

ants. As we look at the imposing and complicated organizations of most of the other denominations, we are irresistibly led to ask, Why the Baptists should limit themselves to so simple and apparently ineffective a constitution? Have we not lost in power and dignity? Have we not sacrificed our highest efficiency? Do we not have so simple an organization, resign all hope of occupying any great place in the religious development of the future? Is not such a loosely compacted body ill adapted to all times and circumstances, and must it not often suffer in competition with the more highly organized bodies of other denominations?

The reason why we have adopted such a form of church government is simply that we find it in the New Testament. We have not adopted it as the most desirable, or the most promising, humanly speaking, but we believe it has justified itself even in these particulars; but we have accepted it as the New Testament type of the church from which we have no right to deviate. We have not tried, as most of the other denominations have confessedly done, to develop the New Testament germ into a more perfect form, but have contented ourselves with trying to reproduce, as far as possible, the New Testament church itself. Other denominations, believing that the New Testament gives us only the embryo of a church, and not its final form, have gone on developing that embryo into their present organizations. Very few of those bodies would claim that the original church bore any closer resemblance to their present forms than the seed bears to the fully-expanded flower; but they would, most of them claim that the development is thoroughly natural and legitimate. Even the Roman Catholics, with their hierarchy rising tier upon tier—priests, bishops, cardinals, popes—would without doubt seek in the Bible (though hardly in the New Testament alone) the justification of their entire development.

But we do not so read the Scriptures. We do not discover in the New Testament a germ to be developed, but a model to be copied. Discovering no relation of mutual dependence of churches there, we have established none ourselves. We find, for instance, no relations between Rome and Antioch, or Corinth and Jerusalem, except those of friendly intercourse and co-operation. Also, perceiving in the New Testament simply two officers, and those confined entirely to a single church, with no authority over or relationship with any other, we have followed the Bible literally, and have only pastors and deacons.

But some of my readers will remind me that the New Testament seems to speak of more than two orders, deacons, elders and bishops. These three words certainly occur; but there are indisputable reasons for believing that two of these three names belong to one and the same office. A bishop in the New Testament is not the lofty personage he is in the modern world, a man far above his fellow Christians by virtue of his office, and exercising an authority over many subordinate ministers and churches. That has all been imported into the Word in later times. A bishop in the New Testament is simply a pastor, with no authority as far as we can discover, more than a simple Baptist pastor possesses today. An elder is the same man under a different name, as can be plainly seen by comparing Acts xx: 17, 28; Titus i: 5, 7. The name *bishop* is Greek, and designates the office on the side of its duties; the name *presbyter*, or *elder*, is Hebrew, borrowed from the synagogue, and designates the office on the side of its dignity. If *presbyter* and *bishop* had constituted two different offices, we have every reason to believe that when I Timothy, iii, Paul was enumerating the church officers and giving them advice, he would have enumerated both offices. He does not do so, however, but simply speaks of bishops, without mentioning elders at all, because they were precisely the same.

With that tendency of human nature to read our own views into the Scriptures, some of our good friends in other churches say they discover in the New Testament traces of the separation of the single office into two subsequently. We have not spectacles clear enough to discover any such

traces. Nay, more, we go down to a much later period than the New Testament, and still we find only bishops and deacons, and these chosen in much the same way that we believe they were chosen in New Testament times, and that we choose them now in our own churches. A passage in Clement's Epistle, about 100 A. D., is of great value on this point; Adolph Harnack, who is the leading authority in Germany today in his department, makes this comment upon it: "It is clearer than day that there were only two orders in the clergy at that time, bishops equivalent to presbyters and deacons."

The order of deacons probably originated with the seven appointed at the suggestions of the apostles, as related in Acts vi: 1-6, altho we must remember that these are never called deacons in the New Testament. Still, it would seem that the work of a deacon, or helper, was theirs, and so it is generally agreed that the order originated then. Very few allusions are made to this office in the New Testament. In Phil i: 2, they are named with the bishops, and constituted the officers of the church, whom Paul greets in the opening of his letter; and in 1 Tim. iii: 8-13 the qualifications of the deacon are given in connection with those of the bishop.

The objection which is sometimes urged against our literal interpretation of the command to baptize, that it is not practicable in all climates and conditions of men, is urged in much the same form against our literal imitation of the New Testament teachings upon the subject of church organization, that it is not adapted to all the varying circumstances of the church in the world. But this objection is practically answered by our history. We may have lost something in dignity and impressiveness, but nothing in real efficiency. We cannot hope to make that impression upon the senses of men that the Roman, the Greek and other churches make with their showy forms and richly robed officials; but it is a question whether they have not sacrificed by their showiness the real efficiency which we have preserved by our simplicity.

But it will be asked, Do we not lose efficiency by the lack of a central authority? Do we not suffer from irremediable conflicts between churches, and from scandals in the church which we are powerless to control? Without any supreme authority, are not the individual churches liable to great excesses in doctrine and in conduct? All these dangers would seem to threaten a denomination whose parts are so loosely joined together and over which there is no presiding head or authority. The simple fact is, however, that no denomination maintains better discipline over the conduct and teaching of its members, none is less afflicted by irremediable scandals, none less by false teaching. Our only power is that of brotherly admonition and rebuke; but it is all powerful. A church which teaches false doctrine is disfellowshipped, and few churches have been able to endure that reproach. Papal bulls and the edicts of other churches have no more power than the simple vote of one of our Associations to withhold its fellowship from a church in error. Such churches stand a little while like sulky children, but are soon bathed in tears of repentance or else disband and disappear. Altho we cannot discipline a minister for preaching false doctrine, no minister is able to stand long in our pulpits and teach contrary to the truths we hold dear. He does not need to be cut off; he cuts himself off from us and goes where he finds those with whom he can agree.

Instead of believing our simple organization ill adapted to cope with the varying circumstances of the present and of the future, we believe it is the least handicapped of any of the church organizations, and enters upon the future with the fullest adaptation to the spirit of the age and with the highest range of possibilities. That organization which seemed so little like the systems of government in the first century of the Christian era in which it originated, so little like the complex organization of the Roman Empire, and therefore so liable to be crushed under the heels of tyrannical power, was found to have more life than the great Empire itself, and has outlived its ruins. And now, in the nineteenth

century, this organization which sprung up nineteen centuries ago, seems to us to be adapted as no other is to the needs and spirit of the age. It is an age that has already largely discounted everything but real worth. We care not much for titles. A great commoner in England, Wm. E. Gladstone, possesses a dignity which no title of nobility could confer, and our own land refuses to recognize the value of any hereditary title whatsoever, and allows none of her citizens to wear one. In other churches little men may obtain a fictitious worth by titles and embroidered garments and may have rule over brethren far abler than themselves. In Baptist circles no man can have any power over another, and his only title must spring from the regard which his worth and abilities confer. If any brother possesses a pre-eminence in Baptist circles it must be simply because he is deemed worthy of it, for he can never have such pre-eminence thrust upon him unworthily by an imposing title. In an age that is advancing with rapid strides toward pure democratic principles, in an age that is discounting everything but real ability, that calls upon men, more and more, to stand for what they are and does not allow them to be labeled by some fictitious badge—in such an age what can better be adapted to a place of influence and power than this simple church polity which puts every man upon his own merits and makes every man's position in the councils of the church to be that, and only that, which his abilities and his piety entitle him to? If democratic principles are more and more to win the day, then this democratic church organization will be far less out of place in the future than those organizations which are built up with high-sounding titles, worn often by the least meritorious.

The Sunday School.

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AUGUST 24.

Report of Spies.

Numbers 13, 26 to 14: 4.

GOLDEN TEXT. Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust. Psalm 40: 4.

Not long after the Israelites had taken up their march from Mount Sinai they came to Kadesh Barnea. From this point twelve chosen men were sent forward to spy out the land of Canaan and bring back a report to the people of Israel.

THE FRUITS OF THE PROMISED LAND.

There was no question concerning the excellence of the fruit to be found in the Promised Land. In Doré's striking picture is presented to our eyes a faithful representation of what the fruit of Canaan must have been, both from the Scriptural account of the return of the spies and from what travelers have told us of the fruitfulness of the vine in the valley of Eschol.

THE REPORT OF THE MAJORITY.

All the spies were agreed as to the fruitfulness of Canaan. When they came, however, to report upon the character of the inhabitants and to draw conclusions as to the probable result of the attempt of the Israelites to possess themselves of the land, there was a marked difference in their utterances. Ten of the spies reported that the people of Canaan were so strong physically and their cities so strongly fortified that it would be an impossible task for the people of Israel to overcome them.

A MINORITY REPORT.

Two of the spies, however, Caleb, and Joshua by name, rendered a more encouraging report. They admitted the strength of the Canaanite and the apparent impregnability of their cities, but mindful of the divine guidance vouchsafed to the people of Israel, and of the many occasions during their journey from Egypt when, by the interposition of God they had been marvelously protected and their wants amply provided for, Caleb and Joshua urged that they go up at once to possess the land, "for we are well able to overcome it," they said.