

of the temporal affairs of the church, and demonstrate the inexpediency of connecting it with the ministerial office.

The duty and the privilege of the church in this matter was to look out from among themselves men, and choose them to this office. There is a striking propriety manifested in requiring the people to select these office-bearers. The apostles themselves were eminently qualified to make the selection; they were inspired with the gift of discerning spirits, and were able to tell with infallible certainty, who among the members of the church would most faithfully discharge the trust reposed in them. But they refrained from authoritatively interfering in the appointment. While they maintained the prerogative of their own office they scrupulously avoided infringing the rights of the people: thus giving the sanction of God to the dictate of reason, that the community which fills the treasury ought to manage its distribution. Behold a remarkable feature in the secular economy of the church, exhibited in this act. While its inspired rulers ordain authoritatively its order they leave unimpaired the great principles of human liberty, and calls all its converts to the unfettered enjoyment of them. How far have those branches of the church departed from the rules and practices of the apostles, who leave the laity nothing but a blind and passive subjection! The consequences of such usurpation have been most pernicious to the progress of the Gospel. A callous indifference to its success, or an infantile imbecility in promoting it, has grown upon the church, its priesthood is its only agency, and the sinews of its membership have become shrunk and powerless.

While however the apostles in calling upon the members of the church to

select these secular office-bearers, left their natural and inherent right unimfringed, yet in the exercise of that spiritual authority with which Christ had invested them, they explained and defined the qualifications requisite to the office. The church were to select men of honest report—of reputable characters and standing in society—men attested for unimpeachable integrity and unswerving partiality. For wherever a trust is reposed, there ought to be valid reasons of confidence, that the murmurings of the discontented and the insinuations of the jealous may be silenced. They were to select men full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. For as office-bearers in a spiritual community, even though their special duties were purely secular, it was right and necessary that they should possess the spiritual character, that their faith in the doctrines of the cross should be fully established, and that they should have obtained that abundant grace then so richly enjoyed, and so essential to their usefulness. They were to select men of wisdom, without which the greatest purity of intention cannot preserve from error and injurious measures. This was a necessary qualification for deacons, even in reference to the simple secularities of the primitive church; for even then, they had to deal with the interested and the prejudiced, to silence their murmurings, and to diffuse the hallowed atmosphere of the celestial world over transactions which in their own nature bore the mean impress of time. Oh! what wisdom, what piety, is needed to preserve the temporal affairs of the church from sinking to the level of purely worldly transactions; to prevent the play of human passions amidst scenes consecrated to eternal interests, and hallowed by the presence of the Deity.