

set forth, yet when we ask light from the New Testament we find the veil uplifted. Vast changes had taken place in Israel, yet the Eldership remained. Their position, as evidenced by the disclosures of the New Testament, was no less conspicuous in those days than it was in the palmy days of Solomon. Perhaps we might with propriety say that their position was more conspicuous in the New Testament than in the Old. They are certainly brought out more to notice. But for what? We shall see about the earliest mention that is made of them their traditions are brought into contact with the Saviour's action. The Scribes and Pharisees would convict him, if not of sin, certainly of transgression, because he did not teach his disciples to observe the traditions of the Elders. So their influence seems to have become great among children of Israel by the lapse of time. Their traditions—whatever these were—had become (as we learn from another portion) in the estimation of the people of higher authority than the Word of the living God. "Ye have made the word of God of none effect by your traditions" (Mat. xv. 2-6.) It appears also from the prominent part they took in causing suffering to the Son of Man, that whether they were properly so called leaders of the people, they were clearly leaders of the popular feeling. At his apprehension they sought for false witnesses to testify against Christ. "At the last came two false witnesses" (Mat. xxvi. 59-60.) And when Jesus was with Barabbas, presented to the people that they might release the one or the other, the Chief Priests and the Elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas and destroy Jesus. At the feast of the Passover the governor used to release unto the people a prisoner whom they would have released. By persuasion of the Elders they set at liberty a murderer and demanded the life of the Son of God. Moreover they took part in mocking him while he was dying on the cross—"He saved others, himself he cannot save." So also they exhibited what spirit they were of when, after the resurrection, the Apostles Peter, James, and John were fearlessly declaring to the people that God had made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ, they, in concert with their vile companions, endeavored to stop the mouths of these holy men—to hinder them from telling the most wonderful, enrapturing story to which the ears of men ever listened—salvation, eternal life through the goodness, mercy, and love of the very Being they have crucified. These facts tell plainly what their character was during the reign of the Cæsars, whatever it might have been in the reign of their own kings. Some of them, by faith, obtained a good report (Heb. xi.)

Let us proceed to notice the Elders of the New Dispensation. At the very outset an interesting enquiry presents itself. Why Elders in the new dispensation? Is it in any wise like the old, that it must needs have Elders? The answer to this is not to be looked for so much from the fact that there were Elders in the olden times

from the necessities of human nature. It may be compared to a vessel which is to sail to any given point: it must have individuals to take care of it. So society, whether composed of sinners or saints, must have its officials, whose duty shall be the conducting of their charge through the difficulties incident to its existence, and so securing as large an amount of comfort, peace, and satisfaction as the whole range of its circumstances can possibly admit. Perhaps, however, the Christians borrowed the idea from the previous dispensation; or, it may be, that the Apostles and Evangelists were directed to the creation of this order by the Holy Spirit. But whether the existence of the Elders as a class may be traced to the necessities of human nature or to revelation; or whether the cause be beyond our reach, the fact is plain. The church had its Elders, if not from the beginning, from a very early date in its history. Eight years after Peter's first sermon Agabus (Acts xi. 28) signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world, which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren who dwelt in Judea, which also they did, and sent to the Elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. As churches multiplied and grew the indefatigable missionaries of the glorified Saviour, the Apostles, ordained them Elders in every church (Acts xiv. 23.) This order may be considered as forming a component part of every church, from the time of their organization down to the close of the volume inspiration; or rather, I should have said, we read of their existence in the churches from an early period down to the close of revelation. They were not self-appointed men; they were selected from the brethren by the Apostles and Evangelists, and ordained to the office. As the Apostles, at least, had the power of discerning spirits, it may be predicated on that fact that the Elders whom they ordained were good men. This will come out more clearly by a brief statement of their specified qualifications, duties, and rewards.

It will not be necessary to reaffirm by whom they were ordained. It will be enough simply to refer to passages where their ordination is stated, Acts xvi. 23. Titus i. 5. In the first of these passages the ordination was conducted by Apostle Paul and Barnabas in person, and in the second the ordination was commanded to be done by the appointment of the Apostle Paul. So that the institution may perhaps be traced to inspiration, exclusively of any other consideration. In fact Paul sees no need to affirm this (Acts xx. 28.)

Concerning the qualifications of Elders these are particularly given by the Holy Spirit, so that it is only necessary to refer the reader to the Scriptures where they are started. These are chiefly Tim. iii. and Titus i. In both passages it is affirmed that they must be BLAMELESS. That word contains the germ of all the excellencies of the office. Failing the possession of