

Presbyterianism to both Episcopacy and Congregationalism when kept within the bounds of moderation :—

A misapprehension to which people here are liable, and which I will now endeavour to obviate, is, that Presbytery is a very peculiar and extreme system, and that every Episcopalian or Congregationalist, in virtue of being such, must look upon it as the very antipodes of Episcopacy or Congregationalism. If any identify Episcopacy with apostolical succession, and, consequently, avow sisterhood with Rome, through which that succession is derived, and pay homage to the relation by introducing into a Protestant church as much Romanism in doctrine and ritual as English feeling will tolerate, or even pronounce to be intolerable, then I confess that such administration is antagonistic to Presbyterianism. But if we speak of the founders of the English Church, and the great and good men who in diverse ages have adorned its communion, it will be found that their solemn and declared conclusions bring many of them into proximity, and even relation, to ourselves. It can give no umbrage to any Episcopal friends that I adduce their own authorities against an extreme denominationalism, and in behalf of closer affinity with us than many suppose to exist.

Bishop Burnet informs us that there were many learned and pious divines in the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's reign, who, being driven beyond the sea, had observed the new model set up in Geneva, and other places, and these thought that such a platform might be an effectual way of keeping out disorders. But the Queen, perceiving that if the concerns of religion came into popular hands there would be a power set up distinct from hers, over which she could have no authority, resolved to maintain the ancient government of the Church. Nothing then but the preference of the Crown for prelates and prelacy, after its own sort, prevented a very considerable modification of Episcopal peculiarities, and closer assimilation between Geneva and London.

Mark the constituents of Presbytery. Our churches are individually superintended by ministers and elders—by ministers who preach, and elders who do not preach. The value of such an eldership is fully acknowledged in constitutional documents of the English Church. Indeed, the same convocation which passed the Thirty-nine Articles sanctioned a catechism, drawn up by the Rev. Dean Nowell, in which the maintenance of discipline by a ruling eldership is unequivocally advocated; and powerful and commendable attempts have been made in recent times to revive this order of labourers. Nor is an eldership at variance with Congregationalism. That every primitive church had a plurality of Presbyters is generally acknowledged by independent writers. They also admit that all the Presbyters did not originally preach; and that while one or more of them publicly taught, others ruled only, finding plenty of occupation for their time and talents in practical superintendence. Let Congregationalists act out this view—their own view—of primitive Christianity, and each of them will have a company of Presbyters, or what we call a session.

The following is the eloquent and glowing conclusion of the pamphlet. The extract is of considerable length, but we are sure our readers will thank us for it :—

Another impression liable to be adopted here is, that Presbytery is almost equivalent to quarreling—that we seek the perfection of sects in the multiplication of them, and aim to do execution in society by bursting like bombshells, and scattering in fragments. I dare not, in candour, repudiate this objection as unqualifiedly as others. Episcopacy has certain advantages on the side of coherence. In the absence of courts, it wants those embittered debates which issue in dismemberments. It is hard, too, for a bishop to secede. And if none secede, none can be installed. No bishops can be ordained without bishops; and without bishops there can be no confirmation; and so, without a secession of bishops, Episcopacy, from its summit to its base, is despoiled of its characteristics. For