

tion that the frequent and unguarded use of terms, strictly and thoroughly Christian—may lead those who listen to us—to imagine (from their uninterrupted recurrence,) that they are Christians.—We have often thought—that this may be one of the master processes of the father of lies, in which for a time he sorrows, as it were, the sacredness of the Christian ministry to aid him in deluding the souls of men. If the danger referred to is only imaginary and not real, we ask the indulgence and forbearance of clearer heads and warmer hearts than our own. We admit that the Apostles of Christ, in addressing the different churches to which they wrote, were in the habit of using general terms, such as Brethren, Beloved, Saints, Elect of God, &c., &c. But we presume no one will pretend to say that the state of the Church now and then are alike. Those were the times,—the circumstances that tried men's souls. Insincerity and hypocrisy then were next to impossible—the trials of the primitive Christians were too severe, too numerous, and the ordeal through which they passed too searching, to make it probable that they had taken up a profession, without the inward and spiritual grace.

It cost a man something in those times to be a Christian. None could bear the obloquy, the inconvenience and persecutions—always attendant upon an avowal of attachment to Christ—unless the root of the matter was in him. The Acts of the Apostles, which we call the first chapter of ecclesiastical history—and writings of Eusebius, which you may call the second, make this sufficiently clear, so that there was little danger of leading men astray in Apostolic times by the use of general terms. We cannot say as much of the Church (Catholic) in the present day—ah no, it is impossible for us to resist the conviction—that we often address as fellow Christians, persons whose minds are dark as midnight—cold as the grave and hard as adamant; men who never felt the plague of their own hearts, or saw the sinfulness of sin—who continue daily in the practice of those things they know to be sinful without uneasiness, without pain, without fear; men who indulge in no hopes—make no efforts—offer no prayers to be delivered from its guilt, its practice and pollution. These have gone, and are still going astray—and it is therefore—it is highly dangerous, to address them as if they had returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls.

Then we are deeply conscious of our unworthiness and unfitness to be teachers or the prophets of the Lord. Yet we have ventured to say that danger may be apprehended here. It is a terrible reflection, and awakens a most solemn feeling of responsibility to God—to think that we often address as the people of God—the children of the wicked one. It is no justification of the course to say “we cannot read men's hearts,” that is another and one of the strongest reasons why we should be guarded. The writer of these remarks has often been led to fear—that the fact of people being habituated to the use of appellations, truly Christian—their receiving baptism for their children, and occasionally partaking of the Supper of the Lord—may lead some who have neither part nor lot in the matter of vital saving Godliness to deceive their own souls. At all events the subject is certainly worthy of serious consideration by every minister of our Church, and we shall be glad and thankful if this communication—weak and incomplete though it be—shall be the means of provoking some abler hand to take up the subject. A. M.

#### ON THE ELDERSHIP.

From Lectures addressed to a Congregation.

##### NO. I. EVIDENCE.

We shall endeavour to show, in the *First* place, What in the primitive churches which we regard as our model, there was only one class of office-bearers connected with the spiritual management, viz. Bishops—Presbyters or Elders—and *Secondly*, That this class was divided into

two sections—the first embracing those who ruled only. The second those who communicated instruction, besides.

##### I. One class of Spiritual Office-bearers in the Primitive Church.

In the New Testament we read of individuals bearing the official designation of Bishops, (Episcopoi) and of others bearing that of Elders, (Presbyteroi). From this the inference has been drawn by the adherents of Prelacy, that these were two distinct classes of office-bearers, and that the members of the one occupied a position above those of the other. They regard Bishops as a species of spiritual peers, and Presbyters as entirely separate and subordinate. On a close and careful examination of Scripture, however, it will be found that Bishops and Presbyters or Elders stand on the same level—possess the same powers—are in short in every respect identical. They are just two names given indiscriminately to the same office—the one being descriptive of the character of the office itself, the other of the condition of those who fill it. They were called *Bishops* or *overseers*, (ἐπισκοποι) because invested with the oversight of the Church's spiritual concerns—and Presbyters or Elders (πρεσβυτεροι) on the principle enunciated by Elihu, the friend of the patient patriarch, “Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.”

Having stated the fact that Bishops and Elders are one and the same—let us briefly enumerate the proofs which Scripture furnishes in its favor. When Paul was journeying to Jerusalem, he dispatched a message to the rulers of the Ephesian Church to meet him at Miletus, that he might take sweet counsel with them, and deliver to them a solemn charge—the interesting incident as recorded in Acts xx. 17—38.—But what we wish you particularly to observe is, that the parties who in the 17th verse are called Presbyters or Elders (πρεσβυτεροι) are in the 28th verse called Bishops, (ἐπισκοποι). “He called for the *elders* of the Church”—and these elders he thus addresses, “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made you *Overseers*.” The original word for Bishop is the same as that which our Translators render *Overseer*. It is clear as a sun-beam therefore, that to be the overseer or Bishop of any portion of the Good Shepherd's flock, is in no way different from being simply an Elder or Presbyter. The circumstance too of a plurality being specified, goes convincingly to show how different was the signification attached to the expression Bishop in primitive times, from what is attached to it by a certain class now—a Bishop in the prelatic acceptance of the term, is one holding ecclesiastical sway over an extensive district of country. Here, however, we read of a number of Bishops belonging to a single city, and acting as the representatives of a single Church.

In Titus i. 5, Paul states the object he contemplated in leaving that faithful Evangelist behind him in Crete—“that thou shouldst ordain *Elders* in every city.” In the 6th verse he exhibits the qualifications which these Elders ought to possess. “If any be blameless, &c.” And in the 7th he explains the reason why these qualifications ought to be possessed by them, that mark the change in the mode of expression which he adopts, “For a *Bishop* must be blameless.” The term Bishop, therefore in the 7th, must be synonymous with the term Elder in the 5th, otherwise the reason here assigned by the Apostle would be entirely destitute of point and propriety. Therefore it is that the above characteristics ought to meet in an Elder; it is because a *Bishop* must be blameless—how singularly inappropriate this method of arguing on the supposition of the two names being descriptive of distinct offices!

“The *Elders* which are among you I exhort, says Peter, (1 Peter v. 1.) who are also an elder.” Then he proceeds to exhort them in a strain not unlike that adopted by Paul to those from Ephesus.

“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof;” In other words, acting the part of bishops towards it.—(ἐπισκοποι.) Here again the Elder, or Presbyter, is said to fill the post and to perform the functions of a regular Bishop. What need we any further witness, then, in favor of the fact, that in so far as spiritual superintendence was concerned, the primitive churches had only one class of office-bearers, and that not the shadow of a difference was regarded as subsisting between the Primitive Presbyter or Elder, and Episcopos or Bishop.

II. Let us now proceed to show that under this general class fall, to be included, two special classes, viz: the Elders, whose duty it is *only* to rule, and those who in addition to ruling, are also expected to teach; in other words, the pastor, or presiding minister, and the ruling Elder or Elders. These, be it remembered, however, at the outset, are not to be regarded as distinct orders of office-bearers, or as possessing different degrees of authority, but as occupying different departments of the same general office, and of equal authority as rulers of the Church.

The arguments by which this distinction, between the Ruling and Teaching Elders, is established, may be ranged under the following heads:—

##### I. The Analogy derived from the Jewish Synagogue.

There is strong reason to believe that the external frame-work of the early Christian Churches, was cast into the mould, and formed after the model of these well known ecclesiastical assemblies amongst the Jews. To each synagogue a body of office-bearers, bearing the name of *Elders*, was attached. In consequence of the similarity in the duties they had to perform, the Christian office-bearers were distinguished by the same appellation. Now it is generally acknowledged—it may be said even to rank in the catalogue of historical facts—that the Jewish Elders were divided into two classes. Those who engaged in the exposition of the law, and those who exercised a general supervision over the synagogue services. We might, consequently, expect a corresponding division amongst those in the Christian Church, occupying a corresponding position.

##### II. The well established fact, that there did exist a plurality of Elders in the Primitive Church.

In consulting the New Testament Scriptures, we are furnished with the most clear and conclusive evidence, that such was the case. The Church in Jerusalem was, doubtless, regarded by the Apostles as a kind of model, after whose constitution all others should be formed. In the 15th of Acts, we read of a body of Elders connected with this Church, assembling in council to receive and review the appeal brought by Paul and Barnabas, from the Church at Antioch, and uniting with the Apostles in framing and forwarding the decree in which their decision on the matter was embodied.

In the opening of his epistle to the Philippian Church, Paul particularly addresses as its acknowledged representatives, “the Bishop and Deacons.” We have already endeavoured to show you, that an Elder and Bishop mean one and the same thing. There was therefore at Philippi, as at Jerusalem, at least, more than one Presbyter. So also at Ephesus, the Elders of that Church met the venerable Apostle at Miletus. And why was it that he left his son Titus behind him at Crete? It was, “that he might ordain *Elders* in every city”—Titus i. 5. When himself travelling from place to place, in company with Barnabas, we are told that they “ordained them *Elders* in every Church”—Acts xiv. 23. In his epistles to the Hebrews, and the Thessalonians, respectively, he thus writes—“obey them which have the rule over you”—Heb. xiii. 17. “We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are