

The following specimen of the representation given on this subject in various parts of the Old Testament, will suffice, at once, to illustrate and establish what is here advanced. Even while the children of Israel were in Egypt, they seem to have had Elders, in the official sense of the word; for Jehovah in sending Moses to deliver them, said, *Go and gather the Elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The Lord hath visited you, and hath seen what is done to you in Egypt; Exodus iii. 16.* In the wilderness, the *Elders of Israel* are spoken of as called together by Moses, appealed to by Moses, and officially acting under that divinely commissioned leader, on occasions almost innumerable. These Elders appear to have been of different grades, and endowed, of course, with different powers; *Exod. xvii. 5. xviii. 12. xxiv. 1, 9. Numbers xi. 16. Deut. xxv. 7—9. xxix. 10. xxxi. 9. 28.* From these and other passages, it would seem they had seventy Elders over the nation; and besides these, Elders over thousands, over hundreds, over fifties, and over tens, who were all charged with inspection and rule in their respective spheres. Again, we find inspectors and rulers of the people, under the name of Elders, existing, and on all public occasions, acting in their official character, in the time of Joshua; during the period of the judges; under the kings, especially during the most favored and happy season of their kingly dominion; probably during the captivity in Babylon; and, beyond all doubt, as soon as they returned from captivity, and became settled in their own land; until the Synagogue system was regularly established as the stated means of popular instruction and worship.

When the Synagogue service was instituted, is a question which has been so much controverted, and is of so much real uncertainty that the discussion of it will not be attempted in this place, especially as it is a question of no sort of importance in the inquiry now before us. All that is necessary for us to assume, is that it existed, at the time of our Lord's advent, and for a considerable time before; and that the Jews had been long accustomed to its order and worship; which no one, it is presumed, will think of questioning. Now, whatever might have been its origin, nothing can be more certain, than that from the earliest notices we have of the institution, and through its whole history, its leading officers consisted of a bench of Elders, who were appointed to bear rule in the congregation; who formed a kind of Consistory, or ecclesiastical judicatory;—to receive applicants for admission into the Church; to watch over the people, as well in reference to their morals, as their obedience to ceremonial and ecclesiastical order; to administer discipline when necessary; and in short as the representatives of the Church or congregation, to act in their name and behalf; to "bind" and "loose;" and to see that every thing was "done decently and in order."

It is not forgotten that a few eminent writers, following the celebrated German errorist, *Erastus*, hav-

contended that there was no *ecclesiastical* government among the Jews distinct from the *civil*; and that, of course, there were no rulers of the Synagogue, separate from the civil judges. Those who wish to see this error satisfactorily refuted, and the existence of a distinct ecclesiastical government among that people clearly established, may consult what has been written on the subject, by the learned Gillespie, by professor Rutherford, by Bishop Stillingfleet, and others; from whose writings they will be convinced, beyond all reasonable doubt, that the civil and ecclesiastical judicatories were really distinct; that the persons composing each, as well as their respective spheres of judgment, were peculiar; and that the latter existed long after the civil sovereignty of the Jewish people was taken away.

There has been, indeed, much diversity of opinion among learned men, concerning a variety of questions which arise in reference to these Elders of the Synagogue. As, for example, whether there was a difference of rank among them? Whether some were teachers as well as rulers, and others rulers only? Whether there was any diversity in their ordination, &c. &c.? But while eminent writers on Jewish antiquities have differed, and continue to differ, in relation to these points, they are all perfectly agreed in one point, namely, that in every Synagogue there was a bench of Elders, consisting of at least three persons, who were charged with the whole inspection, government, and discipline of the Synagogue; who, as a court or bench of rulers, received, judged, censured, excluded, and, in a word, performed every judicial act, necessary to the regularity and welfare of the congregation. In this general fact, Viringa, Selden, Voetius, Marek, Grotius, Lightfoot, Blondel, Salmasius, and, indeed, so far as I can now recollect, all the writers on this subject, who deserve to be represented as high authorities, substantially agree. And in support of this fact, they quote Philo, Josephus, Maimonides, Benjamin of Tudela, and the great mass of other Jewish witnesses, who are considered as holding the first rank among Rabbinical authorities. Indeed, they speak of the fact as too unquestionable to demand any formal array of testimony for its confirmation.

Accordingly, we find various passages in the New Testament history, which refer to these Ruling Elders, as belonging to the old economy, then drawing to a close, and which admit, it would appear, of no other interpretation than that which supposes their existence. The following specimen will suffice; *Mark, v. 22, And behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the Synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet; Acts xiii. 15. And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the Synagogue sent unto them, saying, ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.* On this latter passage, Dr. Gill, an eminent master of oriental, and especially of rabbinical learning, in his Commentary, writes thus:—"The