

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

WHY ARE YOU A PRESBYTERIAN?—VI.

BY REV. JOHN LAING, M. A.

IV. The elders in Scripture are all of equal authority; hence the Presbyterian assertion of the parity in the eldership. This, however, is not inconsistent with the existence of two classes, (1) those who rule, and (2) those who rule and also labour in word and doctrine. The first may be able to rule efficiently while giving their time to some honest calling for a livelihood; whereas the whole time and attention of one who labours in word and doctrine is required for the work. Hence the distinction between the ruling and teaching elder—both presbyter-bishops, but called and set apart to different work in the Church of God.

That some one must be president of the bench or college of elders, is a necessity common to all societies. Whether this president or moderator shall be temporary or permanent is a matter of detail, to be decided by the Church from time to time; but the fact that one is by the vote of his fellows made *primus inter pares*, does not warrant the assumption by him of a lordship over his brethren, as though the office (*prelatus*) were superior to that of bishop.

V. As to the mode of appointing office-bearers, the Scripture affords us guidance. They are to be chosen by the people, then solemnly set apart to the work by those already in office (Duet. i. 13; Acts vi. 3, 6; xiii. 3; xiv. 23). Presbyterians hold that God hath given to the visible Church the ministry. The Holy Spirit addresses the inward call, and the Christian people give the outward call to such as they believe to be called of God, and possessed of the necessary gifts and graces. Having satisfied themselves that the person called is worthy, the office-bearers of the church solemnly invest him with official authority to exercise the ministry to which he is called. In Scripture the laying on of hands is mentioned in connection with this investiture with office, or ordination, and seems to be the proper symbolic act connected therewith. While thus holding to Scriptural ordination and practising it, Presbyterians have always strongly contended (1) that the laying on of hands and official investiture is not essential to the ministry of the Christian Church, and that the Church has even power of itself to originate a ministry; and (2) that the laying on of hands does not confer grace nor make a man necessarily an office-bearer of the Church of Christ, nor constitute a caste in the Church. Apostolic succession and transmission of grace by manual contact, Presbyterians regard as an unfounded and unscriptural notion, utterly inconsistent with the spirituality of the Church of God.

VI. The Scripture speaks of the Church of Christ as one. There are separate churches, as the seven churches of Asia, and the churches in Galatia, nevertheless the Apostles (Acts xv.; 1 Cor. xi. 16; 2 Cor. viii. 13) were very earnest to secure unity among all the churches. That even in apostolic times there was not uniformity is undeniable, but the oneness of the Church was always asserted. This manifested outward unity is to be desired and sought after. The want of it, and the unseemly strifes which oft-times obtaining among the Lord's people, do Him great dishonour.

The denominationalism of our time is the unhappy result of circumstances. Low spiritual life has at times produced error and oppression, which again have forced separation among brethren; a separation followed by sinful rivalries; insistence on unscriptural usages, or the neglect of enjoined rites has made a breach at other times; the rise of the Reformed Church in the several countries, with various usages, has given rise to various denominations in new countries to which European Christians have emigrated. Nevertheless Christians of all denominations feel that a more excellent way is to be sought, and the Presbyterian Church by its alliance and general council is seeking to promote a manifestation of unity and co-operation which may justify the Scriptural assertion of the unity of the Church of Christ, amid differences of tongues and usages.

This idea of unity leads to the subordination of individual churches to superior church courts. Hence the Presbyterian government, which by a

gradation of courts secures the local action of sessions, and the joint action of presbyteries, synod and assemblies. In this way liberty is combined with united action and harmony of sentiment. As has been said elsewhere, this idea of unity in no way prevents the acknowledgment of other Christian Churches, but rather makes it the duty of Presbyterians to be unsectarian and generous in their sympathy, and to do what lies in our power to remove all obstacles to the catholic character of the Church of Christ. A true Presbyterian cannot be a narrow sectarian.

It is no easy matter to direct attention to the question of Church government. In all the Churches there are earnest men honoured by God to do a noble work for Him. When souls are saved and saints edified, the Christian people give themselves little concern as to form of government obtaining in the Church into which they are gathered. This is well. Still there are times when Church government becomes an important question—a social crisis. At such times the Church government, according to Scripture, becomes the bulwark of liberty and a stay against anarchy.

The rise of the Papacy after the time of Constantine would have been held in check, if not prevented, had not the heathen idea of priesthood, and the connection of the Church with the Empire developed a hierarchical government in the Church, utterly at variance with Christianity. Again at the Reformation in the sixteenth century (as in the Evangelical movement in Roman Catholic countries to-day), nothing short of a return to Scriptural Church government could suffice for the overthrow of anti-Christian tyranny and corruption. The right of private judgment conflicts with hierarchical authority. "No bishop, no king," was the motto of the intolerant Laude—showing how clearly he saw that tyranny based on the divine right of kings could not continue where a people had grasped the New Testament idea of a Church free with the liberty which Christ gives. Now we see a yet further development of liberty which threatens to pass into the lawlessness that "despises Governments and speaks evil of dignities." This must again bring up the question of Church government. Shall society be dissolved into its individual atoms, held together only by brute force and imperial state-craft? or can the Church provide a remedy? Democracy means the rule of the *Demos*, the majority of a nation. It means, fully carried out, "no higher law" than the state constitution; "might is right." Can the Church again make God's voice heard and quell the tumult by His authority? If so, it must be in accordance with Presbyterian Church government. A world-wide grasping hierarchy cannot again deceive and enthrall the nations. A democracy cannot know God's law. Only a form of government which maintains God's supreme authority can lift the standard alike against tyranny and lawlessness. This Scriptural Presbyterianism has done in the past, and can do again. Requiring that kings rule for God and do not oppress it, secures for man his God-given rights, while maintaining government. Also it meets the will of an insolent majority, with the revealed will of God, thus preventing revolution and anarchy, while every man is free to do what God has permitted.

It is also no insignificant feature of late years in ecclesiastical matters, that while all denominations are full of zeal and seeking unity for the purpose of strength, the bonds of sectarianism are being weakened, and church authority is on the wane. Men are asking how to meet the change. In answer to the inquiry the Prelatic Church of England is turning to the laity, the Methodist community is also working in a lay element. Independent Churches are seeking stronger bonds of union, and the Presbyterian Churches are giving more practical effect to the theory which they hold—a people free in Christ to obey God, but governed for God by divinely appointed officers who are of the people, and are called by them to office.

AN OUTING TO THE SEA.

BY THE REV. JOHN M'EWEN.

You leave the "City of Brotherly Love" by the Pennsylvania Road. Three hours' travel through a fruitful and well-kept country brings you to "Ocean Grove," of which Asbery Park is an extension, or, if you will, "a suburb." This is one of the large watering places that abound along the shore of the Atlantic.

At present its population is estimated at thirty thousand. It has between six and seven hundred houses with tents innumerable. A large portion of these buildings are hotels capable of accommodating from one to three hundred boarders. Every cottage is laid out for such accommodation. All the religious bodies have good churches and settled congregations. There is a large public library, a public school, a military academy, with Ocean Grove Tabernacle and Education Hall at the Park, each capable of seating between two and three thousand persons; neatly and permanently furnished for audiences. All this is tastefully and regularly set down on a carefully surveyed country—three miles along the beach, two and a half miles wide; covered with shrubbery and small trees that abound on the coast.

The evenings are specially attractive. The demanded vacation—the panting for recreation—finds all that is desirable here. Modern civilization and Christian life go hand in hand. Cheap reading is abundant in "The Seaside Library," and "Franklin Square," both having a wise selection.

This time of vacation and recreation has occupied the attention of the Synod of New Jersey, and, in their generation, they have followed the people and sought to improve the time by healthy and helpful exercises. They have established what is called the "Seaside Assembly." To participate in these services is the main object of my visit. I will give you a few glimpses of this important gathering. The Ocean Grove section has been for three days grappling with the best methods and principles of conducting the temperance reform of the land, with audiences varying from two to three thousand.

The Asbery Park section occupies Education Hall, the Presbyterian church, and a building called the Tabernacle, under the experienced direction of Rev. J. A. Worden, appointed by the Jersey Synod. There is a Sabbath school department, with a normal class of one hundred enrolled students which meet two hours per day,—subject, "The Life and Labours of Paul." The work done is very thorough. There is the Primary Teachers' department, with an average attendance of one hundred, in charge of Mrs. Alden, familiarly known as "Pansy,"—one hour a day. Also a children's service each day. A musical department with voice culture, exercises in harmony and choral practice under the efficient management of Prof. Case, for two hours daily. Then there is Vanlenep's large and carefully assorted Oriental Museum, illustrating Bible customs and manners. This is specially attractive.

These departments are full of work, drill, conference and examination, and draw together those having special likings, and "at home" special work. These exercises give increased efficiency and equipment to leaders in these departments in many congregations.

The grand gathering of the people is at the lectures and entertainments, one hour in the forenoon, afternoon and evening. These are of great interest and of special value; and the programme has been drawn up with much care. The subject of one day will illustrate the rest.—"Science and the Bible." A prayer meeting for thirty minutes before breakfast brings the subject of the day before the Lord. At eleven a.m., Dr. F. L. Patton gives a lecture on "Doubt," every word of which is clear, incisive, and suggestive in various directions, and to ignorant or irrational doubt there is given no quarter. In the afternoon there is a conference on "The Practical Methods of Counteracting Infidelity," presided over by Dr. Herrick Johnson of Chicago, led off by Dr. Hodge, President Tuttle, and others. The results of the hour were impressively summed up by Dr. Johnson. In the evening the subject of the day is eloquently followed up by Hon. G. R. Wendling of Illinois, in a lecture on "Ingersollism from a Secular Standpoint," in which, after two hours of enunciation of fundamental principles, marshalling of historic facts, rapid and forceful reviews of epochs and systems of morals, he reached the conclusion, and gave the verdict, that the scoffing school are subjects of State discipline and concern, leaving Churches out of the question. Involuntarily you find yourself grasping your Bible more firmly, and when you take a breathing moment, you love the Church and her ordinances more intensely.

So we had Foreign Mission day, Home Mission day, Sabbath Observance day; time would fail to dwell on each. The talking was clear, adapted and thorough, and as the day in each subject wore on