

DEACONS COURTS. *A. F. Kemp.*

We are no lovers of this name. We would prefer that the only Congregational Court should continue as of old to be the Session, and that the Deacons should be included under this designation. But the name has become current, and an organization has been generally adopted under it in the revived Presbyterianism of the Free Church, and there is now no help for us but to accept of it as upon the whole the most convenient and the best. There is, we allow, some difficulty in settling this part of our subject. We have very little direct Scripture to guide us in regard to it, and must, for the most part, be satisfied with inferences from the particulars which describe the character and work of the Deacon, as to the kind of organization by which this work is to be done. Ancient History gives us very little light on this topic. We only know on the authority of the earliest historians, that there were Deacons in all the Churches, and that they had at first, and even so late as the time of St. Cyprian, the management and distribution of the Church's property. Whether this was in conjunction with the other Officers of the congregation, or whether they had separate councils for the consideration of the affairs entrusted to them, we have no certain knowledge. Commonly there were but seven Deacons—the number chosen at Jerusalem—in any city or district. Hence it frequently happened that there was but one Deacon to each congregation, or sometimes one only for two or more congregations. This gave rise to the order of Sub-Deacons, as the assistants of the original seven, and to these seven being designated by the title of Arch-deacon. This much we know.

From the fourth century or thereabouts down to the sixteenth, the deaconship was altogether perverted. It became an Order and a ministry in the spiritual service of the Church, occupying—as it does now in the Episcopal Church—much the same place as the probationer with us.

It is only when we come to Reformation times, that history affords us any light on the question; and here we have much that is satisfactory to guide us, and many confirmations of the views expressed in our previous article.

As regards the Lutheran Church, we have no precise information. Its representative in the United States has for its lowest judicatory a Church Council, consisting of Pastor, Elders, and Deacons, one of the functions of which is the superintendence of the temporal concerns of the Church, of which, so far as we can gather, the Deacons appear to have the executive administration.

In the early French Church, we find a constitution of things very similar to this, and from which this, we apprehend, has been borrowed. A good example of the French Presbyterian system as regards Deacons may be found in the Constitution of the Dutch Reformed Church of America. In this Church, the lowest Court is the Consistory, composed of Minister or Ministers, Elders, and Deacons—it corresponds to our Session. The Elders with the Ministers of the Word, it is, however, noted "constitute what in the original Article of Church Government (Canons, Synod of Dort, 1618,) is properly called the Consistory. "But as the Deacons in America have always, where the congregations were at first very small, been joined with the Elders; and wherever charters have been obtained, are particularly named as forming with them one Consistory." On this account, it was thought necessary, to define their joint and respective powers, just as is proposed to be done in the Overture now before our Synod. In this definition by the Dutch Church it is said, "That from the form of their Ordination, it is evident, that to the Elders together with the Ministers of the Word is committed the spiritual government of the Church; while to the