

Some of the most suspicious passages in the Epistles, relate to the rulers of the church. These and their authority seem studiously brought forward in every Epistle, as though the tendency of the christians of that day had been to spiritual insubordination. In the accompanying paper, my friend ingeniously accounts for this by saying that it was to the doctrine taught, and not to the teacher that the submission was sought; but the language of the Epistles strongly savours of the doctrine that the authority is in the men who are ordained to ecclesiastical functions—a doctrine, which, growing out of the mistakes of good men, and fostered by the fraud of bad men, has been the fruitful germ of spiritual tyranny. It is very true, that some of the early fathers exhibited christianity after a more perfect pattern in their lives than in their writings. We may say of them—varying somewhat a remark of Luther concerning one of his contemporaries—“what we write, they lived.” And so we must not be too ready to refer to corruptors of their writings, those sentiments which appear to be unworthy of themselves. Yet, this consideration cannot altogether remove the suspicion that the writings of Ignatius and others have been unfairly dealt with by designing men in after ages: and neither must it be permitted to diminish our sense of the vast importance of the form of sound words, since deadly error in many forms, has for more than a thousand years, been striving to maintain its ground in the church under the shelter of the authority of the writings of these fathers, and the fame of their virtues.

*Secondly.* The question in regard to the genuineness of the suspected passages in the Epistles of Ignatius is not after all, of so great importance as at first sight appears. It is admitted, that they describe the church under a certain definite form of government. Now, if they are genuine, then, we know what was the polity of the church in the year 107. But if they were introduced into the text of Ignatius by some weak and crafty ecclesiastic, some two or three centuries after, then we learn what the polity of the church was when the interpolation was made. So that the real question in regard to the external form of the church is mainly one of chronology. It is undoubtedly highly interesting and important for us to know how the church was modelled in the Ignatian age: this may even assist us to understand the writings of the inspired writers themselves. But neither Ignatius, nor any or all of the contemporary Fathers or their successors have any authority in the church of God. She acknowledges the apostles and prophets under her Great Head, the Son of God, as her sole legislators.

Those who have written in support of prelacy have very generally claimed Ignatius, as a witness to the apostolicity of their favorite scheme of church policy, and have on this account, we may believe, been the more disposed to contend, as they have done for the genuineness and integrity of his writings. But the episcopacy of Ignatius is not a diocesan episcopacy. His Epistles, indeed, furnish ample testimony to the existence of the three orders—Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons: yet, alas, nothing but the names and the number of these remain to modern prelacy. The Bishops of Ignatius were men who had the oversight of particular congregations, and had no control over other Pastors.—Hear how he addressed himself to his brother Polycarp, bishop of the Church of Smyrna: “Let not the widows be neglected: be thou after God their guardian. Let nothing be done but with thy knowledge and consent: neither do thou any thing but according to the will of God, as also thou dost, with all constancy. Let your assemblies be more frequent: inquire into all by name. Overlook not the man and maid servants.” The minute inspection of the flock implied in the observance of these exhortations is obviously competent only to one who has a special charge of it—and would in vain be sought for in the prelate or diocesan bishop.

The presbyters or elders of Ignatius in like manner, are types rather of the ruling elders of Presbyterians than of the priests of Episcopalians. In his epistle to the Smyræans he thus writes: “It is not lawful without the Bishop either to baptize or to celebrate the holy communion.” And his Deacons, judging from what is said of several individuals who are mentioned by name were evidently a kind of assistants or servants to the Pastor in his spiritual functions.

These rulers, Bishop, Presbyters and Deacons, constituted the *Presbyterium* or Eldership, who administered the affairs of each Church or congregation. That any one Church in the present day has an organization of officers, in all respects the counterparts of these, I will not affirm; but that the session of a Presbyterian Church, consisting when properly constituted of a Pastor, Elders and Deacons does approximate to this, much more closely than any convocation of a diocesan bishop, and his clergy is to me, at least, clear as demonstration.

I make these remarks, Mr. Editor, with no hostile feelings to the Ministers or members of the Episcopal Church. The modern prelate has, I believe, little in common with the primitive bishop; and I am free to confess my opinion, that even the