

NOTES.

I.

PRIMITIVE DEACONSHIP.

Of the origin of Deacons, as a distinct class of officers in the Christian Church, and of the appointment of the first seven, we are informed in the sixth chapter of the "Acts of the Apostles." A careful perusal of that chapter is sufficient to convince any unprejudiced person that the deaconship was originally and primarily a secular office, or a sort of stewardship for the management of secular interests and affairs. This is clearly evinced by the following facts:—1. The occasioning cause of the appointment of Deacons was a murmuring respecting temporal affairs, or the "daily ministration." Nothing whatever was said respecting a lack or a partiality of religious instruction and aid. 2. The reason assigned by the twelve for the appointment of Deacons establishes the distinction we have mentioned. "It is not meet that we should leave the word of God and serve tables." The employment of the Apostles was, therefore, to *minister the word of God*; that of the Deacons, to *serve tables*. 3. The Apostles plainly contradistinguish the apostolate and deaconship in the third and fourth verses. They direct the brethren to select seven men to be appointed over "this business," namely, the "daily ministration" or "service of tables," for there is nothing else in the context to which the words can refer. "But *we*," say the Apostles, will "give ourselves to *prayer* and to *the ministry of the word*." Language could not more explicitly distinguish and determine the secularity of the deaconship, and the spirituality of the apostolate. It is not said of Stephen, one of the Deacons, that he preached the word or baptized, but that he "did great wonders and miracles among the people." Philip, another Deacon, preached and baptized, but he held the office of evangelist as well as of Deacon, being expressly styled "the evangelist:"—Acts, xxi. 8. A Deacon might hold some other office, or might occasionally exhort and teach without being regularly set apart to the work of the ministry. The fact that the Apostles laid their hands on the Deacons cannot prove any thing in opposition to the views we have given, as the imposition of hands was employed for conferring the Holy Ghost on private members of the Church, as well as for ordaining ministers, and was in fact a ceremony used on various occasions and for various purposes.

The term *Deacon* signifies Minister or servant, and, like many other words, is variously applied. The Apostles are called Deacons or Ministers, but always in such a connexion as to guard and determine the sense. Christ himself is called the "Deacon of the circumcision:"—Rom. xv. 8. But Christ and his Apostles are never designated Deacons in the same sense as the seven already mentioned. Every Minister of the Gospel is a Deacon, but every Deacon is not a Minister of the Gospel. When, therefore, we assert that Christ and his Apostles are never styled Deacons, we have reference only to the signification of the term Deacon in its specific appropriation to those who served tables.