemnation on the rulers of the Corinthian church; and therefore he speaks of his own position and the position of Apollos rather than of theirs. He and Apollos

are "ministers," "stewards," and "it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." His own judgment of himself, though he was conscious of no unfaithfulness, was nothing; the Lord is the true Judge. He was speaking of himself and of Apollos, but he was thinking of his brethren in Corinth. Is there not much greater force in the passage if we suppose that it was intended to rebuke the unfaithfulness of regularly appointed church officers rather than the factiousness of unofficial persons?

Finally. Paul had sent Timothy to Corinth, who, he says "shall put you in remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, even as I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Cor. iv. 17). He occupied a position very similar to that of Titus, whom Paul entrusted with the work of completing the organisation of churches which were without office-bearers (Tit. i. 5). Had the church at Corinth been without elders it seems likely that one of the chief objects of the visit of Timothy, especially after all the disorder from which the church had suffered, would have been to "appoint" them. But throughout the epistle there is nothing said about the appointment of such officers; they had probably been appointed long before.

As a mere question of polemics, it might be in the interest of Congregationalism to contend that the church at Corinth was left for four or five years without any "elders" or "bishops." The responsibilities of the commonalty of the church, even where church officers exist, are sufficiently illustrated without any appeal to this case of discipline in the church at Corinth; and if it is contended that for four or five years, with the concurrence of Paul, the church had been meeting for worship and Christian instruction, and had been celebrating the Lord's Supper, without officers of any kind, this is a final answer to the claims of sacerdotalism. During four or five years, according to this hypothesis, there was no "priest" in the Church at Corinth to consecrate the bread and the

wine, no "priest" to receive confession and to pronounce absolution.

NOTE II.—THE WORD "APPOINT."—Calvin, Beza, Erasmus, Owen, Doddridge, Coleman, and others have contended that Acts xiv. 23 gives direct support to popular election.* To these may be added one of the very highest recent exegetical authorities—Meyer—who, in his commentary on the Acts, *in loc.*, insists that the word used by Luke (χειροτονήσαντες) shows that the elders were chosen by popular suffrage: "Paul and Barnabas chose by vote presbyters for them—*i.e.*, they conducted their selection by vote in the churches." But Dr. Davidson is, in my judgment, clearly in the right in rejecting this interpretation of the passage.

Dr. Hatch, in his article on ordination in the "Dictionary of Christian Antiquities," gives an excellent account of the use of χειροτονεῖν: "Its meaning was originally 'to elect,' but it came afterwards to mean, even in classical Greek, simply 'to appoint to office,' without itself indicating the particular mode of appointment. That the latter was its ordinary meaning in Hellenistic Greek, and, consequently, in the first ages of Church history, is clear from a large number of instances—*e.g.*, in Josephus it is used of the appointment of David as king by God; of the appointment of Jonathan as high-priest by Alexander; in Philo it is used of the appointment of Joseph as governor by Pharaoh," &c.

No instance is given in which the word means "to conduct an election," and this meaning must be assigned to it in Acts xiv. 23 if the passage is to be quoted in favour of the election of elders by popular suffrage. Paul and Barnabas *appointed* the elders; how they were *elected* Luke does not tell us.

* Davidson's "Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament," p. 158.

CHAPTER V.

PRINCIPLE V.—BY THE WILL OF CHRIST EVERY SOCIETY OF CHRISTIANS ORGANISED FOR CHRISTIAN WORSHIP, INSTRUCTION, AND FELLOWSHIP IS A CHRISTIAN CHURCH, AND IS INDEPENDENT OF EXTERNAL CONTROL.

THIS is an immediate inference from the principle illustrated in the previous chapter. In strict accuracy it might be described as the statement of that principle in another form. If all the members of a Christian Church are directly responsible to Christ for the maintenance of His authority in the Church, they must elect their own officers, regulate their own worship, determine what persons shall be received into their fellowship, and what persons shall be excluded from it. The Church must be free from the interference of any authority external to itself, and it must not be too large for all its members to meet regularly to fulfil the trust which they have received from Christ. Congregationalism is impossible without Independency.

I.

The apostolic churches were Independent churches as well as Congregational churches; they were Independent churches because they were Congregational churches.

(I.) *There is not a single case in the New Testament in which a Christian assembly acknowledges, or is required to acknowledge, any ecclesiastical authority external to itself.*

The church at Antioch (Acts xiii. 1, xiv. 27) was founded by members of the church at Jerusalem (Acts xi. 19—21); but when it originated the first great movement for preaching

the Gospel throughout the Pagan world it acted independently. This movement was one of critical importance. It marked a new epoch in the history of the Christian Faith. But the church at Antioch sent out Paul and Barnabas without asking any authority from the church at Jerusalem—without even consulting it. When Paul and Barnabas returned from their missionary journey it was to the church at Antioch that they "rehearsed all things that God had done with them, and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts xiv. 27).

This independent action was taken in obedience to the will of Christ; for it was at Antioch—not at Jerusalem—that the Holy Ghost said, "Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have appointed them" (Acts xiii. 2). If the church at Antioch had been under the control of any ecclesiastical authority external to itself, this was precisely one of those moments in which the church would have been required to recognise that authority. But it stood in the immediate presence of Christ, and was free from all control but His. Its independent action was sanctioned—was commanded—by the Spirit of God Himself.

The church at Corinth was broken up into parties. Some of the Corinthian Christians denied the resurrection of the dead—one of the chief articles of the Gospel. The church generally was indifferent to the claims of Christian morality, and permitted one of its members to live in gross sin. It is clear from Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians that there was no authority outside the church itself that was responsible for reconciling its schisms, for correcting its grave doctrinal errors, for removing from it any member whose moral conduct was inconsistent with the law of Christ. Had such an authority existed, the condition of the church was so bad as to call for its immediate and vigorous action; had such an authority existed, Paul would have condemned it for not acting sooner. But the church stood apart. It was an Inde-

pendent church. Paul, though an apostle, could only tell it what was the will of Christ. Whether it would obey Christ's will he had to leave to the church itself. He had no power to enforce obedience. If the church chose to retain in its communion the man whom Paul declared should be excluded, Paul had no authority to exclude him. The church was responsible to Christ alone.

(II.) *There is nothing in the New Testament to suggest that the apostles intended that separate Christian assemblies should be drawn into a larger ecclesiastical organisation under a central government.*

The church at Jerusalem had no control over the church at Antioch; nor were Jerusalem and Antioch under the government of any supreme ecclesiastical authority.

The churches which Paul and Barnabas founded in Lycaonia, Pisidia, and Pamphilia on their first missionary journey were independent of the church at Antioch and of each other. In every city there was a church, and in every church there were elders (Acts xiv. 21—23), but the narrative of Luke gives the impression that every church stood apart. No attempt was made to bring them into any ecclesiastical confederation or to place them under a common government. In the account of Paul's second visit to this part of Asia Minor we are told that the "churches"—not "the church"—"were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily" (Acts xvi. 5). They were standing apart still, and Paul did nothing to draw them together.

In the western part of Asia Minor there was a church at Ephesus, another church at Colosse, and another church at Laodicea (Col. iv. 16). These churches were so near together that it would have been easy to place them under the rule of one bishop, or of one representative Church Assembly; but each of these Christian societies was directly responsible to Christ.

Philippi was not far from Thessalonica, but there was a

church at Philippi and a church at Thessalonica. Cenchreæ was only nine miles from Corinth, but there was a church at Corinth and also a church at Cenchreæ (Rom. xvi. 1).

(III.) *That in apostolic times every organised Christian assembly was an independent church is confirmed by the manner in which the words "church" and "churches" are used by the writers of the New Testament.*

They speak of the church at Jerusalem (Acts viii. 1, xi. 22), the church at Antioch (Acts xiii. 1, xiv. 27), the church of the Thessalonians (1 Thess. i. 1), the church at Philippi (Phil. iv. 15), the church at Corinth (1 Cor. i. 2), the church at Cenchreæ (Rom. xvi. 1). The Christians in each of these cities were able to meet together for worship and for instruction in the Christian Faith, for the election of their officers, and for the exercise of church discipline.

On the other hand, in no single instance do the writers of the New Testament speak of "the Church" of any province or large district of country. The Christians of Macedonia did not constitute a Church; Paul speaks of the "*churches* of Macedonia" (1 Cor. viii. 1). The Christians of Galatia did not constitute a Church; Paul addresses the "*churches* of Galatia" (Gal. i. 1). The Christians of Syria and Cilicia did not constitute a Church; Luke tells us that Paul "went through Syria and Cilicia confirming the *churches*" (Acts xv. 41). The Christians in Asia Minor did not constitute a Church; John addresses "the seven *churches* of Asia" (Rev. i. 4).*

The action of the apostles was uniform. Every church they founded stood apart from every other church. Whether it consisted mainly of Jews inheriting a monotheistic faith, disciplined from their childhood to the morality of the Jewish Law, familiar with the manifestations of God's righteousness

* For the use of the word "church" in Acts ix. 31 see APPENDIX on "The word 'Church.'"

and love in the wonderful history of their race, instructed in the writings of Psalmists and Prophets who saw afar off the glory of Christ and longed for His coming; or whether it consisted mainly of Gentiles drawn from the baser levels of Pagan society, with their imagination still under the spell of Pagan superstitions, and with their moral life still infected by the foul atmosphere of Pagan vices, made no difference. With a courage—with an audacity of faith—which, when we look back upon it, creates astonishment, the apostles trusted every Christian society which they founded to itself, or rather to the defence and government of Christ and the illumination of His Spirit.

II.

The reasons for taking a different course were so strong and so obvious that the apostles could not have failed to recognise them. What would have been more natural than to have drawn the weaker churches of Judea and Samaria into organic union with the powerful church at Jerusalem? In the church at Jerusalem there were for some time not only apostles, there were "elder brethren," some of whom may have been the personal friends of Christ, all of whom had probably been believers in Christ from the great day on which the Spirit of God descended on the disciples and the triumphs of the Christian Gospel began. James the brother of our Lord, who remained in Jerusalem, and was the leader of the church after the apostles had been driven from the city, was a man of so much distinction that he is named with Peter and John as if his personal authority was equal to theirs. It was a church rich in knowledge, rich in experience, rich in sanctity. What would have been more natural than to have given it power to control the disorders and to correct the heresies which were likely to arise in a church like that at Antioch, the majority of whose members were probably converts from heathenism?

Whatever objections, drawn from expediency, have been urged against the isolation and independency of churches in later times might have been urged with still greater force against the isolation and independency of churches during the thirty or forty perilous years which followed the Ascension of our Lord. But to the apostles the ideal church was the Christian assembly; and from the attempt to give reality to the ideal church nothing could divert them. They had learnt from their Master that wherever two or three are gathered together in His name, He is in the midst of them (Matt. xviii. 20); and they desired that each church should find the bond of its unity and its defence against all dangers in Him.

Those great words of Christ's are the real ground and justification of the independent form of church polity. Congregationalists do not contend that any number of Christian men have a natural right to form a church of their own, to celebrate worship as they please, and to observe the Christian Sacraments according to what seems to them the mind of Christ, without the interference of any external ecclesiastical authority. Their contention is of a much more serious kind.

They say that when even two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ, Christ is in the assembly. He is there, not merely to receive worship and to confer blessing, but to make the prayers of the assembly His own, to control and direct its deliberations, and to invest its action with His own authority. He does not stand apart; He is one of the company. If a Christian man has a complaint to urge against a brother, Christ is there to hear it; and if the assembly is really gathered together in His name, if its members are completely one with Him, their decision is His decision; what they bind on earth is bound in heaven, what they loose on earth is loosed in heaven. From an assembly in which Christ himself is present, and whose decisions He confirms, there can be no appeal.

Nor is it in cases of discipline alone that the decisions of the church are the decisions of Christ. In the reception of members into its fellowship, in the election and deposition of its officers, in the regulation of its worship, in the direction and conduct of all its agencies for relieving the miseries of the sick and the poor, for perfecting the life of its own members, and for evangelising the world, the ideal church is acting under the guidance of Christ, is giving effect to His laws, and is the organ of His will. Whenever it meets it meets in His name; it has no occasion to meet except to rejoice in Christ, to learn His mind, to receive His benediction, and to do His work. Whenever it meets, Christ Himself is present, and the acts of the church are the acts of Christ. *His* authority cannot be challenged.

Independency is an attempt to realise this august conception. The members of Congregational churches may be far enough from reaching that complete union with Christ which is the perfection of the Christian life. In their church meetings they may often forget that Christ Himself is present, and that they have to do His will, and not to please themselves. But to surrender the independence of their churches would be an act of despair. It would be a confession that they have lost faith in the assurance of Christ that when those who believe in Him are assembled in His name, He Himself is among them, and authoritatively confirms their decisions.*

* Robert Brown expressed this truth in his own daring way:—"The voice of the whole people, guided by the elders and forwardest, is said to be the voice of God. . . . Therefore, the meetings together of many churches, also of every whole church, and of the elders therein, is above the apostle, and above the prophet, the evangelist, the pastor, and every particular elder. . . . And this also meant Paul when he saith (1 Cor. ii. 22), 'We are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' So that the apostle is inferior to the church, and the church is inferior to Christ, and Christ, concerning His manhood and office in the church, is inferior to God" ("A True and Short Declaration," &c.). Brown believed

The ideal righteousness illustrated in the teaching of Christ and in the perfection of His own life and character transcends the limits of Christian achievement, but it still remains the law of personal conduct; and the ideal conception of the Church may never be completely realised by any Christian society, but it still remains the law of church polity.

In maintaining that by the will of Christ every society of Christians organised for Christian worship, instruction, and fellowship is a Christian church, and is independent of external control, Congregational Independency affirms the enduring truth of the great words of Christ, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

NOTE I.—CONGREGATIONALISM AND INDEPENDENCY.—Independency is possible without Congregationalism. A church that asserts and maintains absolute freedom from all external control may entrust the government of the church to its officers, reserving no power to the commonalty of the church to discuss and revise their proceedings. The minister and other church officers may have authority to receive candidates into fellowship, to exclude from fellowship persons whom they may regard as unworthy, to determine finally all questions relating to the worship of the church, its finance, and the administration of its institutions. With such an organisation the Christian commonalty would delegate their responsibilities to the rulers of the church, who alone would be directly

in Congregational councils; in the meeting, not of the representatives of churches, but of the churches themselves, to consider questions of common interest or special difficulty. It is to such councils he refers when he speaks of "meetings together of many churches."

responsible to Christ for maintaining the supremacy of His will. The Christian commonalty would be responsible for the election of their rulers, but, after the election, their responsibility would cease. Such a polity (to borrow a phrase of the Rev. Joseph Fletcher's, in his "History of Independency") might be described as "intra-Congregational Presbyterianism," or, still more accurately, as Presbyterian Independency.

NOTE II.—THE CHURCHES AT JERUSALEM, EPHESUS, AND CORINTH.—It is contended (I.) that, in such large cities as Jerusalem, Ephesus, and Corinth, the Christians were so numerous that they could not have met together as one church, that they must have worshipped in different places, that they must have been organised into distinct religious societies, and that in each of these cities "the church" must have consisted of these associated societies under a representative government. This contention is supposed to derive support (II.) from the large number of Christian teachers in each of these cities. And there are some other arguments which are alleged to strengthen this conclusion.

I.

(I.) *The Church at Jerusalem.*—In Jerusalem three thousand persons were baptized on the Day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 41); after this "the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved" (Acts ii. 47); it has been alleged that "about five thousand men" (Acts iv. 4), besides women, became Christians as the result of the discourse which Peter delivered in the Temple after healing the lame man at "the door of the Temple which is called Beautiful;" we are reminded that after the death of Ananias and Sapphira the apostles worked many miracles, and "multitudes, both of

men and women," were added to the Lord (Acts v. 14); that after the election of "the seven" this enlargement of the church went on rapidly, and "the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts vi. 7); that after the death of Herod "the word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts xii. 24); that when Paul came to Jerusalem with the contributions from the Gentiles for the poor Christians in that city he was reminded "how many thousands" (myriads) there were among the Jews which had believed (Acts xxi. 20).

But (1), if there were several organised congregations in Jerusalem with their own "elders," it is remarkable that there should be nothing in the Acts of the Apostles to suggest their existence. That the Christians of Jerusalem may have had private and informal meetings for Christian fellowship in different parts of the city is possible. There was a time when it was very common for the members of the same Independent church in a large town to meet together in groups for prayer and religious conversation; but these groups were not in any sense "sectional churches," nor were they under a common representative government; all the members of the separate groups were members of the same church, and were expected to be present at the meetings of the church, and to take part in its business.

(2) The number of Christian converts permanently living in Jerusalem and belonging to the church in that city is enormously exaggerated.

(*a*) Jews were continually coming to Jerusalem from remote parts of the world to celebrate the feasts. It is probable that many of these were among the converts who received baptism from the apostles, and who temporarily became members of the church at Jerusalem. But after a few weeks these visitors would return home. Of the three thousand converted on the Day of Pentecost it is probable that a large number were strangers. Of the "many thou-

sands" of believers spoken of in Acts xxi. 21 a large proportion—how large it is impossible to say—were probably Jews whose homes were not in Jerusalem, but who had come up to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost.

(*b*) The "five thousand men" * in Acts iv. 4 are not to be regarded as fresh additions to the church. The Revised Version gives the true translation: "the number of the men came to be about five thousand"—that is, the new converts, added to those who had been previously received into the church, brought up the number of the men to about five thousand.

(*c*) During the persecution which followed the death of Stephen the members of the church were driven out of the city, and "were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts viii. 1). Without attaching to the word "all" a meaning which, in a popular document like that of the Acts of the Apostles, it does not necessarily bear, it is clear that the great majority of the members of the church left Jerusalem; that very few of them remained; nor have we anything to show that many of them ever returned.

(*d*) We are not left to speculate as to whether it was possible for the Christian converts to meet in one assembly; we are told, over and over again, that they *did*. On the Day of Pentecost all the disciples were "together in one place" (Acts ii. 1). This, it may be said, is not surprising, for as yet their number was very small. But after the "three thousand" were baptized "all that believed were together" (Acts ii. 44). As yet the number of believers living in

* I do not care to discuss the question whether Luke uses the word *andrōn* (men) in this place loosely to include women as well as men. Meyer stands by Luke's accuracy. It is a little curious, no doubt, that the number of the "men" only should be given; but there may have been reasons for this of which we are ignorant, and about which it is useless to speculate.

Jerusalem may have been small, and many of those converted on the Day of Pentecost had probably left the city. But after "the men" reached the number of "five thousand" "they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch" (Acts v. xii.); the church met where our Lord Himself had taught. When "the seven" had to be elected "the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them and said, It is not fit that we should forsake the Word of God and serve tables" (Acts vi. 2). Where this meeting was held Luke does not tell us; but it is clear that the whole church, "the multitude"—not the rulers and representatives of the church—were assembled for the election. In Acts xv., which contains the account of the visit of Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, there are several indications that the church could still meet in one place for worship and for discussion. "When they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church and the apostles and the elders" (Acts xv. 4). When the apostles and the elders met to consider the question submitted to them by the Christians at Antioch, their deliberations took place in the presence of the church, and the unofficial members of the church might have taken part in the discussion, for it is said that after Peter's speech "all the multitude kept silence" (Acts xv. 12), implying that they might have spoken had they wished to speak. The letter addressed to the Christians at Antioch was sent by Judas and Silas with the concurrence of "the whole church": "It seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men out of their company, and send them to Antioch . . . and they wrote thus by them" (Acts xv. 22, 23). "The whole church" was present, and apparently any member of the church might have proposed other messengers, or objected to any part of the letter.

It is clear that, as a church, the Christians in Jerusalem met together in one place.

(II.) *The Church at Ephesus.*—It is alleged that there was a church in the house of Priscilla and Aquila at Ephesus (1 Cor. xvi. 19), and another large Christian assembly in the same city which formed another church; and that, since all the Christians at Ephesus are described as "the church" at Ephesus, these two sectional churches must have been included in one organisation governed by representatives of the separate Christian assemblies.

But what is the history of the church at Ephesus?

(*a*) Paul met Aquila and Priscilla at Corinth (Acts xviii. 1), and they went with him from Corinth to Ephesus (Acts xviii. 18).

(*b*) Paul stayed at Ephesus a very short time; Aquila and Priscilla remained in the city after he left (Acts xviii. 19—21).

(*c*) After an interval of a few months Paul returned to Ephesus and found Aquila and Priscilla there still. While he had been away, the few converts he had made at his first visit had probably met in Aquila's house, and others had been added to them. As Aquila and Priscilla were tent-makers, they probably had large work-rooms in which a considerable number of persons might meet for Christian instruction and worship. It was during this visit that Paul wrote his First Epistle to the Corinthians and sent the salutation from Aquila and Priscilla and "the church that is in their house." Before the epistle was written another assembly was probably formed in the "school of Tyrannus" (Acts xix. 10); and for a time there were two churches in the city. But during the next two years we read neither of "the church" nor of "the churches" at Ephesus, but only of the "disciples" (Acts xix. 30, xx. 1).

(*d*) Aquila and Priscilla left Ephesus either before Paul was driven from the city by the riot provoked by Demetrius or very soon afterwards. It is certain that they had left before Paul called the elders of the Ephesian church to meet him at Miletus (Acts xx. 17), for in the interval he had

written the Epistle to the Romans from Corinth, and Priscilla and Aquila were at that time in Rome (Rom xvi. 3). When Aquila and Priscilla left Ephesus the church in their house would probably be united with the church which had met in the school of Tyrannus. We therefore find in Acts xx. 17 that from Miletus Paul "sent to Ephesus to call to him the elders," not "of the churches"—but "of the church."

"In connection with this point it should be specially noticed that the term *church* is never applied to the whole body of converts in a town where any of the persons having *churches in their houses* then resided. Accordingly, when Aquila and Priscilla lived in Rome, . . . the entire company of believers in the imperial city is not styled the *church of Rome* or *at Rome* contemporaneously with the existence of a church in Aquila and Priscilla's house (compare the Epistle to the Romans, xvi. 5, and the entire letter). So also in the case of Philemon. At the time a church is said to be in his house there is no mention of *the church* at Colosse. The example of Nymphas at Laodicea is *apparently* an exception, but not *really* so, unless it can be proved that he lived *in* the city rather than in its vicinity" (Davidson's "Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament," Second Edition, p. 83).

(III.) *The Church at Corinth.*—The principal grounds on which it is maintained that the church at Corinth was a group of churches under the government of a supreme representative body are (*a*) the large number of Christians in the city, who, it is alleged, could not have met as one congregation; (*b*) the distinct recognition of several "churches" in 1 Cor. xiv. 34, which in the Authorized Version reads, "Let your women keep silence in the churches." In reply to (*a*) it is sufficient to remark that we have no proof at all that the Corinthian Christians were so numerous that they could not meet together as one church. In reply to (*b*) it may be fairly argued that Paul is stating a law on which he insists in all

churches. "But if his intention had been general, should he not have used throughout a general phraseology? Would he not have said, 'Let *women* keep silence in the churches'? Why *your* women, if he did not mean *their* women in particular?" This rejoinder is very fair, but its force disappears on the discovery that, in the true reading of the text, the "your" is not found. In the Revised Version the passage reads, "Let the women keep silence in the churches."

However large the church at Corinth may have been, Paul speaks of all its members as meeting together in one place. "If, therefore, the whole church be assembled together, and all speak with tongues," &c. (1 Cor. xiv. 23).

II.

The large number of religious teachers in each of these three churches is supposed to support the theory that each of them consisted of a number of separate churches included in one large ecclesiastical organisation, and under a common government.

But this argument rests upon a misconception of the "ministries" of the primitive churches. Every church had several "elders" or "bishops;" but at first it was not necessary that all of them should be able to teach. They shared between them the general care of the Christian community. In some of the churches there were several "prophets;" but every "prophet" did not "prophesy" every time the church assembled. Nor is there any reason to suppose that all the "teachers" taught the church whenever it met for worship and fellowship. The power to teach came to be one of the necessary qualifications of "the bishop" (1 Tim. iii. 2); but there were "teachers" who were not "bishops," and who had no official position in the church. In the free assemblies of the church, prophets and teachers used their several gifts for the instruction and edification of their

brethren, but they had no official appointment, and their services were, in all probability, only occasional.

To argue that, because there were many "teachers" in Corinth, Ephesus, or Jerusalem, there must have been many churches in the city is to forget that, though in a modern church there is generally only one teacher—the pastor—in a large apostolic church there were probably many "teachers," as well as "prophets," "elders," and "deacons."

NOTE II.—THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM.—The appeal of the church at Antioch to "the apostles and elders" at Jerusalem, on the question whether Christian converts from heathenism were under any obligation to submit to circumcision and observe the laws of Moses, is regarded by some as a decisive proof that in apostolic times separate churches were under the authority of "councils," or representative "synods," and were, therefore, not independent. An examination of the narrative in Acts xv. will show that the assembly to which the question was submitted, and in which it was discussed, was neither a "council" of bishops nor a representative "synod"; and the appeal proves nothing against the Independency of apostolic churches.

There were Jewish Christians who insisted that the ceremonies and institutions of Judaism, established by God Himself, had not been abolished by our Lord Jesus Christ. They contended that the Jews were still the elect race, and that it was inconceivable that they had lost their ancient prerogatives by the fulfilment of the prophecies which had been the solace and glory of their fathers for more than two thousand years. If heathen men desired to share the blessings of the Divine Kingdom which the Jewish Messiah had established, they must observe Jewish laws and customs. "Certain men" holding these opinions "came down from Judea" to Antioch, "and taught the brethren, saying, Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye

cannot be saved" (Acts xv. 1). They appear to have alleged the authority of the church at Jerusalem for these opinions (Acts xv. 24, 25); and they were able to maintain with perfect truth that, whatever Paul and Barnabas might teach, the Christians at Jerusalem, among whom were several of the original apostles and many other of the personal friends of the Lord Jesus Christ, observed the laws of Moses. The position of the Judaisers was a strong position, and the evangelisation of the whole of the heathen world was arrested by the controversy. If there was a real conflict between Paul and Barnabas on the one side, and the Christians at Jerusalem on the other, it would seem the safer course for the recent converts from heathenism at Antioch to adhere to the faith and practice of the older and more powerful church.

The way in which it was resolved to settle the question was simple and obvious. The Judaisers maintained that "the apostles" and "elders" at Jerusalem were on their side. A deputation was sent from Antioch to Jerusalem to learn whether this was a fact.

When Paul and Barnabas reached Jerusalem the church met to receive them, the apostles and elders being present; and they told the story of the triumphs of the Faith among the Gentiles. They began, no doubt, with the revelation of the Divine will to the church at Antioch: "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts xiii. 2). Then came the account of their preaching in Cyprus, in Pamphylia, in Pisidia, and in Lycaonia, and of the churches which they had founded in these countries. We can imagine the joy and thankfulness with which the story was listened to. "But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, saying, It is needful to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses" (Acts xv. 5).

Another meeting was held. The appeal had been to "the apostles and the elders," and Luke tells us that "the apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter," but the whole church was present. There was great difference of opinion, sharp discussion, "much questioning" (Acts xv. 6, 7). Peter's speech, in which he reminded the church that, while he was preaching to Gentiles—Cornelius and his friends—God "bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us" (Acts xv. 7, 8), appears to have silenced, if it did not convince, the Judaisers (Acts xv. 12). Barnabas and Paul once more rehearsed "what signs and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them," and this time they were heard without protest (Acts xv. 12, 13). James then proposed what may be described as articles of peace between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. The Jewish Christians might continue to observe their national customs, but, said James, "my judgment is, that we trouble not them which from among the Gentiles turn to God" (Acts xv. 19). There were, however, some practices so hateful to the Jews that, unless the Christian Gentiles avoided them, there could be no free, social relations between the two sections of the Church. James therefore recommends that the Christian Gentiles should be asked "to abstain from the pollutions of idols . . . and from what is strangled, and from blood." To these ritual requirements he adds a moral one. Sensual sins were appallingly common in the Pagan world, and James thinks that even Christian converts from Paganism are not likely to share the Jewish abhorrence of these foul offences, and he proposes that they should also be required to abstain from "fornication" (Acts xv. 20).

These proposals secured the concurrence of the whole church. The church was convinced that they expressed not merely its own judgment, but the judgment of the Holy Spirit, and they were embodied in a letter addressed to "the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria, and

Cilicia." * In this letter the teaching of those who have "troubled" the Christians at Antioch is repudiated, and "our beloved Barnabas and Paul" are spoken of with honour as "men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts xv. 24, 25).

I. It is clear that *this assembly was not a representative synod.*

(I.) The church at Antioch appealed to "the apostles and the elders" at Jerusalem to learn whether it was with their authority that certain men who came down from Judea had taught that unless the Gentile Christians were "circumcised after the custom of Moses" they could not be saved.

(II.) It was "the apostles and the elders" and "the whole church" (Acts xv. 22) at Jerusalem that considered the question, and answered it.

(III.) There is not the slightest hint that any church outside the city of Jerusalem was invited to send representatives to the assembly. Paul and Barnabas, with their friends from the church at Antioch (Acts xv. 2), came alone. There is nothing to suggest that they were accompanied by representatives from the churches of Syria and Cilicia who were to take part in deciding the controversy. Even the church at Antioch was not "represented" in the assembly. Paul and Barnabas and their friends were what we should call the appellants; they were not present in Jerusalem to express their own judgment

* In the Authorized Version the letter is written in the name of "the apostles and elders and brethren." In the text of the Revisers the "and" is omitted, and the version reads—"The apostles and the elder brethren, unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles," &c. As it is clear that the "brethren," "the multitude," "the church," were present at the discussion of the whole question, and as at the first meeting, if not at the second, other persons besides "the apostles and the elders" took part in the debate (Acts xv. 5), the change is of no great importance. But it is at least doubtful whether the text of the Revisers, though supported by high MS. authority, is accurate. Tischendorf retains the "and;" Lachmann rejects it.

on the question, but to ask for the judgment of "the apostles and the elders" of the church in that city. The letter in which the decision of the assembly was recorded was not theirs; it is the letter of the persons to whom, in the name of the church at Antioch, they had appealed, and they are described as "our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus;" and the letter was sent to Antioch, not by Paul and Barnabas, but by Judas and Silas, who were prominent members of the church at Jerusalem (Acts xv. 22).

II. It is clear that the assembly was not a "council." If it had been a "council" the bishops of the churches scattered over Asia Minor ought to have been present, but these churches learnt the decisions of the assembly from Paul and Barnabas—not from their own bishops (Acts xvi. 4). Nor does it appear that even the bishops of any churches in the immediate neighbourhood of Jerusalem were present. The decrees were the decrees of "the apostles and elders that were in Jerusalem."

The whole story, apart from modern controversies, is perfectly simple. Certain Jewish Christians, who had come down to Antioch, insisted that the Gentile converts could not be saved unless they submitted to circumcision and kept the laws of Moses; and they said that they had the authority of the great mother-church at Jerusalem on their side. Paul and Barnabas and some others were appointed to go to Jerusalem to learn whether this was true. A synod would have been of no use. A "council" would have been of no use. It was not the opinion of the elected representatives of the churches of Syria, Cilicia, Phœnicia, and Samaria that was wanted. It was not the opinion of the bishops of those churches that was wanted. The question to be determined was whether the church at Jerusalem, and especially

the apostles who were living there and the elders of the church, supported the Judaisers. The apostles and the elders and the church gave a clear and definite answer to the question. The assembly was not a "synod"; neither was it a "council." It was the meeting of a single church which had been asked to declare whether, as a matter of fact, certain persons had spoken with its authority. And, as it was the great Jewish church, advantage was taken of the discussion to state the terms on which Jewish Christians could live peaceably with Christian converts from heathenism.

BOOK II.

Church Officers.

CHAPTER I.

THE PASTORATE OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES.

I.

(I.) In the persecution which followed the martyrdom of Stephen the members of the church at Jerusalem were "all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts viii. 1). After the martyrdom of James the apostles themselves left Jerusalem, and the contributions which Paul and Barnabas brought from Antioch for the relief of the brethren in Judea who were suffering from famine were entrusted to the "elders" of the church (Acts xi. 27—30).* Whether the "elders"

* It is assumed that the martyrdom of James and the imprisonment and release of Peter, which Luke narrates in Acts xii., were contemporaneous with some of the events narrated in the preceding chapter. He says that the martyrdom and imprisonment happened "about that time" (Acts xii. 1). This appears to be the explanation of Paul's omission of any reference to this visit in Gal. i. and ii. In that epistle he is vindicating the independence of his apostolic commission, and explaining his relations to the original apostles, not giving an account of all his journeys after his conversion. The apostles had left the city when he and Barnabas came with the contributions from Antioch; they saw only the "elders;" it was therefore unnecessary that the visit should be mentioned.

were appointed before or after the death of James there is nothing to indicate. But from that time Jerusalem ceased to be the home of the apostles; some of them visited the city occasionally and remained there for a longer or shorter time, but their principal duties lay elsewhere. The church was deprived of its apostolic leaders, and was in charge of "elders" or "presbyters."*

Paul and Barnabas appointed "*elders*" or "presbyters" in every church that they founded in Lycia, Pamphylia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia (Acts xiv. 23). There were "*elders*" in the church at Ephesus (Acts xx. 17). Titus was directed to appoint "*elders*" in every city of Crete (Titus i. 5).

(II.) In churches consisting chiefly of Gentiles—but never in churches consisting chiefly of Jews—the "elders" are sometimes called "*bishops*" (Acts xx. 28; Phil. i. 1), and, in his Epistles to Timothy and Titus, Paul describes what sort of men "bishops" ought to be (1 Tim. iii. 1—7; Titus i. 7—9).

"Bishops" and "elders" discharged the same functions and held the same rank. *That these two titles denoted the same office is certain.*

* "This later persecution was the signal for the dispersion of the Twelve on a wider mission. Since Jerusalem would no longer be their home as hitherto, it became necessary to provide for the permanent direction of the church there, and for this purpose the usual government of the synagogue would be adopted. Now, at all events, for the first time we read of 'presbyters' in connection with the Christian brotherhood at Jerusalem. From this time forward all official communications with the mother-church are carried on through their intervention. To the presbyters Barnabas and Saul bear the alms contributed by the Gentile churches (Acts xi. 20). The presbyters are persistently associated with the apostles—in convening the congress, in the superscription of the decree, and in the general settlement of the dispute between the Jewish and Gentile Christians (Acts xv. 2, 4, 6, 22, 23; xvi. 4). By the presbyters St. Paul was received many years later on his last visit to Jerusalem, and to them he gives an account of his missionary labours and triumphs" (Lightfoot, "Philippians," p. 191).

(1) Paul invited the "*elders*" or "presbyters" of the church at Ephesus to meet him at Miletus. When they came he said to them, "Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock, in the which the Holy Ghost hath made you *bishops*" (Acts xx. 28).

(2) Paul directs Titus to appoint "elders" in every city, and goes on to say, "If any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having children that believe, who are not accused of riot or unruly. For the *bishop* must be blameless," &c. (Titus i. 5—7). If the "elder" and the "bishop" had not been the same, this account of the qualifications of the bishop would have been irrelevant.

(3) In Paul's First Epistle to Timothy, after describing the qualifications of a "bishop" (chap. iii. 1—7), he passes on to describe the qualifications of "deacons" (chap. iii. 8—13). Of "elders" he says nothing. If there had been three grades of office in the church—bishops, presbyters or elders, and deacons—it seems unlikely that the qualifications necessary for an elder should have been omitted. Later in the epistle, having occasion to speak of certain church officers, he describes them as "elders" (chap. v. 17—19.) These were not the deacons—the servants of the church—but its rulers and teachers. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and in teaching (chap. v. 17). They were "bishops" or "overseers."

(4) In the Epistle to the Philippians Paul salutes "the bishops and deacons" (chap. i. 1). Had there been "elders" in the church, as distinguished from "bishops," it is inconceivable that Paul should not have mentioned them.

(5) Peter, addressing the "elders" of the churches to which he is writing, charges them to "Tend the flock of God . . . exercising the oversight [*fulfilling the office of bishops*], not of constraint, but willingly, according unto God" (1 Pet. v. 1, 2). The work of an elder was the work of a bishop.

(6) Although Paul speaks of "bishops and deacons" (Phil. i. 1) because these were distinct and different offices neither he nor any other New Testament writer ever speaks of "bishops" and "presbyters" or "elders."

(III.) In Eph. iv. 11 these same church officers are described as "*pastors and teachers*." That these are the "elders" or "bishops" of the churches appears—

(1) From the omission of any other reference to "elders" or "bishops" in this passage.

(2) From the terms in which the work of "bishops" or "elders" is described both by Paul and by Peter. In his address to the Ephesian "elders" Paul speaks of their work as the work of "shepherds" or "pastors": "Take heed unto yourselves and to all the *flock*, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops to *feed* [*to act as pastors to*] the Church of God" (Acts xx. 28). And in Peter's charge to "elders" he says, "*Tend* [*act as pastors to*] the flock of God" (1 Pet. i. 2).

(IV.) Elsewhere "bishops," "elders," "pastors," are described more generally as "*presidents*" and "*rulers*" of the churches: "We beseech you, brethren, to know them that labour among you, and *are over you in the Lord*, and admonish you" (1 Thess. v. 12); "*Obey them that have the rule over you*, and submit to them, for they watch in behalf of your souls" (Heb. xiii. 17); "Salute all them that have the rule over you" (Heb. xiii. 24). These passages evidently refer to church officers that were invested with a certain authority over the church; and the only officers to whom this authority is attributed elsewhere are the "bishops," "elders," and "pastors."

It appears, therefore, that in the New Testament the same church officers are described as "elders," "bishops," "pastors and teachers," "presidents," "rulers."

II.

It also appears that it was usual for every church—that is, every separate assembly and society of believers in Christ—to have several of these officers. Paul and Barnabas did not appoint one elder, but "elders," in every church (Acts xiv. 23), and every elder was a "bishop." There were several "elders" in the church at Ephesus (Acts xx. 18), and all these elders were "bishops" (Acts xx. 28). In the church at Philippi (Phil. i. 1) there were "bishops" as well as "deacons"—not one bishop and one deacon; not one bishop and several deacons; but several officers belonging to each order.

There is nothing to indicate that there were gradations of rank among the "elders," "bishops," "pastors," of a church. They had the same title; they shared common responsibilities; there was perfect equality in their official position.

III.

But equality of official position would not carry with it equality of personal influence. That in many churches one "bishop" or "presbyter" should command greater confidence and greater reverence than his fellow-bishops or fellow-presbyters, and should exert a more powerful control over the life of the church, was inevitable. Among the "elders" of a newly organised church it is probable that there would often be one man who, on account of his greater age, or perhaps on account of his reputation for personal integrity before he received the Christian Faith, would be regarded with exceptional respect by his colleagues and by all his Christian brethren. When a church had existed for twenty or thirty years it would attach exceptional weight to the judgment of a "bishop" who had watched over

its fortunes from the beginning, and whose appointment had been confirmed by the evangelist or apostle who had founded the church; newly elected "bishops" would have the same rank and the same title, but not the same measure of authority. Even a young "bishop" with an eager temperament and resolute will, with great courage and great industry, would soon secure ascendency over his less vigorous colleagues. Or a "bishop" might have exceptional authority, both among his brethren in office and in the church generally, on account of his eminent sanctity, or of his vehement zeal, or of his practical sagacity, or of his eloquence, or of his large and profound knowledge of Christian truth.

While the official equality of the "bishops" or "presbyters" was still acknowledged, one of the "bishops," one of the "presbyters," would, therefore, in many churches become the recognised leader of the Christian community. He would usually preside both in the church assembly and in the council of church officers.

Even in those churches in which none of the "bishops" had this personal ascendency, experience would sooner or later demonstrate the convenience, and even the necessity, of appointing a permanent president. To maintain order in a free popular religious assembly, in which every man was at liberty to exhort, reprove, or comfort his brethren, to illustrate a Christian doctrine or a Christian duty, to offer a prayer or sing a psalm * was not an easy duty. It would be discharged most effectively by the "bishop" that discharged it most frequently, and whose authority the church had become accustomed to recognise. When the officers of the church met for consultation and for administrative business, the functions of the president were less difficult. But even in these smaller meetings it was necessary that some one should have authority to control the discussion and to bring it to a close; and it

* See 1 Cor. xiv. 26—33.

was also necessary that some one should be charged with the responsibility of carrying the decisions of the meeting into effect. In these meetings the "bishops" might have presided in turn, but for administrative purposes it was convenient that one of them should be made permanent president.

In some of the churches of Asia Minor at the beginning of the second century the president of the church was distinguished from his colleagues by a separate title; he was the "bishop" and his colleagues were "presbyters" or "elders." In these churches there were three classes of officers—bishops, presbyters, and deacons—instead of two, as in the churches of apostolic times. A system of Congregational Episcopacy was established; and the claims, not only of the bishop, but of the presbyters and deacons, on the submission of the people were asserted in extravagant terms. As yet the bishop was not the ruler of a diocese, but only of a single church; nor did he rule alone—his presbyters were his council, and it was the duty of the church to obey them as well as him. But in the bishop the church was taught to find its centre of unity, and his authority was supreme.

This was a grave departure from apostolic precedent. It was more. It was a violation of the principles on which the apostolic churches had been founded. From this time the great responsibilities of the commonalty of the church began to be obscured; the corresponding powers of the commonalty of the church began to be impaired. To describe the fatal change in modern language—the principle of Independency was for a time maintained, but the principle of Congregationalism was soon suppressed. The Christian assembly in every city was free from all external control; it was a separate, independent church; but the authority which the apostles attributed to the whole assembly was gradually usurped by the bishop and elders.

For these perilous innovations no apostolic authority can be alleged.*

* See Appendix, on "The Origin of Episcopacy."

CHAPTER II.

THE PASTORATE IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES APPOINTED BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

THE apostles, when they founded churches, did not at once place them in charge of "bishops" or "elders." But before the formal appointment of church officers men of exceptional religious earnestness, or exceptional strength of character, or exceptional sagacity, or exceptional zeal must have exerted an undefined but very real authority in the Christian assembly. In any ordinary society such persons would have been designated by the society itself to official positions, with definite powers and duties; and the society itself would have determined the limits of their authority and the extent of their responsibility.

But Christian churches were founded by Christ, and He was invisibly present whenever they met together in His name. The members of the church were brethren—Christ's brethren. Was it in accordance with His will that some of His brethren should have authority over the rest? Were they not all one in Him? Was He not their only Master and Lord? Might not Christ reveal His will through the youngest member of the church as well as the oldest—through the man who had least to command attention and confidence as well as through the man who had most? Would not the creation of church officers obscure the wonderful truth that all Christian men are "in Christ," and that all have received the Spirit of God?

In the absence of very definite revelations of the will of

Christ it seems doubtful whether the Jewish Christians would have appointed "elders" in the church corresponding to the "elders" in the synagogue; and equally doubtful whether Gentile Christians would have appointed "councils" in the church corresponding to the municipal authorities of the Empire and the committees of the political, religious, and social organisations of the Pagan society which they had forsaken.

Nor does the New Testament give us the impression that the authority of bishops, elders, pastors, was derived from the Church; or that their office was created by the Church. The Church determined what men should fill the office, but the office was instituted by Christ; the Church determined who should exercise the authority, but the authority came from Him.

Paul and Barnabas "appointed . . . elders in every church" (Acts xiv. 22). Paul and Barnabas were Christ's representatives, and they gave effect to the will of Christ. Paul expressly declared that these appointments had Divine sanction. Addressing the elders of the church at Ephesus, he told them that the Holy Ghost had made them bishops in the flock of God (Acts xx. 28). In his epistle to the same church he describes their pastors as the gifts of Christ. Christ, having ascended to His glory, "gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists;" He also gave "some" to be "pastors and teachers" (Eph. iv. 11). The church, under the guidance of Christ, and illuminated by His Spirit, had only to recognise the men whom He had designated to office. Those that are "over" the Thessalonian Christians are "over" them "in the Lord" (1 Thess. v. 12).

However free may be the "obedience" which is due to the rulers of the Church (Heb. xiii. 17), it would be treason to Christ, the Founder and Ruler of the Church, to obey them at all unless their authority were derived from Him.

In the Church the will of Christ is supreme. If it has rulers, they must rule in His name and by His appointment; and their power must come, not from the Church, but from Him. In electing its officers the Church acts, not for itself, but for Christ. It appoints the men whom He has chosen, and it appoints them to exercise an authority which He has conferred.

CHAPTER III.

THE PERMANENCE OF THE PASTORATE.

THE functions of the "elders," "bishops," "pastors," of the New Testament churches were—(1) preaching, in the modern sense of the word, as including instruction and exhortation; (2) pastoral oversight. These functions have not become obsolete; the Pastorate, therefore, has not become obsolete.

I.

Preaching has not been superseded or become obsolete. It is sometimes contended that preaching has become unnecessary as the result of the creation of a great Christian literature. Before the books of the New Testament were written, the converts to the Christian Faith learnt nearly all they knew about the history and teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ from an "oral gospel." They went to the assemblies of the Church to listen to the recitation of the Sermon on the Mount, the parable of the Prodigal Son, and the story of our Lord's miracles, sufferings, death, and resurrection.*

That wonderful knowledge of the real power and glory of Christ, and of the contents of the revelation of God in Him,

* It is no doubt true that, before our gospels were written, passages in this "oral gospel" were written down and copies circulated among Christian people. It is also to be remembered that "many had taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters" on which those who "from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word" had spoken to the churches. But these considerations do not affect the statement in the text that for some time those who believed in Christ depended for their knowledge of Himon what they heardin the Church·

which separates the apostolic epistles from all the Christian literature of later times did not come to the apostles suddenly and as soon as their earliest converts were won. It came to them gradually through their larger personal experience of the greatness of the Christian redemption, through the struggles of the new Faith with Jewish and Pagan life and thought, and, above all, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit resting both on their own experience and the fortunes of the Gospel. While this development was going on—a development illustrated by the contrast between Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians and his Epistle to the Ephesians—the Christian churches must have depended for the enlargement of their knowledge to the limits reached by the apostles, upon the oral teaching of the apostles themselves, or upon the oral teaching of those who had listened to them.

For some time after the gospels and epistles were written copies were scarce; it may be doubted whether as late as the middle of the second century copies of all the writings now included in the New Testament were in the possession of even the ministers of the largest and most important churches; at a much later date the immense majority of those who believed in Christ must have been unable to procure copies of all the New Testament writings for themselves. Indeed, till after the invention of printing, books were so dear that it was impossible for the very poor to buy copies of the New Testament, and, if they had been able to buy them, few of them would have been able to read them.

But now our circumstances are altogether changed. In this country every man may have a New Testament of his own; and, according to the belief of all Protestant Christians, no minister, however saintly and however learned, has authority to decide questions relating to faith or practice that the New Testament has left uncertain. In addition to the New Testament we have a literature preserving the best and

profoundest Christian thought of eighteen centuries. And if God were to give to our own generation successors to Athanasius and Augustine, to Luther and Calvin, to Baxter, Owen, and Howe, they could do comparatively little as ministers of particular congregations, and they would write books which every man might read for himself.

All this, true and important as it is, fails to prove that Christ did not intend the Christian ministry to be a permanent institution for the instruction in Christian faith and duty of those who believe in Him, and for the cultivation of their spiritual and ethical life.

There are admirable books in all departments of human knowledge, and the books are easily accessible; but universities have not yet closed their class-rooms or changed them into libraries. The student goes to his lecture on Aristotle and Plato, though he has on his shelves editions of Aristotle and Plato by scholars of greater genius and learning than the lecturer. For a few shillings he can get the very best text-books in Logic, Philosophy, and Ethics, in History, and in any of the Physical Sciences, and he might work at them at home; but even if he is studying subjects which require no illustration from experiments, and which he can master without working in the laboratory, he knows that a living teacher will give him a kind of assistance which he can never get from his text-books, and he incurs the expense of a university education.

In mixed subjects, like politics and questions of social reform, in which moral as well as intellectual elements have a large place, literature alone is still less effective. Where action is necessary as well as belief, enthusiasm as well as conviction, and where conviction itself is to a considerable extent dependent upon moral sympathies, men must be addressed face to face. They must be brought within the range of the direct personal influence of those whose minds are already made up, and who are in vehement earnest for

the success of their cause. No political party, no movement intended to effect a great change in the moral opinions and habits of a nation, can afford to rely for its triumphs on newspapers, pamphlets, and books. It must have its orators if it can secure them; but even a few plain men whose speaking shows that they have clear intelligence, an honest confidence in their principles, and an eager zeal to propagate them, will create a faith and an enthusiasm which only a writer of rare genius will be able to inspire.

In the whole method of Divine revelation the personal element has a great place. The Eternal Word was made flesh, and God was revealed to men—not in a series of inspired theological definitions, or in an inspired catechism, or in an inspired creed, or in an inspired theological treatise, but in a living Person. It was very largely owing to the personal influence of Christ upon men that they acknowledged the truth and felt the power of His teaching. His personal affection for them, His pity for their sufferings, His earnest desire to reclaim them from sin, the glowing delight with which He recognised their penitence, His generous trust in the loyalty of His disciples, His own perfect faith and joy in God, were among the chief forces of His ministry. The records of the revelation which God made to the world through Christ are not mere summaries of the doctrines He taught and the moral and religious precepts which He gave for the conduct of life, but biographies; and the personal impression which Christ produced on His contemporaries has been reproduced on every later generation by the story contained in the four gospels.

The apostles won their triumphs by the frankness and fervour of their personal testimony to Christ, and by the vehemence of their zeal for the salvation of mankind. There was nothing cold, abstract, or formal in their preaching; it was not merely the expression of intellectual conviction; it was their very life breaking out into speech. And in what

they wrote they retained as far as they could the personal element. They did not write dissertations, but letters.

The laws of human nature are unchanged, and the Divine methods of reaching men are unchanged. Even for purposes of religious instruction a preacher has many advantages over a book. He can dwell on those truths of which he has discovered that his people have the least knowledge, and on those duties of which they most need to be reminded. People choose religious books for themselves, and their choice may leave them ignorant of whole provinces of religious doctrine and religious duty. The subjects of sermons are not chosen by the congregation; and a wise preacher will take care to make his people familiar with all that it is most important for them to know about God and themselves, about the laws of the Christian life, and the greatness of the Christian redemption. And further, as a method of instruction, the sermon has whatever merits belong to the lecture as compared with the text-book.

For purposes of moral and religious culture and impression, as distinguished from mere instruction, the advantages of the ministry are much more conspicuous. An author knows nothing of most of his readers, and they know nothing of him; the relations between them are accidental and temporary. But the true minister speaks under the inspiration of a strong affection for his people, and with a deep sense of responsibility for their faith and righteousness. If, through want of urgency on his part, any of them are living in revolt against God, he knows that he shares their guilt; and, if they remain in revolt to the last, the shadow of their awful doom will fall upon himself. If, through his fidelity, they are doing the will of God, their righteousness is in a sense his own as well as theirs; and, if they finally secure "glory, honour, and immortality," his own eternal blessedness will be augmented. He will speak to them with a personal sorrow for their sin, which, through God's grace, will be more likely

than anything else to move them to penitence, and with a personal alarm on account of their danger which will be likely to excite their fears. The strong solicitude of a human heart for their salvation and their steadfast righteousness will be a revelation to them of the Divine compassion which never fails, and of the Divine mercy which "endureth for ever."

There is something contagious in a vigorous ethical life. A man who speaks under the power of a great enthusiasm for justice, honesty, truthfulness, temperance, purity, will give new authority to the conscience of those who listen to him, and will exalt their ideal of moral perfection. There is the same contagious power in a vigorous religious life. Men do not stand apart from each other. Heart touches heart. Faith becomes firmer while listening to a man whose faith is firm. Courage creates courage. The fires of love for Christ in the soul of the preacher kindle similar fires in the souls of his hearers. His joy in the vision of the eternal city of God inspires their hope of immortality with fresh energy.

There is a reason of altogether a different character which confirms the permanence of the Christian ministry. The exceptional presence of Christ which is realised when we are gathered together in His name is the ground of the exceptional promise to united prayer. When a minister speaks in the Church that same presence must invest his teaching, exhortations, encouragements, consolations, and warnings with exceptional power. We are most likely to receive a true knowledge of the mind of Christ, and are most likely to have our hearts drawn to Christ, where Christ Himself is present.

II.

The pastoral function of the ministers of the Church has not been superseded or become obsolete. The work of the ministers of the early churches was not limited to the instruction which they gave in the Christian assembly.

They had a moral authority which claimed the recognition of their brethren. "The elders that rule well" are, according to Paul, to "be counted worthy of double honour" (1 Tim. v. 17). "He that ruleth" is exhorted to rule "with diligence" (Rom. xii. 8). The name by which the elders of the church at Ephesus are described carries with it the idea of responsibility and authority—the measure of the responsibility being determined in this as in all similar cases by the measure of authority: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in the which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops"—or overseers—"to feed the Church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts xx. 28).* The authority of church rulers was intended not only to secure the peace and vigour of the church society as a whole, but the safety and righteousness of its individual members. This is made clear by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them; for they watch for your souls, as they that shall give account; that they may do this with joy and not with grief" (Heb. xiii. 17).

Christian men are kept by the power of the Holy Spirit; but in the first age of the Church the Holy Spirit gave the Church into the charge of "bishops," "overseers," "elders." Through them, as well as in more direct ways, He defended those who had trusted in Christ against the perils by which their faith and morals were menaced. There is still an urgent necessity for the service of those who are under official obligations to watch for the souls of their brethren (Heb. xiii. 17). Encouragement, kindly warning, appeals for personal service, earnest expostulation addressed to a Christian man in private, and addressed to him early enough, might sometimes save him from a life of indolence, from

* Civil rulers were called "pastors" or "shepherds" by the Jews (Jer. xxiii.). "To feed" a flock according to Jewish ideas included the idea of government.

gross sin, and from utter ruin. Though it is the duty of every Christian man to be his "brother's keeper," the unofficial members of a church may shrink from speaking to their brother who is in peril; or he may not be intimately known to those who would be able to speak to him most wisely and effectively. It was the will of Christ, as shown in the organisation of the early churches, that this service should be rendered to their brethren by "bishops" and "elders;" and, since the necessity for the service remains, it is reasonable to suppose that the offices which were created to render it have not become obsolete.

That the functions of the Christian ministry have not been superseded is also apparent from the fact that men still receive from God those specific qualifications which qualify them for this particular service, and which, apart from it, have no free and effective use. As long as He gives "pastors and teachers," He means that churches should be under their instruction and pastoral care.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DIACONATE IN APOSTOLIC CHURCHES; AND ITS PERMANENCE.

In addition to "bishops," "elders," "pastors," the apostolic churches, when fully organised, had "deacons" (Phil. i. 1; 1 Tim. iii. 8); and there are clear indications that women had an official position as deaconesses (1 Tim. iii. 11; Rom. xvi. 1). The functions of deacons and deaconesses appear to have been of an administrative and executive kind.

I.

It does not appear that the apostles insisted on the appointment of deacons in every church. Paul and Barnabas, as they returned to Antioch at the close of Paul's first missionary journey, appointed elders in every church; but Luke says nothing about the appointment of deacons. In his letter to Titus, whom he had left in Crete, Paul tells him "to set in order the things that were wanting, and appoint elders in every city" (Tit. i. 5), and the qualifications of "elders" or "bishops" are fully enumerated (Tit. i. 6—9); but about the appointment and qualifications of deacons he says nothing. In his first letter to Timothy, on the other hand, the qualifications of deacons and deaconesses are described (1 Tim. iii. 8—13), as well as the qualifications of bishops.

It may perhaps be inferred from these facts that deacons were not appointed until churches became so large that it was expedient to relieve the "elders" or "bishops" from some of the details of administration. The election of the "seven" recorded in Acts vi. lends some support to this conclusion.

The apostles themselves had been till this time the only officers of the church at Jerusalem; but when "the number of the disciples was multiplying" there were complaints that in the provision of the common tables for the poor the Hellenistic widows were neglected. "And the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not fit that we should forsake the Word of God and serve [*diakonein*] tables. Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will continue stedfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the Word" (Acts vi. 2—4). The "seven" are never called "deacons" in the New Testament; but it seems probable that their election was a precedent followed by other churches when the "elders" found that what may be described as the "business" of the church grew beyond their strength. Additional "elders" or "bishops" might indeed have been elected to take charge of this administrative service; but it was easier to find men with the qualifications necessary for administration than men with the qualifications for government.

In the apostolic churches large provision was made for the support of the poor. The provision was so generous that there was danger of its being abused.* It had to be regularly organised; and, although in churches which had only "elders" the "elders" might superintend it, there was an obvious expediency in entrusting it to officers specially appointed to this service. To these same officers would

* "If any woman that believeth hath widows, let her relieve them, and let not the church be burdened; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed" (1 Tim. v. 16). The widows connected with a family were the special charge of the wife, mother, or sister, and so the Apostle says "if any *woman* . . . hath widows;" if her sister, daughter, or mother, or her husband's sister or mother is a widow, she is to care for her if she is able, and not permit her to burden the funds of the church.

naturally fall other administrative duties. The "elders" ruled the church and taught it; the "deacons" served it; the "elders" had charge of what we are accustomed to describe as the moral and spiritual life of the church; the "deacons" of its secular affairs.

But even in the discharge of the duties of the diaconate high spiritual qualifications were required. The "seven" who were to relieve the apostles from serving tables were to be men "full of the Spirit and of wisdom." Paul, in his description of the qualifications of deacons, says that they are to be "grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mysteries of the faith in a pure conscience" * (1 Tim. iii. 8).

These qualifications were necessary, not only because it was fitting that all who held office in the church should be conspicuous for their moral and spiritual excellence, but because, in the discharge of their official duties, they would be brought into close personal contact with their Christia

* "They that have served well as deacons *gain to themselves a good standing* and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. iii. 13). The A. V., which rendered these words "gain to themselves a good degree," lent support to the theory that, by serving well in the diaconate, a man secured promotion to the higher rank of "elder" or "bishop." But the Apostle does not say that the zealous deacon gains a "*better*" standing, or a higher step in ecclesiastical office, but a "*good*" standing. The interpretation which assures the zealous deacon of advancement to the episcopate is, says Dr. Ellicott, "on exegetical grounds clearly untenable . . . for surely such a ground of encouragement as ecclesiastical promotion (were this even historically demonstrated, which appears not the case in the first two centuries) seems strangely out jo place in St. Paul's mouth, and preserves no harmony with the subsequent words" ("Pastoral Epistles" *in loc.*). The meaning seems to be that the man who discharges the deacon's office well, secures a "good standing" in the church, the respect and confidence of his brethren, which will enable him to do his work still more effectively; and he will also become more fearless and vigorous, both in the discharge of his official duties and in his personal Christian life, which will be disciplined by his service.

brethren, and would have the opportunity of rendering them religious service. If they were devout, wise, and sympathetic men, they would be able to comfort the sick and the poor, as well as to give them relief from the funds of the church.

In Oriental and Greek cities the seclusion of women made it expedient that these duties should be entrusted to women. Phœbe was deaconess of the church at Cenchreæ (Rom. xvi. 1); and, in writing to Timothy, who was visiting and organising the churches in Ephesus and its neighbourhood, Paul says that the "women"—evidently women holding office in the church—"must be grave, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things" (1 Tim. iii. 11). In churches consisting mainly of Jewish converts deaconesses were less necessary.

II.

The reasons for the appointment of deacons are permanent.

In a social condition like ours churches are under no obligation to make the lavish provision for human wretchedness which was necessary in the earlier ages of the Gospel; and any attempt to do it would probably be extremely mischievous. It would attract many into church fellowship who have no faith in Christ; it would lessen the vigour of personal independence in those who are really loyal to Him. But to provide, within safe limits, for the relief of the poverty of its members is the plain duty of every Christian church. To visit the sick and the aged, and those in great sorrow, is another duty. The same work that was probably done by the deacons of the apostolic churches has to be done in our own country and our own age; and to entrust it to special church officers is to follow apostolic example.

With the changes which have passed upon the church and its relations to civil society it has become necessary to provide for the regular discharge of duties which either did not exist at all in early Christian times or which were extremely unim-

portant. Church buildings require care; provision has to be made, not only for the due maintenance of the minister, but for the adequate supply of funds for the various agencies of the church, its schools, and its missions, as well as its special charities. It does not seem to be a matter of obligation to impose all these duties on the deacons alone; but they are duties for which it is natural that the deacons should be specially responsible, even when they have the co-operation and assistance of other and unofficial members of the church.

In England the social position of women does not render the appointment of deaconesses as *necessary* as it was in Greece and in Asia Minor; but if women were officially appointed to care for women who need relief and visitation, the work would be done far more effectively, and inconveniences which sometimes occur in churches where no such appointment has been made would be avoided.*

* Bradford gives the following account of the organisation of the church of Congregational exiles at Amsterdam:—"Before their division and breach they were about three hundred communicants; and they had for their pastor and teacher those two eminent men before named [Francis Johnson and Henry Ainsworth], and in our time four grave men for ruling elders, and three able and godly men for deacons, [also] one ancient widow for a deaconess, who did them service many years, though she was sixty years of age when she was chosen. She honoured her place, and was an ornament to the congregation. She usually sat in a convenient place in the congregation with a little birchen rod in her hand, and kept little children in great awe from disturbing the congregation. She did frequently visit the sick and weak, and especially women; and, as there was need, called out maids and young women to watch them and do them helps as their necessity did require; and, if they were poor, she would gather relief for them of those that were able, or acquainted the deacons; and she was obeyed as a mother in Israel and an officer of Christ." [Governor Bradford's "Dialogue." "New England's Memorial," p. 355.]

CHAPTER V.

THE PASTORATE AND THE DIACONATE IN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.

In the apostolic churches the pastorate was shared by several elders; in modern Congregational churches there is usually only one "pastor." The difference is, perhaps, more apparent than real.

For the diaconate in modern Congregational churches has come to be in many, perhaps the majority of cases, a board of "elders." It is often described as the "council" of the minister. Among the deacons there are generally some men who are real leaders of the church—men whose judgment on all questions affecting its discipline, its worship, and its general action justly commands confidence. They are men of sagacity and large experience, of firm Christian integrity and exemplary zeal. They have been associated with the church of which they are the officers through a long course of years, and have served it in many ways—as Sunday-school teachers, secretaries of church committees, conductors of mission services. They know many of the members more intimately than the pastor knows them. They are consulted on questions of Christian conduct. They have a moral position in the church which justifies them in offering advice even when it is unsought. They can speak in a frank, brotherly spirit to members of the church who seem to be losing their Christian earnestness, or whose lives are not consistent with their Christian profession. When the pastorate is vacant they discharge many of the duties which confessedly belong to the eldership. They preside at church-meetings. They receive applications from those who wish to

be received into membership. They officially welcome new members into the church. They guide the action of the church in cases of discipline. They arrange for the conduct of the more public services of the church. Their advice has great and legitimate authority in determining whom the church shall elect to the vacant pastorate. They are called "deacons," but they are really "elders" or "bishops," and the pastor is the presiding elder or presiding bishop.

But always, I imagine, in the diaconate of a strong and healthy Congregational church there are men of another kind, whose qualifications for the original duties of the diaconate are not less admirable—men without the power of spiritual leadership, but methodical, painstaking, gentle, full of kindness and sympathy for poverty and suffering. For the leadership and government of the church they are unfit; but they have all the qualities for that particular *service* [*diakonia*] which was the province of the diaconate in the apostolic churches.

That there are disadvantages in obscuring the distinction between the functions of the eldership and the functions of the diaconate is certain. Some men who would be efficient "elders" may decline the office of deacon because they are conscious that they are not qualified for visiting and comforting the sick and the poor. Some men, on the other hand, who are excellently qualified for what was the original work of the diaconate may refuse to accept the office, or miss election to it, because they have not the personal vigour necessary for leadership; or, if they are elected and consent to serve, they may naturally suppose that they must attempt the duties of leadership which require powers, intellectual and moral, of which they are destitute. In practice it is probably found that those deacons lead who have the faculty for leadership, and that the rest limit themselves to the original work of the diaconate. It may be fairly contended that the modern practice is not unlike that of the earliest

churches, which had "elders" only, who discharged the duties which were subsequently divided between elders and deacons.

Where some of the deacons are really "elders," our modern system reproduces the essential elements of the apostolic organisation; but when, in a church of any magnitude, the duties of the eldership are discharged by the pastor alone, there is not only a departure from apostolic example, which makes the pastor the president of several elders—there are also serious practical evils. Either there is a paralysis of the governing power of the church, or the pastor exerts an authority which ought not to be vested in a single church officer, and, whenever a vacancy occurs in the pastorate, the church is likely to be left without vigorous leadership.

In some Congregational churches there are both "elders" and "deacons," but the two offices have never secured general recognition and acceptance among English Congregationalists.

Names, though not of supreme importance, count for something, and the customary names for both the offices in modern Congregational churches give a false impression of the duties connected with the offices which they denote. We give the title of "deacon" to men discharging two wholly different functions—the function of leadership or government, and the function of service. We give what is really the same title to the chief officer of the church. The "ministers" of a church are properly the deacons; the pastor is not its "minister," but its presiding elder or bishop.

NOTE.—RULING ELDERS.—To the question whether in the primitive churches there were two classes of elders, formally distinguished from each other as "ruling elders" and "teaching elders," Dr. Lightfoot appears to have given an accurate answer in the following passage:—"The duties of the presbyters were twofold. They were both rulers and instructors of the congregation. This double function appears in St. Paul's expression 'pastors and teachers' (Eph. iv. 11), where, as the form of the original seems to show, the two words describe the same office under different aspects. Though *government* was probably the first conception of the office, yet the work of *teaching* must have fallen to the presbyters from the very first, and have assumed greater prominence as time went on. With the growth of the Church the visits of the apostles and evangelists to any individual community must have become less and less frequent, so that the burden of instruction would be gradually transferred from these missionary preachers to the local officers of the congregation. Hence St. Paul, in two passages where he gives directions relating to bishops or presbyters, insists specially on the faculty of teaching as a qualification for the position (1 Tim. iii. 2; Tit. i. 9). Yet even here this work seems to be regarded rather as incidental to than as inherent in the office. In the one epistle he directs that double honour shall be paid to those presbyters who have ruled well, but *especially* to such as 'labour in word and doctrine,' as though one holding this office might decline the work of instruction. In the other, he closes the list of qualifications with the requirement that the bishop (or presbyter) hold fast the faithful word in accordance with the apostolic teaching 'that he may be able both to exhort in the healthy doctrine and to confute gainsayers,' alleging as a reason the pernicious activity and growing numbers of the false teachers. Nevertheless there is no ground for supposing that the work of teaching and the work of governing per-

tained to separate members of the presbyteral college. As each had his special gift, so would he devote himself more or less exclusively to the one or the other of these sacred functions" ("Epistle to the Philippians," pp. 192, 193).

Paul's words in 1 Tim. v. 17 seem decisive in favour of the theory that in the apostolic churches there were "elders" or "bishops" who did not give public instruction to the congregation. On the other hand, he describes it as a necessary qualification of the "bishop" that he should be "apt to teach" (1 Tim. iii. 2), and "able both to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers" (Tit. i. 9). The passage from Dr. Lightfoot suggests the explanation of the apparent contradiction. In the earlier days it may have been difficult to find several men in every church who united qualifications for exercising pastoral rule with qualifications for giving public pastoral instruction; but to place a church under strong pastoral influence was indispensable, and, therefore, "elders," "bishops," were appointed who could not "labour in word and doctrine." As time went on, there would be a larger number of men with a sufficient knowledge of Christian truth to enable them to discharge the functions both of teaching and governing. Paul therefore charges Timothy and Titus to require that the "elders" or "bishops" should be able to teach as well as rule. There had never, as Dr. Lightfoot says, been any formal distinction between "ruling" and "teaching" elders; Paul now thinks it desirable that every "elder" should teach.

But the question whether there should be "ruling elders" who do not teach is evidently one of those questions of expediency which the church is free to determine according to its varying circumstances. What seems important is that the pastor should not rule alone, but should have associated with him church officers who share the functions of government, and among whom he simply presides. This seems to have been the uniform practice of the apostolic churches, and there are obvi-

·ous reasons for perpetuating it. At first some elders were able to teach, and some were not; some were, in fact, only ruling elders; others both ruled and taught. When it became possible to secure elders who were qualified for both functions, Paul told Timothy that those should be elected who were "apt to teach" as well as able to rule. It would be well if in all churches all the elders, whether called elders or deacons, were able to exhort and instruct the church; but, if the double qualification cannot be secured in all, we are free to fall back on the practice of the churches in their earliest stage, and have "elders," under whatever name, who can govern, but some of whom cannot teach, associated with an elder—the pastor—who can do both.

Many of the earlier Congregationalists were favourable to the appointment of "ruling elders;" the objection to the title is that it seems to restrain these particular elders from the right to use what powers they may possess for instructing and exhorting their brethren.

CONCLUSION.

"WHERE two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." It is the presence of Christ among Christian people meeting regularly for fellowship with each other and with Him that constitutes a church. They may not have discovered their responsibilities and their powers. They may have submitted to a form of church organisation by which many of these responsibilities and many of these powers are suppressed. But as the presence of Christ is not secured by the noblest form of church polity, it is not forfeited by the worst.

In an Episcopalian congregation the devout men and women who, without any organisation to separate them from those who are destitute of religious faith, are drawn together by their common loyalty to Christ and their love for each other, form a true church, and they not unfrequently assume and discharge many of the responsibilities of a church. A Wesleyan class-meeting is a church, and it may realise far more perfectly than churches with a completer organisation the blessedness of the communion of saints. In the darkest ages of Christendom there were many monasteries in which devout men and devout women, in communion with each other and with Christ, reached a wonderful perfection and peace. Christ was among them, and, amidst the awful corruptions of that vast organisation which they regarded as Divine, these little groups of saints were true Christian churches.

On the other hand, the outward form of the apostolic polity

may be retained, and the authority and sanctity attributed to the church by Christ may be lost. Never yet, perhaps, has any society gathered together in His name been so perfectly one with Him that all its decisions were confirmed by His authority. Congregationalism is an ideal polity. This is at once its reproach and its glory. The transcendent prerogatives and powers which it claims for the church lie beyond the reach of Christian communities which are not completely penetrated and transfigured by the Spirit of Christ. But as churches approach more and more nearly to the perfection to which Christ has called them, their authority becomes more and more august, and they enter more and more fully into the possession of the blessedness which is their inheritance in Him.

APPENDIX.

Art. I.—The Word "Church."

I.

A HUNDRED years ago it was probably the universal custom of Congregationalists to call their places of worship "meeting-houses." "Chapel" began to find its way into use early in this century, and soon displaced the older and better name. It is now very common for all descriptions of Nonconformists—and Congregationalists have caught the prevailing fashion—to call their places of worship "churches." But, very irrationally, the name is seldom given to a place of worship unless it happens to be a Gothic building.

When the word "church" was first applied by some Congregationalists to the building in which the church meets there was a great outcry. It was maintained that the new usage would create confusion, and would obscure the difference between the material structure and the spiritual society. There seems to be no sufficient reason for this objection. A "school" consists properly of children and their teachers; but it is also the building in which the children are taught. A "college" is a society for the cultivation of learning; it is also the building in which the society has its home. A "hospital" is an institution for the relief of the sick; it is also the building in which the work of the institution is carried on.

There is the same double application of the words "university," "museum," "library," "House of Commons;" there seems to be no good reason why the double application should not be made of the word "church." The material church is the building in which the spiritual church meets. Confusion between the two is impossible.

Indeed, this name for a place of worship is much more in harmony with the truth than certain descriptive phrases used for the same purpose which were formerly common in the sermons and prayers of Congregationalists, and which still survive in hymns with which it is not easy to dispense. For example, to call the place in which a church meets for instruction and worship the "House of God" is positively misleading. It suggests that the same kind of awful sanctity attaches to the building that attached in Jewish times to the Temple, which was really in some wonderful sense the House of God, the palace in which the King of the elect race had His home, and

where there was a permanent symbol of His presence. But since Christ came, the special presence of God has not been assured to consecrated places or consecrated buildings, but to consecrated persons. A place of worship is not erected to be the Home of God, but to be the home of the church, and to call it a church suggests no false conception of its character.

The word "church," however, has obviously no connection with the Greek word *ecclesia*, which denotes the Christian assembly or society. It is derived from *Kuriakē* = the Lord's. In early centuries the Greek Christians, anticipating the inaccurate modern phrase, called the place in which the church met "the Lord's House" (*Kuriakē Oikia*), and in the Teutonic and Scandinavian languages the names for a church-building are derived from this usage—*circ, cyric* (Anglo-Saxon), *kerk* (Dutch), *Kirche* (German). The word "church" is derived from one of the words in the phrase which originally denoted the building in which the church meets; its derivatives have come to denote the church itself.

II.

But the word "church" is chiefly interesting as representing the *ecclesia* of the New Testament, though having no etymological connection with it. The word *ecclesia* receives illustration from two sources.

(I.) Among the Greeks it was "an assembly of the citizens summoned by the crier, the legislative assembly" (Liddell and Scott), or "an assembly in general, whether of the constituency of a whole State, or of its subdivisions, such as tribes and cantons" (Smith's "Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities"). The most famous *ecclesia* of antiquity was the assembly of the citizens of Athens, of which a brief account is given in the next Article.

(II.) It is frequently used in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the LXX.) to represent the Hebrew word which is rendered in our version by "assembly" or "congregation"—*e.g.*, Deut. xviii. 16, xxiii. 3, 4, xxxi. 30; Josh. viii. 35; 1 Kings viii. 4; Ps. xxii. 22—25; Joel ii. 15, 16.

"The term describes the Hebrew people in its collective capacity, under its peculiar aspect as a holy community, held together by religious, rather than political, bonds. Sometimes it is used in a broad sense as inclusive of foreign settlers (Exod. xii. 19); but more properly as exclusively appropriate to the Hebrew element of the population (Numb. xv. 15); in each case it expresses the idea of the Roman *Civitas* or the Greek *Politeia*. Every circumcised Hebrew . . . was a member of the congregation, and took part in its proceedings probably from the time that he bore arms. It is important, however, to observe

that he acquired no political rights in his individual capacity, but only as a member of a *house;* for the basis of the Hebrew policy was the house, whence was formed in an ascending scale the *family* or collection of houses, the *tribe* or collection of families, and the *congregation* or collection of tribes. Strangers settled in the land, if circumcised, were, with certain exceptions (Deut. xxiii. 1 *ff.*), admitted to the privilege of citizenship, and are spoken of as members of the congregation in its more extended application (Exod. xii. 19; Numb. ix. 14, xv. 15); it appears doubtful, however, whether they were represented in the congregation in its corporate capacity as a deliberative body, as they were not, strictly speaking, members of any house. . . . The congregation occupied an important position under the theocracy as the *Comitia* or national parliament, invested with legislative and judicial powers. In this capacity it acted through a system of patriarchal representation, each house, family, and tribe being represented by its head, or father. . . . The number of these representatives being inconveniently large for ordinary business, a further selection was made by Moses of seventy, who formed a species of standing committee (Numb. xi. 16). Occasionally, indeed, the whole body of the people was assembled, the mode of summoning being by the sound of the two silver trumpets, and the place of meeting the door of the Tabernacle, hence usually called the Tabernacle of the *congregation* (Numb. x. 8); the occasions of such general assemblies were solemn religious services (Exod. xii. 47; Numb. xxv. 6; Joel ii. 15), or to receive new commandments (Exod. xix. 7, 8; Lev. viii. 4)" (Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible").

The word *ecclesia* had, therefore, acquired among the Jews noble and sacred associations. It was the monument and memorial of the time of their national independence, when the whole people or their representatives were called together to receive Divine revelations and to determine great questions of national policy. When our Lord said to Peter, "Upon this rock I will build My *Church*, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 18), He declared that He was about to call together a new elect race, and to constitute a holy nation that should be protected by the strength of God against all the powers of evil.

The Greek *ecclesia* was convened by the public crier; the Jewish *ecclesia* by the silver trumpets, or by messengers sent through the country to proclaim the meeting of the assembly; the Christian *ecclesia* was to be gathered together by the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ.

III.

In the New Testament the word has three uses.

(I.) It denotes that great and glorious society which includes all those who through Christ have received redemption from sin and the gift of eternal life—those who have already departed to be with Christ, those on earth who by "patience in well-doing" are seeking "for glory, honour, and incorruption." To this Church belong all that are "in Christ" of every age and of every land; of every church and of none. This is the Church of which Christ speaks when He says, "On this rock will I build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 18). This is the Church of which Paul speaks when he says that God put all things under Christ's feet, "and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His Body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. i. 23).

(II.) It denotes an organised society of believers in Christ, meeting regularly for Christian worship, instruction, and fellowship; for the commemoration of the death of Christ in the Lord's Supper, and for the maintenance of discipline. Every organised church of this kind is represented in the New Testament as a more or less perfect realisation of the larger or more august society; as possessing its powers, glory, and blessedness. In the highest sense of the words, the Universal Church, in heaven and on earth, is "the Body of Christ" (Eph. i. 23); but, writing to the church at Corinth, Paul says, "Ye are the Body of Christ, and severally members one of another" (1 Cor. xii. 27).

(III.) It is sometimes used to denote, not any organised Christian society, but those who believe in Christ as constituting a class of persons distinguished in many ways from those who do not. We say, for example, that the relations of the Church to the world vary in different countries and in different ages; that for the last hundred years the Church has had to maintain an incessant conflict with speculative unbelief; that it is the duty of the Church to care for the poor. In such expressions as these we think of all Christians, of all churches, as constituting a distinct community, with a common faith, a common ethical law, and similar religious institutions and observances. And so when Paul spoke of "persecuting the Church" (Phil. iii. 6) he did not mean that he persecuted a particular Christian society—the Christian society at Jerusalem or the Christian society at Antioch; he was not thinking of the organisations to which those who believed in Christ belonged; he was thinking of them

as constituting a "party" which he had regarded as hostile to the faith and hopes of the Jewish race. When he described Gaius as "my host, and of the whole Church" (Rom. xvi. 23), he did not mean that Gaius was the host of a particular church, but that any man that belonged to the "party" of Christ, to the Christian community scattered throughout the world, received from Gaius a hospitable welcome. There is a similar use of the word in Acts ix. 31, where the Revised Version reads, "So the Church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace." Luke does not say "the church of Judea and Galilee and Samaria" had peace; such an expression would have implied that the Christians in these three provinces were organised into one society. He means that those who believed in Christ, the Christian community scattered throughout these districts, had peace, just as we might say that "throughout England, in the early part of the eighteenth century, the Church was in great need of a revival." This third use of the word is sometimes identified with the first, but, as I think, inaccurately.

Art. II.—The Athenian Ecclesia.

THE following account of the Athenian Ecclesia is extracted and condensed from the article in Smith's "Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities."

Ecclesia (*ἐκκλησία*), the general assembly of the citizens at Athens, in which they met to discuss and determine upon matters of public interest. These assemblies were either *ordinary*, and held four times in each prytany, or *extraordinary*—that is, specially convened upon any sudden emergency. (The prytany was the term of office during which the representatives of each tribe presided in the public assemblies. Originally there were ten of these periods in each year; with the increase of the number of tribes, the number was raised to twelve; and it is probable that the ordinary meetings of the ecclesia in each period were reduced to three.)

In the great times of Athenian history the meetings were held in the Pnyx, which was semi-circular in form, with a boundary wall, part rock and part masonry, and an area of about 12,000 square yards.

With respect to the right of attending, it was enjoyed by all legitimate citizens who were of the proper age (generally supposed to be twenty, certainly not less than eighteen), and not labouring under loss of civil rights. All were considered citizens whose parents were both such, or who had been presented with the freedom of the State, and enrolled in the register of some demus, or parish. All citizens were not only permitted, but required, to attend the assemblies. Those who did not attend were subject to fine. The poorer citizens were paid for attendance to compensate them for the loss of time occasioned by their discharge of a public duty.

All matters of public and national interest, whether foreign or domestic, including the regulation and appropriation of the taxes, were determined upon by the people in assembly. In some exceptional cases the assembly exercised judicial powers.

If any change in the laws was proposed, the assembly referred it to a legislative committee, whose consent was necessary to give it effect.

Any citizen might address the assembly and propose a decree; and if the proposal contained nothing which was considered by certain recognised

authorities as injurious to the State, or contrary to the existing laws, it was put to the vote.

The votes were usually taken by show of hands; the crier formed as accurate an opinion as he could of the numbers for and against, and the chairman pronounced the majority. Vote by ballot was only used in a few special cases determined by law; as, for instance, when a proposition was made for allowing those who had suffered the loss of civil rights to appeal to the people for restitution to citizenship; or for inflicting extraordinary punishments on atrocious offenders, and, generally, upon any matters which affected private persons. In cases of this sort a decree was not valid unless at least six thousand persons voted for it. This was by far the majority of those citizens who were in the habit of attending, for in the time of war the number never amounted to five thousand, and in time of peace seldom to ten thousand.

Art. III.—The Origin of Episcopacy.*

THE proof that to the writers of the New Testament "bishop" and "presbyter" were different names for the same office is decisive. This being admitted, there are four principal lines of argument in support of the apostolic origin of Episcopacy.

I.

It is said that the apostles ordained "presbyters" or "bishops," and that at first these two titles denoted the same office; but that, when the churches which they ruled had greatly increased in strength, it became necessary that they should delegate some of their powers to ministers with authority inferior to their own. These delegates they called "presbyters;" and the title of "bishop" they reserved to themselves.

This theory requires no serious discussion. It floats in the air. It is unsupported by any fragment of evidence. There is no shred of trustworthy tradition to be alleged in its favour. The whole current of early ecclesiastical history and the practices of the early church are inconsistent with it. The bishop did not elect the presbyters, but the church and the presbyters elected the bishop. The presbytery was not evolved out of the episcopate by delegation; but the episcopate out of the presbytery by formal or informal election.

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* In this article I have made constant use of Dr. Lightfoot's invaluable dissertation on the Christian Ministry in his "Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians," and, wherever I could, have employed his words rather than my own. He has illustrated the subject with admirable candour as well as with consummate ability; and though Congregationalists do not agree with all his conclusions, they cannot but be grateful to him for the noble temper in which he has discussed questions which too commonly provoke the spirit of ecclesiastical partisanship. With one necessary exception, the references in this Article are to the Sixth Edition of Dr. Lightfoot's "Epistle to the Philippians," published 1881. It is only just to quote the following passage from the Preface of that edition. Referring to the dissertation on the Christian Ministry, Dr. Lightfoot says:—"The object of that essay was an investigation into the origin of the Christian ministry. The result has been a confirmation of the statement in the English Ordinal: 'It is evident unto all men reading the Holy Scripture and ancient authors that from the apostles' time there have been three orders of ministers in Christ's Church—bishops, priests, and deacons.' But I was scrupulously anxious not to overstate the evidence in any case; and it would seem that partial and qualifying statements, prompted by this anxiety, have assumed undue proportions in the minds of some readers, who have emphasised them to the neglect of the general drift of the essay."

II.

It is said that modern "bishops" are the successors of church officers who are denoted in the New Testament by other titles which are now disused.

(1) According to Theodoret, "the same persons were anciently called promiscuously both 'bishops' and 'presbyters,' whilst those who are now called 'bishops' were called '*apostles*.' But, shortly after, the name of 'apostles' was appropriated to such only as were apostles indeed; and then the name 'bishop' was given to those who before were called apostles." * And so Epaphroditus was the apostle of the Philippians, and Titus the apostle of the Cretans, and Timothy the apostle of the Asiatics.

But "the apostle, like the prophet or the evangelist, held no *local* office. He was essentially, as his name denotes, a missionary, moving about from place to place, founding and confirming new brotherhoods. The only ground on which Theodoret builds his theory is a false interpretation of a passage in St. Paul. At the opening of the Epistle to Philippi the presbyters (here called bishops) and deacons are saluted, while in the body of the letter one Epaphroditus is mentioned as an apostle of the Philippians. If 'apostle' here had the meaning which is thus assigned to it, all the three orders of the ministry would be found at Philippi. But this interpretation will not stand. The true apostle, like St. Peter or St. John, bears this title as the messenger, the delegate of Christ Himself, while Epaphroditus is only so styled as the messenger of the Philippian brotherhood; and in the very next clause the expression is explained by the statement that he carried their alms to St. Paul (Phil. ii. 25). The use of the word here has a parallel in another passage (2 Cor. viii. 23), where messengers (or apostles) of the churches are mentioned." †

Even in apostolic times the title "apostle" was not restricted to the original eleven, to Matthias (who was chosen in the place of Judas), and to Paul. James the Lord's brother was an apostle (Gal. i. 18); Andronicus and Junias were apostles (Rom. xvi. 7); Barnabas, as well as Paul, is described as an apostle by Luke (Acts xiv. 4, 14); Paul associates Barnabas with himself as entrusted with the apostleship to the Gentiles (Gal. ii. 8, 9), and claims for Barnabas, as well as for himself, that support which apostles received from the churches (1 Cor. ix. 5, 6, 7).

There were wandering teachers who endeavoured to Judaise the faith of converts from heathenism; Paul calls them "false apostles, deceitful workers" (2 Cor. xi. 13). The church at Ephesus had been visited by men who claimed to be "apostles," and is praised for rejecting their claims;

* Theodoret, quoted by Bingham: "Antiquities," book ii., chap. ii., 1.
† Lightfoot: "Epistle to the Philippians," p. 196.

thou "didst try them which call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false" (Rev. ii. 2).

With the exception of James, whose permanent home was in Jerusalem, these "apostles," as far as we know anything about them from the New Testament, were unattached to any particular church or group of churches. They travelled from city to city, and from country to country, preaching the Gospel.* They were in no sense "bishops." Their functions were the functions neither of modern diocesan bishops, nor of the presbyter-bishops of the primitive churches. James may have been called an apostle for an obvious reason. For some time after the Day of Pentecost, the original apostles were the only rulers of the church; James was probably associated with them very early in the leadership of the Christian community; he was "the Lord's brother"; our Lord, after His resurrection, appeared to James when the original apostles were not present (1 Cor. xv. 7); he had his own testimony to bear to that great fact which lies at the foundation of the Christian Faith, and his great force of character was certain to give him authority. But if he was associated with the apostles in the government of the church before "elders" were appointed, it was natural that he, too, should be called an "apostle," and should afterwards retain the title.

(2) Hilary, Augustine, Epiphanius,† and some modern authorities, including Archbishop Trench,‡ identify the "angels" of the seven churches of Asia with the "bishops" of those churches. John's own language, says Bishop Lightfoot, "gives the true key to the symbolism. 'The seven stars,' so it is explained, 'are the seven angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks are the seven churches.' This contrast between the heavenly and the earthly fires—the star shining steadily by its own inherent eternal light, and the lamp flickering and uncertain, requiring to be fed with fuel and tended with care—cannot be devoid of meaning. The star is the suprasensual counterpart, the heavenly

* This is confirmed by the curious document lately published by Bryennius, Metropolitan of Nicomedia, "The Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles." It is supposed to have been written in the last years of the first century or the early years of the second. In chap. 11 appear these singular words: "Let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord. And he shall not remain a single day (only), but if it is needful a second also; but if he remain three he is a false prophet. And let the apostle when he goes forth take nothing except bread (enough to last him) till he reach his lodgings for the night. But if he ask for money he is a false prophet." The "apostle" was clearly not a diocesan bishop, but a travelling religious teacher. The only church officers mentioned in this document are "bishops and deacons" (chap. 14). The translation is that which appeared in the *Guardian*, March 19, 1884.

† See Bingham: "Antiquities," book ii., chap. ii., 11.

‡ "Epistles to the Seven Churches," pp. 51—57.

representative; the lamp, the earthly realisation, the outward embodiment. Whether the angel is here conceived as an actual person, the celestial guardian, or only as a personification, the idea or spirit of the church, it is unnecessary for my present purpose to consider. But, whatever may be the exact conception, he is identified with and made responsible for it to a degree wholly unsuited to any human officer. Nothing is predicated of him which may not be predicated of it. To him are imputed all its hopes, its fears, its graces, its shortcomings. He is punished with it, and he is rewarded with it. In one passage especially, the language applied to the angel seems to exclude the common interpretation. In the message to Thyatira the angel is blamed because he suffers himself to be led astray by 'his wife Jezebel.' In this image of Ahab's idolatrous queen, some dangerous and immoral teaching must be personified; for it does violence alike to the general tenor and to the individual expressions in the passage to suppose that an actual woman is meant. Thus the symbolism of the passage is entirely in keeping. Nor, again, is this mode of representation new. The 'princes' in the prophecy of Daniel present a very near, if not an exact, parallel to the angels of the Revelation. Here, as elsewhere, St. John seems to adapt the imagery of this earliest apocalyptic book." *

Another interpretation is possible—or, rather, what is substantially the interpretation of Dr. Lightfoot may assume another form. The Apocalypse is an intensely Jewish book, and it ought not to surprise us if the churches are represented in imagery suggested by the Jewish synagogue. In the synagogue "the angel" or messenger of the congregation was an unofficial person who was called upon by the chief ruler of the synagogue to conduct the devotions of the congregation,† was the mouthpiece of the people, their representative, their messenger to God; in him the whole synagogue appeared before the Divine throne. The "angel" of the church may be the ideal representative of the church before God. This explains why the words addressed to the "angel" charge him with all the sins of the church, and honour him for all its loyalty, obedience, and zeal.

III.

It is alleged that in Timothy and Titus we have true diocesan bishops whose powers were immediately derived from the apostles; and that James was Bishop of Jerusalem. But there is a fatal objection to the theory that Timothy and Titus were diocesan bishops. If they were "bishops" they were bishops without a diocese.

* "Epistle to the Philippians," p. 202.

† See the excellent account of the synagogue service in Dr. Edersheim's "Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah," vol. i., pp. 431—450, especially p. 439.

Timothy became Paul's companion on his second missionary journey (Acts xvi. 1—3); travelled with him through Phrygia and Galatia; accompanied him to Philippi; and, long after, Paul reminded the Philippian Christians that they knew the proof of Timothy "that, as a child serveth a father, so he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel" (Phil. ii. 22). He probably remained at Philippi for a short time after Paul left the city, but he was with the Apostle again at Berœa, and, when the Apostle was driven out of Berœa by the Jews from Thessalonica, Timothy and Silas were left behind, but were charged to follow him "with all speed" (Acts xvii. 14, 15). He joined Paul at Athens, but was sent back to Thessalonica to "establish" the Thessalonian Christians, and to "comfort" them (1 Thess. iii. 2). He rejoined Paul at Corinth (Acts xviii. 5), and his name is associated with Paul's in the two letters which Paul wrote, while he remained in Corinth, to Thessalonica. He reminded the Corinthians that Silvanus and Timothy, as well as himself, had preached the Gospel to them (2 Cor. ii. 19). In the early part of Paul's long stay at Ephesus, Timothy appears to have been with him, but was sent away with Erastus into Macedonia (Acts xix. 21, 22). He was also directed to go on to Greece; for in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, written from Ephesus, Paul says, "For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, who shall put you in remembrance of my ways, which be in Christ, even as I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Cor. iv. 17). "If Timothy come, see that he be with you without fear" (1 Cor. xvi. 10). When Paul was in Macedonia, where he wrote the Second Epistle to the Corinthians (2 Cor. viii. 1, ix. 2), Timothy had rejoined him (2 Cor. i. 1). He came on with Paul to Corinth, and joins in the kindly salutations to friends at Rome whom both he and Paul had met during their travels (Rom. xvi. 11). He is named among the friends of Paul who sailed from Philippi and waited for Paul and Luke at Troas (Acts xx. 4, 7) when Paul was on his way to Jerusalem. Whether Timothy went to Jerusalem is doubtful. It is also doubtful whether he was with the Apostle during his imprisonment at Cæsarea. But he was with him in Rome (Phil. i.; Col. i. 1), and it was Paul's purpose to send him to Philippi to get news of the condition of the Philippian church (Phil. ii. 19). After Paul's release from imprisonment he and Timothy visited proconsular Asia, and Timothy was left at Ephesus to correct the grave errors which had appeared in the church in that city, and perhaps in the neighbouring churches; Paul hoped to come back to him soon (1 Tim. ii. 14).

It appears, therefore, that Timothy was employed by Paul at Philippi, Berœa, Thessalonica, and Corinth, as well as at Ephesus; and there is no reason to suppose that his appointment at Ephesus was a permanent one.

The directions contained in Paul's first epistle to him give the impression that his work was not to be restricted to a single church and a single city. He may have been in Ephesus or its neighbourhood when Paul's second epistle to him was written. But he was not to remain there. Writing from Rome Paul says, "Do thy diligence to come shortly to me" (2 Tim. iv. 9). His work at Ephesus was nearly done.

We have fewer particulars of the history of Titus. He went up to Jerusalem with Paul and Barnabas (Gal. ii. 1, 2) when the question was to be decided whether the Gentiles were under any obligation to keep the Mosaic Law. Paul, after his long stay at Ephesus, expected to meet Titus at Troas, and was disappointed at not finding him there (2 Cor. ii. 13); but they met in Macedonia, and Titus told the Apostle of the successful issue of his mission to Corinth (2 Cor. vii. 6, 7, 13), where he had been to enforce what Paul had written in his First Epistle to the Corinthians in reference to the case of flagrant immorality which the church had tolerated. Titus had also been commissioned to press forward the contributions of the church at Corinth for the poor Christians in Judea (2 Cor. viii. 6). He carried to Corinth Paul's second epistle (2 Cor. viii. 16—18), and was directed to complete the collection of the contributions (2 Cor. viii. 19—24).

For some time we lose sight of him. We find that after Paul's first imprisonment he was with the Apostle in Crete (Tit. i. 5), and Paul left him there to complete the organisation of the churches, to resist the Judaisers, and, generally, to instruct the Cretan Christians in Christian faith and duty. But he was not to remain in Crete. It was in no sense his "diocese." "When I shall send Artemas to thee, or Tychicus, give diligence to come unto me to Nicopolis; for there I have determined to winter" (Tit. iii. 12). When Paul wrote his Second Epistle to Timothy, Titus had not returned to Crete, but had gone to Dalmatia (2 Tim. iv. 10).

As far as we can learn from the New Testament, neither Timothy nor Titus had permanent relations to any church or to any group of churches. They travelled with Paul. He left them behind him to give further instruction to the churches which he and they had founded together, and to complete the details of church organisation. He sent them on special missions to churches which, at the time, he himself was unable to visit. The traditions which make Timothy Bishop of Ephesus and Titus Bishop of Crete are wholly untrustworthy.

Nor can the remarkable position of James "the brother of our Lord" in the church at Jerusalem be appealed to as an example of episcopal rank and authority in apostolic times.

When Peter was liberated from prison he directed the disciples, who were meeting in the house of Mary the mother of Mark, to tell the story

of his release to "James and to the brethren" (Acts xii. 17). The apostles had been driven from the city, and from this time James occupies the most conspicuous position in the church. He probably presided in the assembly which was held to discuss the question whether Christian converts from heathenism should be required to keep the laws of Moses; his address (Acts xv. 14—21) looks like the address of the president of the meeting. When Paul went up to Jerusalem for the last time, Luke says, "The brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us to James; and all the elders were present" (Acts xxi. 18). The Jewish Christians whose presence at Antioch led Peter and Barnabas to separate themselves from their Gentile brethren are described as certain "that came from James" (Gal. ii. 12). All these passages indicate that James was the recognised leader of the church in Jerusalem.

But they indicate nothing more. They are consistent with the theory that he was one of several "elders." His ascendency was personal, not official. It is unnecessary to assume that he was a "bishop," in the episcopalian sense of the title, to explain his prominence and his power. He was "the Lord's brother"; this relationship itself would invest him with a certain sacredness and surround him with the reverence of the church. He was a man of great force of character, and had all the moral and intellectual qualities which contribute to personal ascendency. His personal authority was so great that he is named with Peter and John as those who were "reputed to be pilliars," and he is called an "apostle" (Gal. i. 19).

He is never described as a "bishop" till the middle of the second century, and the title would have been alien to the usages of a Jewish church like that at Jerusalem. That he was the presiding elder of the church is very probable, and his personal distinction gave immense importance to the office. His personal authority must have done very much to hold the church at Jerusalem together through times of severe difficulty, and this illustration of the advantage of a vigorous presidency may have accelerated the development of the presiding presbyter into the bishop in the neighbouring church at Antioch, and it may have led Ignatius to value episcopacy as constituting "a visible centre of unity" in the congregation of the faithful. It was at Antioch, which was in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, that the supremacy of the bishop found its earliest and most vigorous advocate.

IV.

The fourth theory is far more plausible. About the condition and organisation of Christian churches during the last thirty years of the first century history is almost silent. Nothing is to be learnt about this period

from the New Testament, and not very much from early ecclesiastical literature. It is contended that during these thirty years, and therefore during the lifetime of the Apostle John, a great change was made in the organisation of the apostolic churches, and that at the beginning of the second century the distinction between "bishops" and "presbyters" was widely and firmly established.

The argument may be stated briefly in the following form:—'As late as 'A.D. 70 there is no sign of any distinction between a bishop and a 'presbyter; but soon after A.D. 100 it is clear that supreme authority 'was attributed to the bishop. What is the history of this remark-'able change? The Apostle John was alive till nearly the close of the 'century, and the earliest indications of the supremacy of the bishop are in 'Asia Minor, where John's influence was most powerful. The distinction 'between bishop and presbyter is strongly asserted in the epistles of 'Ignatius, which belong to the early part of the second century. May it 'not be inferred that this change in the organisation of Christian 'churches had John's sanction, and that the simpler polity which is illus-'trated in the New Testament was not intended to be permanent?'*

'That the authority of the bishop had this early origin, that it was fully 'established some time before the end of the first century, and therefore 'during the life of the Apostle John, does not rest on the unsupported 'authority of Ignatius; it is confirmed by other early "ecclesiastical writers."*

There are two questions to be investigated: (I.) What evidence exists in support of the position that early in the second century the distinction between "bishops" and "presbyters" was widely and firmly established, and must, therefore, have had apostolic sanction? (II.) Is there any evidence to confirm the early origin of diocesan, as distinguished from congregational, episcopacy?

(I.) In investigating the first of these questions it will be necessary to consider (A) the evidence of contemporary authorities, and (B) the testimony of later ecclesiastical writers.

(A) *Contemporary evidence in favour of the existence of the distinction between "bishops" and "presbyters" early in the second century.*

* Rothe's theory, that "immediately after the fall of Jerusalem a council of the apostles and first teachers of the Gospel was held to deliberate on the crisis and to frame measures for the well-being of the church," and that "the centre of the system then organised was episcopacy," has been effectually destroyed by Dr. Lightfoot ("Dissertation on the Christian Ministry," pp. 201—206). It is a bolder form of the theory which attributes the origin of episcopacy to the Apostle John and the other apostles who were living in Asia Minor at the close of the first century. The arguments which are fatal to the Johannine theory are also fatal to the theory of an apostolic council.

(1.) The chief strength of the evidence is derived from the epistles of Ignatius.

The date of the martyrdom of Ignatius is not finally determined; it lies between A.D. 107 and A.D. 117. Fifteen epistles have been attributed to him; it is universally acknowledged that eight of these are spurious. Of the remaining seven we have two Greek texts—a shorter and a longer. Only three of these seven appear in the Syriac version discovered in the British Museum, and published in 1845.

The longer Greek text is universally rejected. Our choice lies between the short Greek and the Syriac version. When Dr. Lightfoot in 1868 published his well-known essay on the Christian Ministry ("Epistle to the Philippians," pp. 179—267), he "assumed that the Syriac version represents the epistles of St. Ignatius in their genuine form."* As to the epistles existing in the short Greek text, he "acquiesced in the earlier opinion of Lipsius, who ascribed them to an interpolator writing about A.D. 140." † He has since been convinced that the seven letters of the short Greek are genuine.‡ In this change of judgment Dr. Lightfoot does not stand alone. For some years after the publication of the Syriac version a large number of eminent scholars believed that it represented the real letters of Ignatius; more recently, the short Greek has been gradually recovering its former authority. But the question is still one on which scholars are divided.§

Ignatius is the only contemporary writer that can be quoted in support of the theory that the threefold ministry of bishops, presbyters, and deacons was widely and firmly established in the Church in the early years of the second century, and must therefore have been created with apostolic sanction and authority between A.D. 70 and A.D. 100, and the question where we are to find the true text of his epistles is one of considerable interest. For while the Syriac version speaks expressly of bishop, presbyters, and deacons, the measure and kind of authority attributed by Ignatius to the bishop as distinguished from the presbyters depends upon the conflicting claims of the Syriac version of the three epistles and the short Greek of the seven.

In the Syriac version the ideal bishop is scarcely, if anything, more than a vigorous presiding elder, who is called bishop to distinguish him from his colleagues, and who, as president, is, to use Dr. Lightfoot's felicitous

* "Epistle to the Philippians," First Edition, p. 232.

† *Ibid.*; and *Contemporary Review*, February, 1875, p. 357.

‡ Preface to Sixth Edition of "Epistle to the Philippians," 1881.

§ Dr. Lightfoot's work on Ignatius, which has been eagerly expected from month to month for some time past, has not yet been published (August, 1884).

phrase, "a visible centre of unity in the congregation."* The strongest passages in support of episcopal supremacy are those which are quoted by Dr. Lightfoot. "Vindicate thine office with all diligence," writes Ignatius to the Bishop of Smyrna, "in things temporal as well as spiritual. Have a care of unity, than which nothing is better." "The crisis requires thee, as the pilot requires the winds or the storm-tossed mariner a haven, so as to attain unto God." "Let not those who seem to be plausible and teach falsehoods dismay thee; but stand thou firm as an anvil under the hammer; 'tis the part of a great athlete to be bruised and to conquer." "Let nothing be done without thy consent, and do thou nothing without the consent of God." He adds directions, also, that those who decide on a life of virginity shall disclose their intention to the bishop only, and those who marry shall obtain his consent to their union, that "their marriage may be according to the Lord, and not according to lust." And, turning from the bishop to the people, he adds, "Give heed to your bishop, that God also may give heed to you. I give my life for those who are obedient to the bishop, to presbyters, to deacons. With them may I have my portion in the presence of God." Writing to the Ephesians, also, he says that in receiving their bishop Onesimus he is receiving their whole body, and he charges them to love him, and one and all to be in his likeness, adding, "Since love does not permit me to be silent, therefore I have been forward in exhorting you to conform to the will of God."†

The whole value of these extracts as evidence in favour of the early origin of episcopacy lies in the enumeration of "bishop, presbyters, and deacons." Omit these words, and they might all have been written by a presiding elder who was inclined to magnify his office, and who believed that the unity and safety of a church in troubled times depended upon the vigour with which the chief of the presbyters discharged the duties of administration, and upon the loyalty with which the church recognised his authority.

Ignatius had an exaggerated conception of the power of all church rulers. The manner in which he enforces the duty of obedience to presbyters and deacons, as well as to the bishop, is alien from the spirit of apostolic times. If the tone of his letters, even as they appear in the Syriac version, was common among the rulers of the churches at the beginning of the second century, the ideal glory of the Christian commonalty had faded away. The powers of an Ignatian "bishop" may not have been greater than those of an energetic presiding elder, but, if the more authoritative title was already generally appropriated to him, this would indicate that the organisation of

* "Epistle to the Philippians," p. 234. † "Epistle to the Philippians," p. 235.

the church was being centralised, and that the spiritual freedom of earlier times was giving place to ecclesiastical tyranny.

It has been said that "Ignatius is the only contemporary writer that can be quoted in support of the theory that the threefold ministry of bishops, presbyters, and deacons was widely and firmly established in the Church in the early years of the second century, and must, therefore, have been created with apostolic sanction and authority between A.D. 70 and A.D. 100." But this is a very inadequate statement. *Whatever other contemporary evidence exists is hostile to the theory.*

(2.) About A.D. 95 Clement of Rome wrote a letter to the church at Corinth, which was disturbed by a violent schism. He wrote, not in his own name, but in the name of the church. He says that the apostles, "preaching everywhere in country and in town, appointed their first-fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be *bishops and deacons* unto them that should believe" (§ 42). "Our apostles knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strife over the name of the *bishop's office*. . . . These, therefore, who were appointed by them, or, afterward, by other men of repute, with the consent of the whole church, and have ministered unblameably to the flock of Christ, in lowliness of mind, peacefully, and with all modesty, and for a long time have borne a good report with all—these men we consider to be unjustly thrust out of their ministration. For it will be no light sin for us if we thrust out those who have offered the gifts of the *bishop's office* unblameably and holily. Blessed are those *presbyters* who have gone before, seeing that their departure was fruitful and ripe; for they have no fear lest any one should remove them from their appointed place. For we see that ye have displaced certain persons, though they were living honourably, from the ministration which they had kept blamelessly" (§ 44). "Only let the flock of Christ be at peace with its duly appointed *presbyters*" (§ 54).

It is clear that to Clement "bishop" and "presbyter" were different names for the same office. The apostles appointed "bishops and deacons," not "bishops, presbyters, and deacons." The "presbyters" whom the Corinthians had deposed were "bishops," and some of them had apparently been appointed by the apostles themselves. No separate authority is claimed for a "bishop." The Corinthians are to live at peace with their "presbyters." Clement does not claim to be a bishop himself in any other sense than that in which all "presbyters" were "bishops." He does not recognise at Corinth any one bishop as having authority over the rest.*

* "There is no allusion to the episcopal office; yet the main subject of Clement's letter is the expulsion and ill treatment of certain presbyters, whose authority he maintains as holding an office instituted by, and handed down from, the apostles themselves" (Lightfoot: "Epistle to the Philippians," p. 216).

And it is remarkable that in the letter of Ignatius to the Romans there is no allusion to the episcopal office.

It may be said that the theory which is being investigated ascribes the apostolic origin of episcopacy to John, who was living at Ephesus; that John's influence was most powerful in Asia Minor; and that Rome was a very distant city. But if the Apostle John, who probably died within three or four years after Clement's epistle was written, had authorised the creation of the threefold ministry, Clement would have been likely to hear of it as soon as Ignatius. Communications were easy between Rome and the remotest parts of the empire. Ephesus was the centre of the trade of the Levant. There was probably much more intercourse between Ephesus and Rome than between Ephesus and Antioch. Corinth was still nearer to Ephesus, and Corinth knew nothing of the change which is alleged to have been introduced into the polity of the Church. If John established episcopacy, it is inexplicable that in A.D. 95 neither Rome nor Corinth should have had a "bishop."

(3.) During the last years of his life John lived at Ephesus, and within a few hours' ride from Ephesus was the great city of Smyrna. Polycarp was Bishop of Smyrna at the time of the martyrdom of Ignatius. He is said by Irenæus to have been appointed bishop "by the apostles." He is said by Tertullian to have been appointed by John himself.

After John's death, Polycarp was accustomed to speak of his familiar intercourse with the Apostle and with others who had seen the Lord; and he used to tell what he had heard from them concerning the miracles and teaching of Christ.* If episcopacy was founded by John's authority, Polycarp must have known it.

But soon after Ignatius wrote his epistle to Polycarp, Polycarp wrote an epistle to the Philippians. It begins: "Polycarp and the presbyters with him to the church of God sojourning at Philippi." Dr. Lightfoot, in his dissertation on the Christian Ministry, says "he evidently writes as a bishop, for he distinguishes himself from his presbyters."† With the greatest respect for Dr. Lightfoot's authority, this inference seems a little strained. If Sir Garnet Wolseley wrote, "Sir Garnet Wolseley and the generals who are with him offer their congratulations," &c., this would not imply that Sir Garnet was anything more than a general. On the authority

* Eusebius: "Ecc. Hist.," book v., chap. 20.

† Dr. Lightfoot's "Epistle to the Philippians," p. 212. In an article on Polycarp in the *Contemporary Review*, May, 1875, Dr. Lightfoot says: "There is every reason for believing that Polycarp was Bishop of Smyrna at this time; yet in the heading of the letter he does not assert his title, but writes merely 'Polycarp and the presbyters with him'" (p. 840).

of Ignatius we may believe that Polycarp was "bishop" of Smyrna at this time, but Polycarp appears to have attached very little importance to his title; from his own letter we should never have discovered that there was any difference between a bishop and a presbyter. Dr. Lightfoot has given an excellent account of the letter. "In Polycarp's epistle . . . there is no mention of episcopacy. He speaks at length about the duties of the presbyters, of the deacons, of the widows and others, but the bishop is entirely ignored. More especially he directs the younger men to be obedient to 'the presbyters and deacons as to God and Christ,' but nothing is said about obedience to the bishop. At a later part he has occasion to speak of an offence committed by one Valens, a presbyter, but here again there is the same silence." * In his dissertation on the Christian Ministry Dr. Lightfoot closes a brief summary of the contents of this epistle by saying: "We are thus led to the inference that episcopacy did not exist at all among the Philippians at this time, or existed only in an elementary form, so that the bishop was a mere president of the presbyteral council." †

But Polycarp does not suggest that the organisation of the Philippian church was incomplete. When Paul wrote to the church it had "bishops and deacons" (Phil. i. 1); it has the same officers still, but they are described by Polycarp as "presbyters and deacons." He does not tell them that the Apostle John had created a new order in the Church, and that it was now their duty to have a "bishop." Polycarp was much more likely to know the mind of John than Ignatius; and, if John had re-organised the churches of Asia Minor on episcopal principles, Polycarp would surely have described himself as the Bishop of Smyrna, and would have recommended, and even enforced, the appointment of a Bishop of Philippi.

The Syriac version of Ignatius is good evidence that early in the second century Ignatius himself was Bishop of Antioch, that Polycarp was Bishop of Smyrna, and Onesimus Bishop of Ephesus. The short Greek text of the epistles, assuming its genuineness, is good evidence that at the same time Damas was Bishop of Magnesia, Polybius Bishop of Tralles, and that the church of Philadelphia had a bishop whose name is not given. That Polycarp was Bishop of Smyrna is confirmed by his pupil Irenæus. ‡ "Polycrates also (a younger contemporary of Polycarp, and himself Bishop of Ephesus) designates him by this title; and, again, in the letter written by his own church and giving an account of his martyrdom, he is styled "Bishop of the church in Smyrna.'" § But what is the worth of

* *Contemporary Review*, May, 1875, p. 841.
† "Epistle to the Philippians," p. 215.
‡ But see note, p. 230.
§ Lightfoot's "Epistle to the Philippians," p. 212.

these facts as evidence that early in the second century the episcopal office was firmly and widely established? Ephesus could be reached in a few hours from Smyrna; Magnesia was ten or fifteen miles distant from Ephesus. Tralles and Philadelphia were more remote, but their distance from Smyrna was not considerable. Antioch, of which Ignatius himself was bishop, was the only distant city.

But at the close of the first century Clement knows nothing of episcopacy in Rome or in Corinth. At the beginning of the second century Polycarp, himself a Bishop, knows nothing of episcopacy at Philippi.

We learn from Ignatius that between A.D. 107 and A.D. 117 there were "bishops" in Antioch and in five other churches which were all situated in one small district of Asia Minor. This is all that his evidence amounts to, and it hardly proves that episcopacy was "widely established."

(B) *Evidence of later ecclesiastical writers in favour of the existence of the distinction between "bishops" and "presbyters" early in the second century.*

Early in the second century there were a few "bishops" in Asia Minor, but the evidence that there were "bishops" elsewhere is wholly untrustworthy.

Irenæus is quoted to prove that the "bishops" of Rome received their authority from the apostles themselves. "The blessed apostles [Peter and Paul], having built up the church, committed into the hands of Linus the office of the episcopate. Of this Linus Paul makes mention in the Epistles to Timothy. To him succeeded Anencletus, and after him, in the third place from the apostles, Clement was allotted the bishopric." *

Tertullian is quoted for the same purpose. He challenges the heretics to prove that their doctrines had apostolic authority. "Let them, then, produce the original records of their churches; let them unfold the roll of their bishops, running down in due succession in such a manner that their first distinguished bishop shall be able to show for his ordainer and predecessor some one of the apostles or of apostolic men—a man, moreover, who continued steadfast with the apostles. For this is the manner in which the apostolic churches transmit their registers; as the church of Smyrna, which records that Polycarp was placed there by John; as also the church of Rome, which makes Clement to have been ordained in like manner by Peter." † Dr. Lightfoot says very justly that "the reason for supposing Clement to have been a bishop is as strong as the universal tradition of the next ages can make it." ‡ But he adds: "Yet, while calling

* "Adv. Hæres.," book iii., chap. 3 (Roberts's translation).

† "De Præscriptione Hæret.," chap. xxxii. (Holmes's translation.)

‡ "Epistle to the Philippians," p. 221.

him a bishop, we must not suppose him to have attained the same distinct isolated position of authority which was occupied by his successors, Eleutherus and Victor, for instance, at the close of the second century, or even by his contemporaries, Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna. He was rather the chief of the presbyters than the chief over the presbyters. Only when thus limited can the episcopacy of St. Clement be reconciled with the language of his own epistle, or with the notice in his younger contemporary, Hermas."

Clement's "bishopric" of Rome is a crucial case. We have the proof from his own hand that he knew of no distinction between "presbyter" and "bishop." He was a presbyter, and his colleagues were presbyters. He was a bishop, and his colleagues were bishops. President of the presbyters or bishops he may have been, but he was wholly unconscious that he held a different office in the church from theirs, and belonged to a superior order. And yet "the universal tradition of the next ages" makes him a "bishop" in the sense in which the title came to be used in the second century. Irenæus, who wrote within seventy or eighty years after Clement's death, not only describes him as Bishop of Rome, but tells us who were his predecessors. The inference is obvious. The only trustworthy evidence of the existence of episcopacy at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second is contemporary testimony, and the only contemporary testimony is that which is contained in the epistles of Ignatius.

"Episcopacy," says Dr. Lightfoot, "is so inseparably interwoven with all the traditions and beliefs of men like Irenæus and Tertullian that they betray no knowledge of a time when it was not. Even Irenæus, the earlier of these, who was certainly born, and probably had grown up, before the middle of the [second] century, seems to be wholly ignorant that the word bishop had passed from a lower to a higher value since the apostolic times."* Whatever testimony may be quoted from writers living in the second half of the second century or later to the existence of episcopacy in the first century is worthless; and this invalidates all the evidence that can be alleged in support of the early origin of episcopacy, except that of Ignatius.

* "Epistle to the Philippians," p. 227. The words quoted from Dr. Lightfoot in the text invalidate the testimony of Irenæus even to the episcopal rank of his master, Polycarp. In A.D. 180 the distinction between "bishop" and "presbyter" had become definite and firm. If Polycarp, as seems certain, was appointed *one* of the presbyters or bishops of the church at Smyrna with the concurrence of the Apostle John, and if he was made president of the presbytery, the title of "bishop" would have come to be exclusively appropriated to him before his death; and Irenæus would naturally speak of him as having been "bishop"—in the second-century sense of the word—from his original appointment.

It was not till the fourth century that the identity of presbyters and bishops in apostolic times was re-discovered; and then the tradition which had created a succession of "bishops" for each of the great apostolic churches was too firmly rooted to be disturbed.*

But how was it that during the latter half of the second century and throughout the third century the tradition was so uniform that there had been "bishops" from the beginning? From what sources were the catalogues of the succession of bishops in the churches of Jerusalem, of Rome, and of Alexandria derived? The probable explanation seems to be that in the larger churches where there were many presbyters it had become necessary very early, for the sake of order and for administrative purposes, to recognise one of them as the president of the presbytery and of the church. In some cases, and especially during the early and formative years of the great churches, the president would probably take his place without any formal appointment. The presbyter who, on the ground of age, or of energy, or of knowledge, or of character, or of eloquence, was the natural leader of the church would preside.† In other cases the

* "Towards the close of the second century the original application of the term 'bishop' seems to have passed not only out of use, but almost out of memory. So perhaps we may account for the explanation which Irenæus gives of the incident at Miletus (Acts xx. 17—28): 'Having called together the *bishops and presbyters* who were from Ephesus and *the other neighbouring cities*.' But in the fourth century, when the fathers of the Church began to examine the apostolic records with a more critical eye, they at once detected the fact. No one states it more clearly than Jerome. 'Among the ancients,' he says, 'bishops and presbyters are the same, for the one is a term of dignity, the other of age.' 'The Apostle plainly shows,' he writes in another place, 'that presbyters are the same as bishops. . . . It is proved most clearly that bishops and presbyters are the same.' Again, in a third passage he says, 'If any one thinks the opinion that the bishops and presbyters are the same to be not the view of the Scriptures, but my own, let him study the words of the Apostle to the Philippians,' and in support of his view he alleges the Scriptural proofs at great length. But though more full than other writers, he is hardly more explicit. Of his predecessors, the Ambrosian Hilary had discerned the same truth. Of his contemporaries and successors, Chrysostom, Pelagius, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret, all acknowledge it. Thus, in every one of the extant commentaries on the epistles containing the crucial passages, whether Greek or Latin, before the close of the fifth century, this identity is affirmed. In the succeeding ages bishops and popes accept the verdict of St. Jerome without question. Even late in the mediæval period, and at the era of the Reformation, the justice of his criticism, or the sanction of his name, carries the general suffrages of theologians" (Lightfoot's "Epistle to the Philippians," pp. 98, 99).

† The order of the succession of Roman bishops is sometimes given as Linus, Cletus, Clement; sometimes as Linus, Anencletus, Clement; sometimes as Linus, Clement, Cletus, Anencletus. There was a tradition that Ignatius was "the first bishop of Antioch after the apostles," but Euodius was generally regarded as the

appointment would be made by the formal action of the presbytery, or of the church, or of both. The names of these leaders and presidents would be preserved by tradition; and when the title "bishop" came to be restricted to the presiding presbyter the distinctive title was attributed to all his predecessors.

Irenæus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria seem not to have known that "the word bishop had passed from a lower to a higher value since apostolic times." "Their silence," as Dr. Lightfoot justly observes, "suggests a strong negative presumption that, while every other point of doctrine or practice was eagerly canvassed, the form of church government alone scarcely came under discussion."*

If the transition from the earlier form of church polity to that which became general in the second century attracted so little attention, it seems probable that the transition was extremely gradual. An apostolic direction requiring the creation of "bishops" in churches where there had been no bishops before would not have been forgotten so easily. If John had authoritatively established "bishops" in the churches of Asia Minor, his action would have provoked inquiry at Corinth and at Rome. But if the larger churches had long been accustomed to presiding presbyters, and if, simply as a matter of convenience, or to do him the greater honour, a church here and there began to call its president the "bishop," leaving to his colleagues in office the other of the two names which belonged to them all, the change was not likely to create controversy. John was not likely to regard it as a matter having any importance. The practice was so convenient that it was likely to spread rapidly. It implied no change in the relations between the "bishop" and the presbyters, or between the "bishop" and the church. The "bishop" was still one of the presbyters, though henceforth the presbyters were not bishops.†

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first bishop and Ignatius as the second. May not these variations be accounted for by the hypothesis that leading presbyters living at the same time were made "bishops" by tradition? This would naturally lead to differences in the traditional order of succession.

* "Epistle to the Philippians," p. 227.

† Irenæus, "arguing against the heretics, says, 'But when again we appeal against them to that tradition which is derived from the apostles, which is preserved in the churches by successions of *presbyters*, they place themselves in opposition to it, saying that they, being wiser not only than the *presbyters*, but even than the apostles, have discovered the genuine truth.' Yet just below, after again mentioning the apostolic tradition, he adds, 'We are able to enumerate those who have been appointed by the apostles *bishops* in the churches and their successors down to our own times'" (Lightfoot: "Epistle to the Philippians," p. 228). Dr. Lightfoot gives other passages in support of this position.

As the second century advanced, the change was recommended by other reasons than simple convenience. The appropriation of the distinctive title to the president of the presbytery gave emphasis to his personal authority, and the troubles of the churches suggested the expediency of centralising the form of government. "Before factions were introduced into religion by the prompting of the devil," says Jerome, the churches were governed by a council of elders, "but as soon as each man began to consider those whom he had baptized to belong to himself and not to Christ, it was decided throughout the world that one elected from the elders should be placed over the rest, so that the care of the Church should devolve on him, and the seeds of schism be removed. . . . When afterwards one presbyter was elected that he might be placed over the rest, this was done as a remedy against schism, that each man might not drag to himself, and thus break up the Church of Christ."*

(II.) One other question remains to be considered. Is there any evidence to confirm the early origin of diocesan episcopacy? Whatever contemporary evidence exists is contained in the epistles of Ignatius. Accepting the seven epistles of Ignatius in the short Greek recension, and assuming that the text is not grossly corrupt, what support do they give to modern episcopal theories?

The epistles as they appear in the Syriac version are sufficient evidence that at the date of the martyrdom of Ignatius a few churches in Asia Minor had bishops, presbyters, and deacons; but they contain nothing to show that the "bishop" of the second century was very much more than the presiding presbyter of the first under a new name. But in the short Greek epistles, which, even if they are not from the hand of Ignatius, "cannot date later than the middle of the second century," † the greatness of the "bishop" is asserted in the most extravagant language. Whether the writer was Ignatius himself or a forger and interpolator living thirty or forty years later, Dr. Lightfoot says that "throughout the whole range of Christian literature no more uncompromising advocate of episcopacy can be found." ‡ To what extent, then, does he support the episcopal theory?

The following extracts are given by Dr. Lightfoot as illustrating the manner in which language is "strained to the utmost" "when asserting the claims of the episcopal office to obedience and respect" § :—

"The bishops established in the farthest parts of the world are in the counsels of Jesus Christ." "Every one whom the Master of the house sendeth to govern His own household we ought to receive as Him that sent

* Quoted by Lightfoot: "Epistle to the Philippians," p. 206.
† Lightfoot: "Epistle to the Philippians" (First Edition), note, p. 232.
‡ *Ibid.* (Sixth Edition), p. 236. § *Ibid.*, p. 236.

him; clearly, therefore, we ought to regard the bishop as the Lord Himself." Those "live a life after Christ" who "obey the bishop as Jesus Christ." "It is good to know God and the bishop; he that honoureth the bishop is honoured of God; he that doeth anything without the knowledge of the bishop serveth the devil." He that obeys his bishop obeys, "not him, but the Father of Jesus Christ, the Bishop of all." On the other hand, he that practises hypocrisy towards his bishop, "not only deceiveth the visible one, but cheateth the Unseen." "As many as are of God and of Jesus Christ are with the bishop." Those are approved who are "inseparate from God, from Jesus Christ, and from the bishop, and from the ordinances of the apostles." "Do ye all," says this writer again, "follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father." The Ephesians are commended, accordingly, because they are so united with their bishop "as the Church with Jesus Christ, and as Jesus Christ with the Father." "If," it is added, "the prayer of one or two hath so much power, how much more the prayer of the bishop and of the whole Church." "Wherever the bishop may appear, there let the multitude be; just as where Jesus Christ may be, there is the Catholic Church." Therefore "let no man do anything pertaining to the church without the bishop." "It is not allowable either to baptize or to hold a love-feast without the bishop; but whatsoever he may approve, this also is well pleasing to God, that everything which is done may be safe and valid." "Unity of God," according to this writer, consists in harmonious co-operation with the bishop.*

But the manner in which the writer of these epistles speaks of the presbyters is almost equally remarkable. "It is befitting," he says, "that, being subject to the bishop and the presbytery, ye may in all respects be sanctified."† "Your justly renowned presbytery, worthy of God, is fitted as exactly to the bishop as the strings are to the harp. Therefore in your concord and harmonious love, Jesus Christ is sung."‡ [The deacon Soter] is subject to the bishop as to the grace of God, and to the presbytery as to the law of Jesus Christ."§ "Your bishop presides in the place of God, and your presbyters in the place of the assembly of the apostles, along with your deacons who are most dear to me, and are entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ."‖ "Be ye united with your bishop and those that preside over you, as a type and evidence of your immortality."¶ "As therefore the Lord did nothing without the Father, being united to Him, neither by the apostles, so neither do ye anything without the bishop and presbyters."**

* Lightfoot: "Epistle to the Philippians," pp. 236, 237.
† Eph. 2. The translation quoted is that of Dr. Roberts and Dr. Donaldson.
‡ Eph. 3. § Magn. 2. ‖ Magn. 6.
¶ Magn. p. 6. The translators mark the meaning of the last clause as doubtful.
** Magn. 7.

"Study, therefore, to be established in the doctrines of the Lord . . . with your most admirable bishop, and the well-compacted crown of your presbytery, and the deacons who are according to God." * "It is therefore necessary that, as ye indeed do, so without the bishop ye should do nothing, but should also be subject to the presbytery as to the apostles of Jesus Christ." † "In like manner let all reverence the deacons as an appointment [?] of Jesus Christ, and the bishop as Jesus Christ who is the Son of the Father, and the presbytery as the Sanhedrim of God and assembly of the apostles." ‡ "He who does anything apart from the bishop, and presbyters, and deacons [*or* deacon], such a man is not pure in his conscience." § "Fare ye well in Jesus Christ, while ye continue subject to the bishop as to the command [of God] and in like manner to the presbytery." ‖ "Jesus Christ who is our eternal and enduring joy, especially if [men] are in unity with the bishop, the presbyters, and the deacons, who have been appointed according to the mind of Jesus Christ." ¶ "Take ye heed, then, to have but one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and one cup to [show forth] the unity of His blood; one altar; as there is one bishop, with the presbytery and deacons." ** "Give heed to the bishop and the presbytery, and deacons." †† "See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbyters as ye would the apostles; and reverence the deacons as being the institution of God." ‡‡ "My soul be for theirs that are submissive to the bishop, to the presbyters, and to the deacons, and may my portion be along with them in God." §§

To form a just conception of the relative positions of bishop and presbyter as illustrated in these epistles two considerations must be taken into account.

(I.) The churches to which they were addressed appear to have consisted, in every case, of only one Christian assembly. There is nothing to suggest that any bishop had more than one congregation under his care. There is not a phrase to indicate that the Christians of any one of these churches met for Christian worship and instruction and for the celebration of the Supper of the Lord in more than one place. Ignatius, or the forger and interpolator who assumes his name, says to the Christians of Smyrna, "Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people]

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* Magn. 13. † Trall. 2. ‡ Trall. 3. § Trall. 7.
‖ Trall. 12. ¶ "Philadelph. Salutation." ** Philadelph. 4.
†† Philadelph. 7. ‡‡ Smyrn. 8. §§ Polyc. 6.

also be."* Writing to the Ephesians, he says: "Take heed, then, often to come together to give thanks to God and to show forth His praise. For when ye assemble frequently in the same place the powers of Satan are destroyed, and the destruction at which he aims is prevented by the unity of your faith."† Writing to the Magnesians he says: "Neither do ye anything without the presbyters. Neither endeavour that anything appear reasonable and proper to yourselves apart; but, being come together into the same place, let there be one prayer, one supplication, one mind, one hope, in love and in joy undefiled. There is one Jesus Christ, than whom nothing is more excellent. Do ye, therefore, all run together as into one temple of God, as to one altar," &c.‡ These extracts give an inadequate impression of the earnestness with which in epistle after epistle the writer insists on the necessity of unity; and the unity on which he insists is not merely a unity of faith and affection, but apparently a congregational unity. He denounces separation from the one Christian assembly. Christians are to hold together. "Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude of the people be." The presbyters were not the ministers of separate congregations which, with their ministers, were all under the government of the bishop. There was only one congregation. The bishop and the presbyters fulfilled their ministry in the same assembly. The episcopacy of these epistles is a congregational episcopacy—not a diocesan episcopacy.

(II.) Although the people are incessantly exhorted to obey the bishop and the presbyters, the presbyters are never exhorted to obey the bishop. In one passage § a deacon is praised for being submissive to the bishop and the presbyters; but in no passage is a presbyter praised for being submissive to the bishop. The kind of authority attributed by the episcopal theory to the diocesan bishop over his clergy is never attributed by the Ignatian letters to the congregational bishop over his presbyters. They rule the church together.

It is with a view to maintain the order and unity of the one Christian assembly that the Christians at Smyrna are charged not to regard any Eucharist as a "proper Eucharist unless it is administered either by the bishop or by one to whom he has entrusted it." ‖ The Eucharist was the centre and home of all that was most sacred in the life and fellowship of the church. For a presbyter to celebrate it at a time or in a place which the bishop did not approve would be to break up the unity of the Christian society. The extravagant language in which the writer of these letters speaks of the authority of the bishop,

* Smyrn. 8. † Ephes. 13. ‡ Magn. 7. § Magn. 2. ‖ Smyrn. 8.

as if it were as sacred and awful as the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the Eternal Father, is not to be pressed as implying that the presbyters owe him unlimited obedience. It is in his relations to the people—not to the presbyters—that the Ignatian bishop has this amazing power. To quote once more a passage in the epistle to the Magnesians—if the deacon is to be "subject to the bishop as to the grace of God," he is to be subject to the presbytery "as to the law of Jesus Christ." The terms in which these epistles describe the power of the bishop over the people verge upon blasphemy, if they are not positively blasphemous. But the presbyters share his supremacy. Presbyters and bishop rule the church together.

(III.) There is not the slightest proof that the theory of the Ignatian epistles was generally accepted by the churches of the first half of the second century. The writer, whoever he may have been, stands alone. His theory made a very slight, if any, impression on his immediate successors. He himself does not appeal to any apostolic authority in support of his extravagant claims for the bishop, or in support of his claims for the presbytery, which are almost equally extravagant. In all probability his language has been taken by later controversialists much too seriously. He was a mystical and passionate writer, and never intended his words to be a precise definition of the powers to be attributed to the rulers of the church. Had he been challenged to explain what he meant when he said that men ought to "obey the bishop as Jesus Christ," he would probably have answered that it was only by recognising the authority of the bishop that the church could "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," and that to violate the unity of the church was to break out into revolt against Christ Himself. "The powers that be are ordained of God;" this, he might have said, is as true in the Church as in the State; they are to be obeyed, not for their own sake, but for the sake of the public peace and order which it is God's will should be maintained. He may not have meant much more than this. If he did, he spoke for himself—not for apostles, not for the church.

CONCLUSIONS.

The results of this discussion may be stated in the following propositions:—

1. Till A.D. 70 no distinction between bishop and presbyter was recognised in any Christian church.

2. At the end of the first century no distinction between bishop and presbyter was recognised either in the church at Rome or in the church at Corinth.

3. At the beginning of the second century the church at Philippi had "presbyters and deacons," but no bishop as distinguished from the presbyters.

4. Presbyters were not ministers to whom bishops delegated part of their powers; but bishops were presbyters who were elevated to presidency in the church.

5. The lists of bishops preserved by tradition in the principal churches probably indicate that from apostolic times, and when no distinction was recognised between bishops and presbyters, each of these churches had as its recognised leader the president of the presbyters, who, however, was only a presbyter.

6. Towards the end of the first century, or very early in the second, the presiding elder in the church at Antioch and in several of the churches of Asia Minor came to be denoted by the distinctive title of "bishop," and this custom extended very rapidly among the churches in every part of the world.

7. The absence of any tradition of controversies occasioned by this change of title indicates that the change of title was not at first supposed to carry with it any real change in the relations between the presiding presbyter and his colleagues.

8. It is unnecessary to attribute this change of title to the Apostle John, or to any other apostolic authority.

9. The bishop of the Ignatian letters was a congregational bishop—not a diocesan bishop.

10. The bishop of the Ignatian letters did not exercise what can be properly described as episcopal jurisdiction over the presbyters.

11. The enormous powers attributed both to the bishop and the presbyters by the Ignatian letters indicate the authority which the writer believed to be necessary to the rulers of churches, but are no evidence that this authority had been conferred by the apostles or was generally acknowledged by the churches either at the beginning or in the middle of the second century.

Art. IV.—Opinions of Eminent Historians on the Early Organisation of the Christian Church.

MOSHEIM.

"As to the external form of the church and the mode of governing it, neither Christ Himself nor His apostles gave any express precepts. We are, therefore, to understand that this matter is left chiefly to be regulated by circumstances, and by the discretion of civil and ecclesiastical rulers. If, however, what no Christian can doubt, the apostles of Jesus Christ acted by Divine command and guidance, then that form of the primitive churches which was derived from the church of Jerusalem, erected and organised by the apostles themselves, must be accounted Divine; yet it will not follow that this form of the church was to be perpetual and unalterable. In those primitive times each Christian church was composed of the people, the presiding officers, and the assistants or deacons. These must be the component parts of every society. The highest authority was in the people, or whole body of Christians: for even the apostles themselves inculcated by their example that nothing of any moment was to be done or determined on but with the knowledge and consent of the brotherhood (Acts i. 15, vi. 3, xv. 4, xxi. 22). And this mode of proceeding both prudence and necessity required in those early times.

"The assembled people, therefore, elected their own rulers and teachers, or received without constraint those recommended to them. They also, by their suffrages, rejected or confirmed the laws which were proposed by their rulers in their assemblies—they excluded profligate and lapsed brethren, and restored them—they decided the controversies and disputes which arose—they heard and determined the causes of presbyters and deacons;—in a word, the people did everything which belongs to those in whom the supreme power of the community is vested. All these rights the people paid for by supplying the funds necessary for the support of the teachers, the deacons, and the poor, the public exigencies and unforeseen emergencies. These funds consisted of voluntary contributions in every species of goods, made by individuals, according to their ability, at their public meetings, and usually called oblations.

"The rulers of the church were denominated sometimes *presbyters* or *elders*—a designation borrowed from the Jews, and indicative rather of the wisdom than the age of the persons—and sometimes, also, *bishops*; for it is manifest that both terms are promiscuously used in the New Testament for one and the same class of persons (Acts xx. 17—28; Phil. i. 1; Tit. i. 5—7; 1 Tim. iii. 1). These were men of gravity, and distinguished for their reputation, influence, and sanctity (1 Tim. iii. 1, &c.; Tit. i. 5, &c.). From the words of St. Paul (1 Tim. v. 17) it has been inferred that some elders instructed the people, while others served the church in other ways. But this distinction between *teaching* and *ruling* elders, if it ever existed (which I will neither affirm nor deny), was certainly not of long continuance, for St. Paul makes it a qualification requisite in all presbyters or bishops that they be able to teach and instruct others (1 Tim. iii. 2, &c.).

"That the church had its public *servants* or *deacons* from its first foundation there can be no doubt, since no association can exist without its servants; and least of all such associations as the first Christian churches. Those *young men* who carried out the corpses of Ananias and his wife were undoubtedly the deacons of the church at Jerusalem, who were attending on the apostles and executing their commands (Acts v. 6—10). These first deacons of that church were chosen from among the Jewish Christians born in Palestine, and, as they appeared to act with partiality in the distribution of alms among the native and foreign Jewish Christians, seven other deacons were chosen by order of the apostles out of that part of the church at Jerusalem which was composed of strangers or Jews of foreign birth (Acts vi. 1, &c.). Six of these new deacons were foreign Jews, as appears from their names; the other one was from among the proselytes, for there was a number of proselytes among the first Christians of Jerusalem, and it was suitable that they should be attended to as well as the foreign Jews. The example of the church of Jerusalem being followed by all the other churches in obedience to the injunctions of the apostles, they likewise appointed deacons (1 Tim. iii. 8, 9). There were also in many churches, and especially in those of Asia, female public servants or *deaconesses* who were respectable matrons or widows, appointed to take care of the poor and to perform other offices.

"In this manner Christians managed ecclesiastical affairs so long as their congregations were small or not very numerous. Three or four presbyters, men of gravity and holiness, placed over those little societies, could easily proceed with harmony, and needed no head or president. But when the churches became larger, and the number of presbyters and deacons, as well as the amount of duties to be performed, was increased, it became necessary that the council of presbyters should have a *president*, a man of

distinguished gravity and prudence, who should distribute among his colleagues their several tasks, and be, as it were, the central point of the whole society. He was at first denominated the *angel* (Rev. ii. and iii.), but afterwards the *bishop*, a Greek title indicative of his principal business. It would seem that the church of Jerusalem, when grown very numerous, after the dispersion of the apostles among foreign nations, was the first to elect such a president, and that other churches in process of time ollowed the example.

But whoever supposes that the bishops of the first and golden age of the church corresponded with the bishops of the following centuries must blend and confound characters which are very different. For, in this century and the next, a bishop had charge of a single church, which might ordinarily be contained in a private house; nor was he its lord, but was in reality its minister or servant; he instructed the people, conducted all parts of public worship, and attended on the sick and necessitous in person; and what he was unable thus to perform, he committed to the care of the presbyters, but without power to determine or sanction anything, except by the votes of the presbyters and people. The emoluments of this singularly laborious and perilous office were very small. For the churches had no revenues except the voluntary contributions of the people, or the oblations, which, moderate as they doubtless were, were divided among the bishop, the presbyters, the deacons, and the poor of the church.

"All the churches in those primitive times were *independent* bodies, none of them subject to the jurisdiction of any other, for, though the churches which were founded by the apostles themselves frequently had the honour shown them to be consulted in difficult and doubtful cases, yet they had no judicial authority, no control, no power of giving laws. On the contrary, it is clear as the noon-day that all Christian churches had equal rights, and were in all respects on a footing of equality. Nor does there appear in this first century any vestige of that consociation of the churches of the same province which gave rise to councils and metropolitans. Rather, as is manifest, it was not till the second century that the custom of holding ecclesiastical councils began, first in Greece, and thence extended into other provinces."—[Mosheim: "Institutes of Ecclesiastical History," Century I., part ii., chap. ii.]

NEANDER.

"The name of presbyter, by which, as we have before remarked, this office was first distinguished, was transferred from the Jewish synagogue to the Christian church. But when the church extended itself farther among

Hellenic Gentiles, with this name borrowed from the civil and religious constitution of the Jews, another was joined which was more allied to the designations of social relation among the Greeks, and adapted to point out the official duties connected with the dignity of presbyters. The name *episcopoi* [bishops] denoted overseers over the whole of the church and its collective concerns, as in Attica those who were commissioned to organise the States dependent on Athens received the title of *episcopoi*, and as in general it appears to have been a frequent one for denoting a guiding oversight in the public administration. Since then the name *episcopos* [bishop] was no other than a transference of an original Jewish and Hellenistic designation of office, adapted to the social relations of the Gentiles, it follows that originally both names related entirely to the same office, and hence both names are frequently interchanged as perfectly synonymous.

"Thus Paul addresses the assembled presbyters of the Ephesian church whom he had sent for as *episcopoi* [bishops]; so likewise in 1 Tim. iii. 1 the office of the presbyters is called *episcopē* [bishopric], and immediately after (verse 8) the office of deacons is mentioned as the only existing church office besides, as in Phil. i. 1. And thus Paul enjoins Titus to appoint presbyters, and immediately after calls them bishops. It is, therefore, certain that every church was governed by a union of the elders or overseers chosen from among themselves, and we find among them no individual distinguished above the rest who presided as a *primus inter pares*, though probably, in the age immediately succeeding the apostolic, of which we have unfortunately so few authentic memorials, the practice was introduced of applying to such an one the name of *episcopos* [bishop] by way of distinction. We have no information how the office of president in the deliberations of presbyters was held in the apostolic age. Possibly this office was held in rotation—or the order of seniority might be followed—or, by degrees, one individual by his personal qualifications gains such a distinction. All this in the absence of information must be left undetermined. One thing is certain, that the person who acted as president was not yet distinguished by any particular name. The government of the church was the peculiar office of such overseers. It was their business to watch over the general order, to maintain the purity of the Christian doctrine and of Christian practice, to guard against abuses, to admonish the faulty, and to guide the public deliberations, as appears from the passages in the New Testament where their functions are described. But their government by no means excluded the participation of the whole church in the management of their common concerns, as may be inferred from what we have already remarked respecting the nature of Christian

communion, and is also evident from many individual examples in the apostolic church.

"The whole church at Jerusalem took part in the deliberations respecting the relation of the Jewish and Gentile Christians to each other, and the epistle drawn up after these deliberations was likewise in the name of the whole church. The epistles of the Apostle Paul, which treat of various controverted ecclesiastical matters, are addressed to whole churches, and he assumes that the decision belonged to the whole body. Had it been otherwise, he would have addressed his instructions and advice, principally at least, to the overseers of the church. When a licentious person belonging to the church at Corinth was to be excommunicated, the Apostle considered it a measure that ought to proceed from the whole society, and placed himself, therefore, in spirit among them, to unite with them in passing judgment (1 Cor. v. 3—5). Also when discoursing of the settlement of litigations, the Apostle does not affirm that it properly belonged to the overseers of the church; for, if this had been the prevalent custom, he would no doubt have referred to it, but what he says seems to imply that it was usual in particular instances to select arbitrators from among the members of the church (1 Cor. vi. 5).

"Respecting the election to offices in the church, it is evident that the first deacons, and the delegates who were authorised by the church to accompany the apostles, were chosen from the general body (2 Cor. viii. 19). From these examples we may conclude that a similar mode of proceeding was adopted at the appointment of presbyters. But from the fact that Paul committed to his disciples, Timothy and Titus (to whom he assigned the organisation of new churches, or of such as had been injured by many corruptions), the appointment likewise of presbyters and deacons, and called their attention to the qualifications for such offices, we are by no means justified in concluding that they performed all this alone without the co-operation of the churches. The manner in which Paul was wont to address himself to the whole church, and to take into account the co-operation of the whole community (which must be apparent to every one in reading his epistles), leads us to expect that where a church was already established he would admit it as a party in their common concerns. It is possible that the Apostle himself in many cases, as on the founding of a new church, might think it advisable to nominate the persons best fitted for such offices, and a proposal from such a quarter would naturally carry the greatest weight with it. In the example of the family of Stepanas, at Corinth, we see that those who first undertook office in the church were members of the family first converted in that city."—[Neander: "Planting of the Christian Church," Bohn's Edition, vol. i., 143—146.]

GIBBON.

"The scheme of policy which under their [the apostles'] approbation was adopted for the use of the first century may be discovered from the practice of Jerusalem, of Ephesus, or of Corinth. The societies which were instituted in the cities of the Roman empire were united only by the ties of faith and charity. Independence and equality formed the basis of their internal constitution. . . . The public functions of religion were solely entrusted to the established ministers of the church, the *bishops* and the *presbyters;* two appellations which, in their first origin, appear to have distinguished the same office and the same order of persons. The name of presbyter was expressive of their age, or rather of their gravity and wisdom. The title of bishop denoted their inspection over the faith and manners of the Christians who were committed to their pastoral care. In proportion to the respective numbers of the faithful, a larger or smaller number of these *episcopal presbyters* guided each infant congregation with equal authority and with united counsels. But the most perfect equality of freedom requires the directing hand of a superior magistrate, and the order of public deliberations soon introduces the office of a president, invested at least with the authority of collecting the sentiments, and of executing the resolutions, of the assembly. A regard for the public tranquillity, which would so frequently have been interrupted by annual or by occasional elections, induced the primitive Christians to constitute an honourable and perpetual magistracy, and to choose one of the wisest and most holy among their presbyters to execute, during his life, the duties of their ecclesiastical governor. It was under these circumstances that the lofty title of bishop began to raise itself above the humble appellation of presbyter; and while the latter remained the most natural distinction for the members of every Christian senate, the former was appropriated to the dignity of its new president. . . .

"It is needless to observe that the pious and humble presbyters who were first dignified with the episcopal title could not possess, and would probably have rejected, the power and pomp which now encircles the tiara of the Roman pontiff or the mitre of a German prelate. But we may define in a few words the narrow limits of their original jurisdiction, which was chiefly of a spiritual, though in some instances of a temporal nature. It consisted in the administration of the sacraments and discipline of the church, the superintendency of religious ceremonies, which imperceptibly increased in number and variety, the consecration of ecclesiastical ministers, to whom the bishop assigned their respective functions, the

management of the public fund, and the determination of all such differences as the faithful were unwilling to expose before the tribunal of an idolatrous judge. These powers, during a short period, were exercised according to the advice of the presbyteral college, and with the consent and approbation of the assembly of Christians. The primitive bishops were considered only as the first of their equals, and the honourable servants of a free people. Whenever the episcopal chair became vacant by death, a new president was chosen among the presbyters by the suffrage of the whole congregation, every member of which supposed himself invested with a sacred and sacerdotal character.

"Such was the mild and equal constitution by which the Christians were governed more than a hundred years after the death of the apostles. Every society formed within itself a separate and independent republic; and, although the most distant of these little states maintained a mutual as well as friendly intercourse of letters and deputations, the Christian world was not yet connected by any supreme authority or legislative assembly."—[Gibbon: "Decline and Fall," chap. xv., 5.]

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