

are responsible for the care of the poor, the direction of discipline, the organization of hospitality, keeping the church rolls, and the material accessories of worship; although at a later date, those of the latter who are able, discharge the duties of apostles, prophets, and teachers.*

It is hazardous to say what will be the final finding of the scholarship of this age, but there is certainly a strong set in the currents of evidence towards the conclusion, that for the first half century of the history of the Churches, "there was (1) liberty of prophesying," as in the Church at Corinth (I. Corinthians, c. xiv.); (2) that apostles, prophets, and teachers visited the churches to preach, teach, and exhort, and that (3) officers were selected, as superintendents for the general arrangement of the services and for the management of congregational affairs. Sermons, if we may apply the word to the speaking in the assemblies of that date, were in the rudimentary stage of short prayer-meeting talks given by men of spiritual exaltation, rapt feeling and rich Christian ideas; whilst what we should speak of as the *ruling* of the Church was under the direction of a committee of "Deacons" and a chief or chiefs who were called "presbyters" in communities dominantly Jewish, and "overseers" or "bishops" in those distinctively Gentile. Episcopacy as we see it now, diocesan or monarchical, has no place in the first century of the church's existence; is not embraced amongst the early ideals of the Kingdom of God, but appears at length as one of the expedients of a later age, introduced by Church leaders just as a commander of an army adjusts his forces to the changing conditions of the field. The real successors to these first century societies, if conformity to their ministry be taken as the test, are not the Roman Catholic organizations around us, nor yet the Anglican, nor even the Presbyterian or Congregational, but the *Friends*, whose ministers are still regarded as "prophets," and are not fixed to one locality, but visit the various "meetings," wherein all may teach and exhort, who are moved by the Spirit of God; whilst the administration of discipline and worship and charity is left to each Society under the direction of a president and committee.

That spiritual conception of the Christian Ministry reigns amongst the non-sacerdotal, and non-episcopal Christian communions. Our ideal is in the New Testament and in the writings referring to the Christian organizations of the first century. No doubt in the apostolic age "the conditions of things were fluid." But it is undeniable that "the dispensation of the Spirit" was characteristically one of

* Cf. Dr. Sanday. *Expositor*, Feb., 1887, p. 109. Romans, xvi., 7, is sufficient evidence that the word *apostle* is not restricted to the twelve. The *Didaché* uses both *apostle* and *prophet* in a wider sense, and speaks of bishops and deacons as still occupying a secondary place as compared with prophets and teachers." "Appoint, therefore, for yourselves, bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men that are meek and not covetous, and truthful and approved; for they too perform for you the service of the prophets and teachers. Therefore, neglect them not: for they are your honoured ones together with the prophets and teachers." *Didaché*, C. XV.