

rulers of the Synagogue sent unto them: that is, those who were the principal men in the Synagogue; the Ruler of it, together with the Elders; for there was but one Ruler in the Synagogue, though there were more Elders; and so the Syriac version here renders it, the Elders of the Synagogue." By this language, as I understand the Doctor, he does not mean to intimate that the other Elders of whom he here speaks, did not bear rule in the Synagogue; but that there was only one, who, by way of eminence, was called, "the Ruler of the Synagogue;" that is, who presided at their meetings for official business. It is plain, however, that, even in this assertion, he is in some degree in error; for more than once we find a plurality of persons in single Synagogues spoken of as "Rulers."

The learned Vitringa, who undoubtedly, is entitled to a very high place in the list of authorities on this subject, is of the opinion, that all who occupied a place with the bench of Elders in the Synagogue, were of one and the same rank or order; that they all received one and the same ordination; and were, of course, equally authorised to preach, when duty or inclination called them to this part of the public service, as well as to rule. And in this opinion he is joined by some others, whose judgment is worthy of the highest respect. But, at the same time, this eminent man freely grants, that a majority of the Elders of the Synagogue were not, in fact, ordinarily employed in teaching or preaching; that this part of the public service was principally under the direction of the Chief Ruler, or Head of each Synagogue, who attended to it himself, or called on one of the other Elders, or even any other learned Doctor who might be present, and who was deemed capable of addressing the people in an instructive and acceptable manner; and that the chief business of the mass of the Elders was to rule. The correctness of this opinion has been questioned. A number of other writers, quite his equals, both in talents and learning, and especially quite as conversant with Jewish authorities, have maintained, that a majority of the Elders in the Synagogue, were neither chosen nor set apart to the function of teaching, but to that of ruling only. But, in the want of absolute certainty which exists on this subject, and for the sake of argument, I am willing to acquiesce in Vitringa's opinion. Suppose it to have been as he alleges:—This is quite sufficient for our purpose. If it be conceded, that there was, in every Synagogue, a bench of Elders, who, as a judicial body, were entrusted with the whole government and discipline of the congregation: that a majority of these Elders seldom or never preached, but were, in fact, whatever right they might have had) chiefly occupied as ecclesiastical rulers; and that all ecclesiastical matters, instead of being discussed and decided by the congregation at large, were constantly committed to the judicial deliberation and decision of this Eldership; if these things be granted—and they are granted, in substance, by every writer, entitled to be referred to as an authority,

with whom I am acquainted;—it is all that can be considered as material to the purpose of our argument. This will appear more fully in the sequel.

These officers of the Synagogue were called by different names, as we learn from the New Testament, and from the most respectable Jewish authorities. The most common and familiar name, perhaps, was that of Elders, as before stated at large. They were also called Rulers of the Synagogue; a title of frequent occurrence in the New Testament, as applied to the whole bench of the Elders in question; but which would seem, from some passages, to have been, at least, sometimes applied, by way of eminence, to the principal ruler in each Synagogue, which principal ruler appears, however, to have been of the same general rank, or order, with the rest, and to have had no other precedence than that which consisted in presiding and taking the lead in the public service. These officers were further called Heads of the Synagogue;—Overseers, or Bishops;—Presidents;—Orders, or Regulators of the affairs of the Synagogue;—Guides, &c. &c. These titles are given at length by Vitringa, Selden, and others, with the original vouchers, and exemplifications of each; showing that they all imply bearing rule, as well as the enjoyment of pre-eminence and dignity.

And, as these Elders were distinguished from the common members of the Synagogue by appropriate titles, indicating official honor and power; so they had also distinct and honorable seats assigned them, when the congregation over which they ruled was convened. The place of sitting usually appropriated to them, was a semi-circular bench, in the middle of which the chief ruler was placed, and his colleagues on each side of him, with their faces towards the assembly, and in a certain position with respect to the Ark, the principal Door, and the cardinal points of the compass. This statement is confirmed by the learned Thorndike, a distinguished Episcopal divine, of the 17th century. In speaking of the Consistory, or bench of Elders, in the Synagogue, and describing their manner of sitting in public worship, he makes the following statement, in the form of a quotation from Maimonides, and confirms it abundantly from other sources. "How sit the people in the Synagogue? The Elders sit with their faces towards the people, and their backs towards the Hecall (the place where they lay the copy of the law;) and all the people sit rank before rank, the face of every rank towards the back of the rank before it; so the faces of all the people are towards the Sanctuary, and towards the Elders, and towards the Ark; and when the Minister of the Synagogue standeth up to prayer, he standeth on the ground before the Ark, with his face toward the sanctuary, as the rest of the people."

The number of the Elders in each Synagogue was not governed by any absolute rule. In large cities, according to certain Jewish authorities quoted by Vitringa the number was frequently very large. But even in the smallest Synagogues, we are assured, as