

ELDERS OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS.

The reader is not to expect a complete history of the Elders of the Old and New Testaments, as the heading of this article would almost indicate; but simply a few of the outlines of what might profitably occupy the pen of some of our more experienced brethren.

Revelation may be compared to a web composed of an infinite variety of threads, every one of which is necessary to the completion of the entire fabric. The student's duty is to trace out as many as possible, that he may see the consistency of the whole, and thus be enabled to help forward such as may be beginning to investigate, but without sufficient strength to persevere. Or it may perhaps more properly be compared to a mine full of exhaustless treasures, but which must be dug for. But whether the one or the other, let us take pleasure in searching the Scriptures.

From them we can gather that Elders as a class are of very ancient origin. We find them as an institution in the land of Egypt, or Elders of his house and Elders of the land. Although the particular duties of these officials are not in every instance distinctly specified, still it may be inferred from the fact, that in cases of public interest, as in the burial of the aged patriarch Jacob, (Gen. 1. 7) when they were called together, that their advice at least was needed, if not their guidance and direction. It may be that they were expected, from their age, natural abilities, education and experience in the affairs of men, to be able to direct the younger, inexperienced, and otherwise disqualified portions of the community; or to give importance in the eyes of the people to whatever occasion called for their presence: Among the Israelites while in the land of bondage, there were men of this class. We know not by whom these were appointed, nor the laws of their constitution—whether they were called into being by a voice from the throne, or elected to office by the people, is not revealed. Neither are we enlightened as to the aggregate duties of their office; but this, we think, appears evident, that they were *servants, if not representatives* of the people (Exodus iii. 14, 18.) From these verses we learn, among other things, that God instructed Moses to speak to the People through the Elders, on the occasion of his being sent from Midian to Egypt, which would lead us to suppose that they were in some degree representatives. The word delivered to them they would circulate among the poor enslaved thousands of Israel. The miracles which they saw wrought by Moses and Aaron, confirmatory of the divinity of their mission, would inspire them with confidence to tell the glad news of salvation from Egypt's galling yoke, and so induce the people to believe. Should they be unsuccessful in removing all doubts from the minds of the people, such doubts would all be dispelled by the terrible displays of divine power in the wonders which followed. However, it seems

evident that the duties of Moses and Aaron were expedited by the co-operation of the Elders of Israel.

These Elders must have been worthy of confidence—men whom the people could believe. Probably they were in many respects qualified, but these not being revealed are left to conjecture. Shortly after the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, Elders are again mentioned in connection with Moses and Aaron, from which it would appear that whatever help these servants of the Most High needed they were ready to give to the amount of their abilities (Exod. x. 12.) They do not seem to have been the class from whom judges were chosen on that occasion detailed in the chapter referred to. This order would appear to have been superadded to that of the Elders. While judges were elected to aid Moses in the distribution of justice, the office of Elder was left as it was previous to this arrangement. That it was in some degree a representative order may be inferred from some interesting facts in the history of Israel. I shall just mention two. The first is found in the 31st chapter of Deuteronomy. Moses is there represented as drawing nigh the close of his earthly career. Like an honest man—a man who has served faithfully his God—he fears not to face death, but he cannot die without placing before the people the terrible consequences of departure from God. For this purpose he gives order, “Gather unto me all the Elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in your ears”—that is, as I understand, that I may speak to the people through you.—Doubtless also he taught them on that occasion to sing the admirable song which bears his name, that they might teach it to their respective tribes, that through them Israel's men and women, young men and maidens, boys and girls, might learn to sing that song, so beautifully calculated to inspire in them a spirit of nationality, of patriotism, and of holy reverence and ardent affection for the God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had so marvelously rescued them from the land of Ham. The second instance we find in Leviticus iv. 13-20. There *all Israel* being convicted of sin are enjoined to bring their young bullock before the Lord to the tabernacle of the congregation; The Elders of the congregation lay their hands upon the head of the animal, its blood is shed, sprinkled as directed, and the sin of the people is expiated. Here surely they acted as representatives. Throughout the history of Israel, both while they were travelling in the wilderness and when settled under their kings in Canaan, the office of Elder existed, and the officers held honorable and responsible position. While in the wilderness they are found in company with Moses and Aaron, and when in Canaan with Kings and Prophets. The virtuous wife was known, her industry advertised, and herself honored by the appearance of her husband as he sat in the gate among the Elders of the land (Prov. xxxi. 23.) Although the character of the Elders, during the time specified in the foregoing, is not clearly