

ancient authority, and who, not in a few instances, are accustomed to cite out a scanty scripture proof by the testimony of the Fathers, and to lean on the arm of tradition, shut their ears on this point against the clear and undoubted voice of venerable antiquity, and still adhere to the express apostolic practice. On the other hand—and we cannot but note the strange casualties incident to theological warfare, those who, on almost every other question, if not on every other, take their immovable stand upon the explicit authority of Scripture, and who will do neither more nor less than can be made good by text upon text, these very persons, in defending the main article of their ecclesiastical policy, namely the popular call, appointment, election, and removal, of pastors and teachers, are left without warrant of Scripture, (some torturing of terms excepted,) and without the sanction of a single apostolic instance; and are compelled to support the practice they adopt on the lower ground of expediency, or of the natural rights of men, or of the example of the early Church, as reported by ecclesiastical writers.

On secular principles nothing can be more simple or reasonable than that those who pay should command; and in the present temper of mankind, especially in certain circles, it may be nearly impracticable to secure submission to any other law. Nevertheless, the serious question returns upon us—Is this the law, or this the principle, recognised as the basis of church polity in the New Testament? We are compelled to answer—it is not. That our Lord, in a sovereign manner, elected and empowered every one of those who were to promulgate his religion is not questioned. The apostles assume the same irresponsible authority in relation to such as they acknowledged in the character of religious teachers; and while they freely admitted, and indeed invited, the popular concurrence on all occasions where common or secular interests were involved, and especially in every pecuniary transaction, yet reserved to themselves the power to create spiritual officers. For aught that appears in the canonical writings, no other mode of appointment found room in the Church; and the assumption that the apostles exercised this power in virtue of their extraordinary commission, and on the ground of their miraculous knowledge of hearts, is purely gratuitous. So it may have been; but we have no evidence in support of the allegation.

The apostolic epistles abound, as well in exhortations addressed to the people, urging the duty of submission to their spiritual rulers, as in admonitions given to the officers of the Church, and pressing upon them the temper and conduct, the fidelity, the purity, the impartiality, and the meekness, which become their station. We find also, in the three clerical epistles of Paul, addressed to two of the individuals whom he had empowered to set in order, and to keep in order the Churches, specific instructions concerning the appointment and government of spiritual officers, both higher and lower. *All this accords well with the supposition that the clerical authority and function springs from within itself, and is irrespective of the popular will.*

If the apostolic writings afford a single particle of evidence, direct or indirect, in favour of the doctrine of the popular origination, or popular control of the clerical office, let it be produced. If not, even if we should admit by accommodation, the propriety of some sort of popular influence in this behalf, we must do so manifestly in contradiction to the principle of the sufficiency, and the sole authority of Scripture in matters of church polity. The two principles of modern democracy in church affairs, and of an unbending adherence to the letter of Scripture in what relates to worship and government, are abhorrent, the one of the

other. Meanwhile, calm and well informed men, indifferent to actual interests, must halt on the threshold when summoned to enter the Church, if the ultimate power therein is alleged to rest with a sacerdotal order, self-evolved, and irresponsible. Will human nature well bear to be so far trusted? Does even Christianity afford any safeguard against the natural abuses and encroachments that attend insulated and undefined spiritual authority? These proper and anxious inquiries lead the way to our next rudiment of Church Polity, and which presents an adequate balance to sacerdotal powers.

VII Christianity, assuredly, is neither despotic in its spirit, nor could it generate despotisms, in any case, if allowed to retain that rudiment which, in the primitive Churches, operated as a natural counterpoise to clerical authority. This counterpoise was the participation of the people—the *Plethos*, in church deliberations, and church acts; and especially the scope allowed to popular agency in every punitive exercise of discipline. An effective check is this to what might otherwise be formidable in sacerdotal power. So long as it is fully and freely admitted clerical authority may safely reach a high and salutary point; but remove or restrict it, and then our alternative is either to give room to the pride and arrogance of priests, or to cashier the ministers of religion of all dignity and power (as an order) and to deny them the greater part of their useful influence. The presence and active operation of this popular element in church affairs is not a whit less necessary as the guarantee of the power of the clergy, than as the safeguard of the liberties of the people.

As the primitive Churches knew nothing of that ministerial subervency which belongs to our modern congregational communities, so neither did they admit that fatal separation between clergy and laity which destroys all effective reciprocity between the two, leaves to the former a perilous, nay ruinous irresponsibility, and treats the latter as the passive, or rather the dead subjects of clerical operations. On this point almost every existing Christian community has moved far from the foundation on which alone the Church can be securely reared:—some, throwing the sovereign power into the hands of the people; while others have left it, unbalanced, with the clergy. Christianity may be expected to regain its energy when, to the clergy is restored that independent authority and dignity, as the ministers of Heaven, with which they may safely be trusted, so long as they yield to the apostolic counterpoise of popular influence.

In every age it has been by gathering themselves into clusters, apart from the people, by sitting in conclave, with the doors barred against the laity, and by concerning measures, not in the church, but in chambers and closets, that the ministers of religion have converted the Gospel into a system of tyranny and an engine of cruelty. The history of Spiritual Despotism hinges upon this division of the elements of Church Power. An impious and fatal divorce of what God had joined—a divorce craftily effected by the clergy, was the principal means of introducing and of establishing all corruptions and all usurpations.

The people, whether in mass, or by representation, being present, and taking a share in church proceedings, and being allowed a real, not a nominal agency in church acts—knowing whatever is proposed, and concurring in whatever is determined, there will no longer be danger in granting to the clergy as high and free an authority as Christian men could wish to exercise, or safely to themselves sustain.