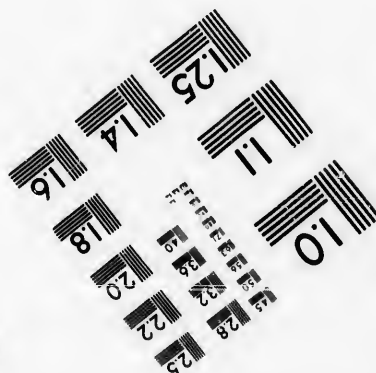
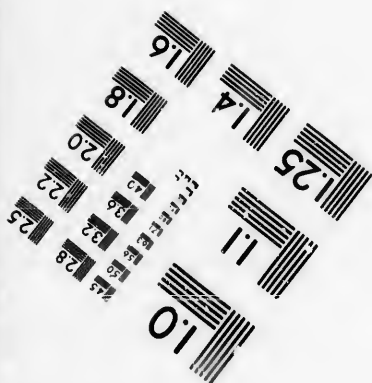
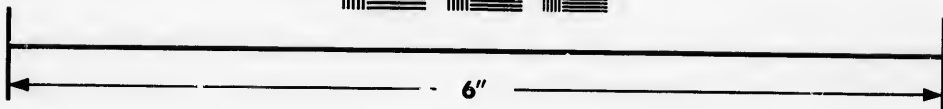
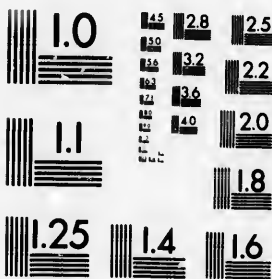


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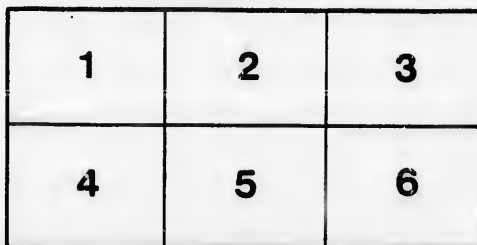
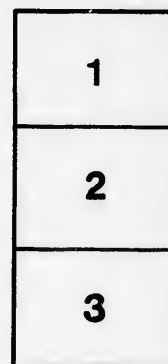
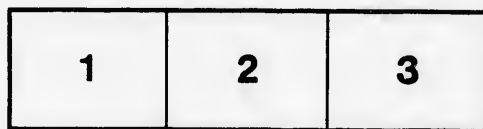
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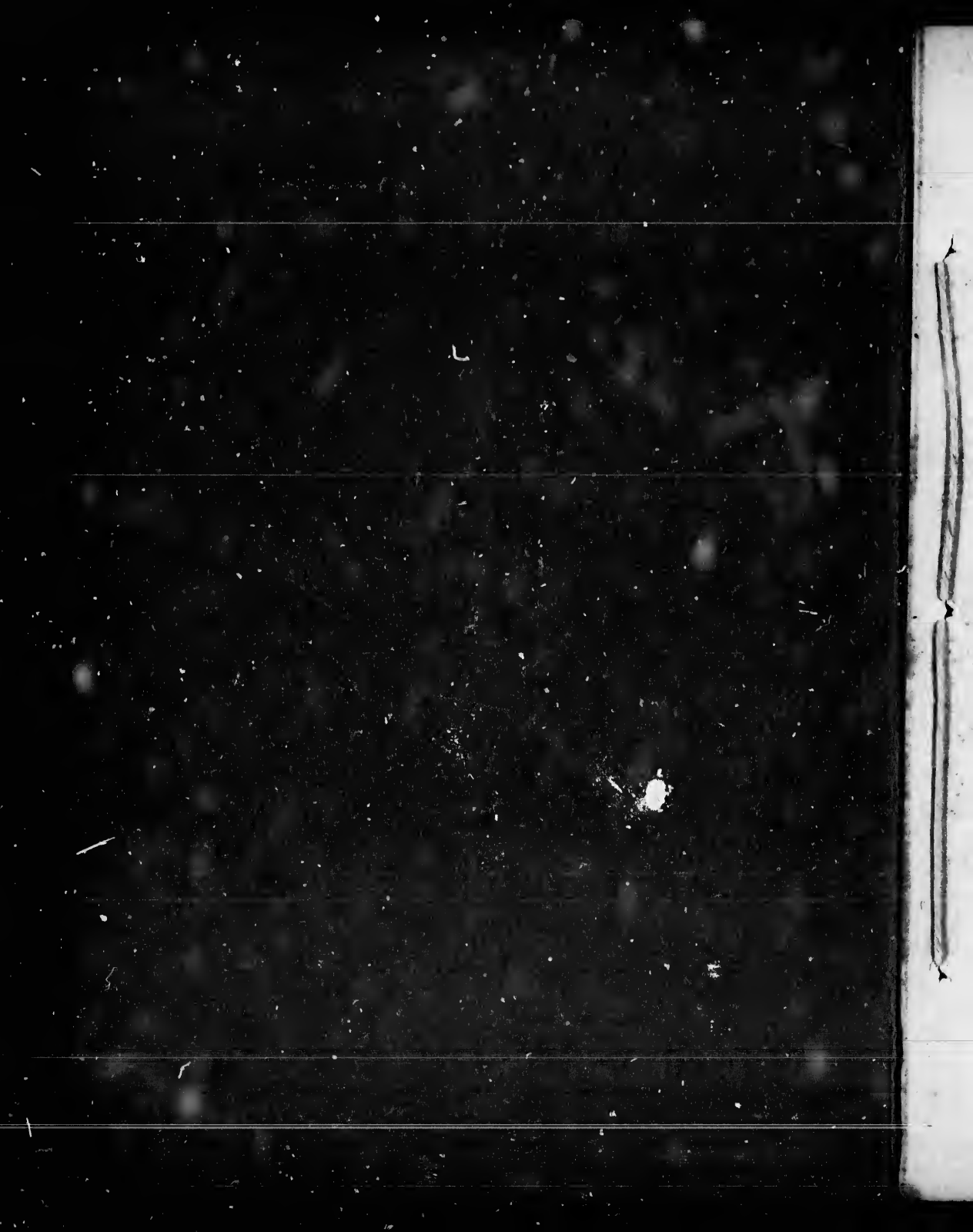
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THE NEW TESTAMENT ELDER.

PROF. WITHEROW.

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THE
New Testament Elder:
His Position,
POWERS AND DUTIES
IN THE
Christian Church.

BY
THOMAS WITHEROW,
PROF. OF CHURCH HISTORY, LONDONDERRY.

AUTHOR OF
"The Apostolic Church, Which Is It," "Scripture
Baptism, Its Mode and Subjects."

Reprinted from the British and Foreign Evangelical Review.

TORONTO:
JAMES BAIN, BOOKSELLER,
KING STREET, EAST,
1873.

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P R E F A C E .

THE following treatise originally appeared in the columns of the British and Foreign Evangelical Review, but at the suggestion of friends, is now issued with the author's permission in a more popular form, the subject is one of deep interest, and is treated in the same plain and logical manner, which has secured for his treatises on Baptism and Church Government so extensive a circulation.

TORONTO, Nov. 25th, 1873.



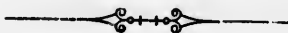
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T H E
NEW TESTAMENT ELDER.



THE growing divergences of opinion among the Reformed Churches on the subject of the Eldership, and the variety of practical suggestions to which these divergences lead, demand that we should review our present position, and reconsider the whole subject in the light of Holy Scripture. That such differences exist, there can be no doubt. In some churches where the institution was once in full operation, it is now extinct ; while in others it is steadfastly maintained. Among those churches where the elder still survives, some regard him as a layman chosen merely to represent the laity in the governing body ; while others regard him as a spiritual officer, whose office is as clearly defined as that of the bishop or deacon. It is obvious that any suggestion in regard to the discharge of his duties must be very much coloured by the position,

which the person giving the suggestion believes is assigned to him in the New Testament. Every difference on the subject must ultimately be brought to the test, not of human opinion or ecclesiastical practice, but of divine revelation. Even divine institutions administered by men have a strong tendency, in the lapse of years, and amid a change of circumstances, to veer away from their original positions : it is by constant reference to the divine chart and guide that we can keep them in their place.

Every one who has given attention to the constitution of the New Testament Church is of course aware that its office-bearers are divided into two grand classes, which may be designated the *itinerant* and the *stationary*. In the former are comprised the apostles and the evangelists, who went out into all the world preaching the gospel, gathering their converts into little communities, and conferring on them a settled organization ; but as they were constantly moving about, and could remain but a short time in one locality, it was necessary to provide for affording to the little communities which they formed, a permanent supply of Christian ordinances. This was done by appointing in each local congregation two classes of officers resident at the spot, one of whom, the elder, attended to the spiritual, and the other, the deacon, who attended to the temporal wants

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of the little community. It is with the former of these that we are at present concerned.

The eldership is a divine institution. It has not originated with uninspired men ; it is not a growth of ages, but has its roots in the new Testament.⁺ Yet the strange thing is, that, like sacrifice in the old dispensation, the history of its origin is not recorded. In Acts xi. 30, it meets us for the first time as an institution already existing in the church at Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas set it up in the churches which they planted in Asia Minor. We find it in vigorous existence at Ephesus. Paul left Titus behind to establish it in Crete ; and the Christians to whom James wrote were exhorted, in times of sickness, to avail themselves of the benefit of it.¹ As we cannot doubt that the Apostles acted by divine authority in organizing the first Christian communities, we must believe that every institution which they set up and approved must have had the authority of God.

Elder and bishop, presbyter and pastor, are, in the New Testament, different names for the same office-bearer. No candid scholar now ventures to deny the fact. The elders of Ephesus were overseers, that is, bishops, by appointment of the Holy Ghost : the elders of Crete were to possess

¹Acts xiv. 23, xx. 17 ; Tit. i. 5 ; James v. 14.

+ In the Old Testament in which
the Church was organized.

all the qualifications required in bishops. When Paul enumerates the qualifications of bishops, he passes over in silence those of elders, which he was not likely to do if under the one name both had not been included ; and Peter commands the elders to act as bishops by feeding the flock.¹ But the New Testament bishop or pastor is the office-bearer who is elsewhere designated presbyter, teacher, minister. These names, though all pointing out the same officer, are not strictly synonymous, but each presents him to us in a different point of view. The same man might be called a presbyter or elder, from his age or gravity, bishop or overseer from his having the oversight of the people, teacher, from the great work he was to discharge, pastor or shepherd, from his feeding and tending the flock, minister or servant, because that for Christ's sake he was the servant of all.

There was a plurality of these elders in every local congregation. It was so in Jerusalem, in the churches of Asia Minor, in Ephesus, in Philippi, in the churches of Crete ; and it would have been impossible to obey the admonition

¹Acts xx. 28 ; Tit. i. 6-9 ; 1 Tim. iii. 1-7 ; 1 Pet. v. 2. Tischendorf, however, in his eight edition, omits *episcopountes* (Bishops) in last passage, on the authority of the Codex Vaticanus and another ancient manuscript. Four ancient manuscripts, however, viz., the Alexandrian, the Cyprian, and two others, sustain the reading of the received text.

+ Because it the office of elder
was a merely assisting office ;
before Paul & even before Moses.

of James, had there not been more than one of them in every congregation.¹ It is interesting to notice how this plurality shews itself often undesignedly in the apostolic admonitions—"Remember *them* which have the rule over you"—"Know *them* which labour among you and are over you in the Lord." It was these elders of the local church, who, in their associated capacity, constituted the Presbytery.²

The qualifications of the bishop or elder are stated in detail in the epistles to Timothy and to Titus.³ Of the twenty-two distinct qualifications there enumerated, six are found in the Epistle to Timothy which are not in Titus, and seven are stated in Titus which are not in Timothy. Nine, however, are common to both Epistles, and from this double statement of them, we may infer that they are of special importance. These qualifications substantially are, that the elder must be a man of experience, consistent in moral character, unselfish in his aims, an example to others in temper, in life and in conduct. But, over and above these moral requirements, there are two others deserving of special attention. He must be "one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all

¹ Acts xv. 2, xiv. 23, xx. 17; Phil. i. 1; Tit. i. 5; James v. 14.

Heb. xiii. 7, 17, 24; 1 Thess. v. 12; 1 Tim. iv. 14.

³ 1 Tim. iii. 2-7; Tit. v. 9.

gravity," or as it is in the parallel passage, "having faithful children not accused of riot and unruly;" and it is added as a reason for this qualification, "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" Want of success in ruling at home was to disqualify a man from ruling in the church. The other special qualification was skill in teaching. A bishop, says Paul to Timothy, must be "apt to teach," that is, fit to communicate knowledge. The same qualification is presented in the Epistle to Titus in different words, the language in the latter passage having more of a polemic air. "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." It is in reality the same qualification, only with a double aspect; the elder must be fit to instruct believers on the one side, and to answer objectors on the other. It is noteworthy that no exception whatever is made; every elder must be *able to rule* and also *fit to teach*.

The two qualifications now stated are important in this respect. that they point to the *work* that the elder was to perform. In absence of an apostle or other occasional visitor, the entire spiritual oversight may be summed up in two words, *government* and *instruction*. In the discharge of

their duty as governors, they had to take care of the church, to receive its charities, to administer discipline, and sit in council in regard to its spiritual affairs.¹ But much the most important part of their duties was the instruction of the people. They were expressly commanded to "feed the church of God"—a duty which it is impossible to do in any other way except by communicating to its members knowledge and saving truth. Peter solemnly exhorts the elders to "feed the flock of God, taking the oversight of it." Rulers were over the flock that they might "labour" and "admonish" as well; that they might pray with the sick and watch for souls.² It was, therefore, in the duties of ruling and teaching that the spiritual oversight of the church consisted; and as no exception whatsoever is made, we cannot but conclude that these two departments of work were common to all elders.

While the main duties of all were the same, there was nothing in the apostolic arrangements to prevent any elder giving most attention to that department of the work for which, owing to taste or circumstances, he was best adapted. On the contrary, there was something to encourage it: "As every man hath receiveth the gift, so minister the

¹Act xi. 30; 1 Thess. v. 12; Acts xv. 2, 6, 22, 23; xvi. 4.

²Acts xx. 28; 1 Pet. v. 2; 1 Thess. v. 12; James v. 14; Heb. xiii. 17.

*The verb τροφαινω - Generally
understood to feed, never in the Greek
Scriptures denotes to teach but to rule.*

same one to another"—“ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering,” &c.1 If every church member was bound to use his special gift for the good of all, much more would every member of the eldership be under obligation to attend to that department of duty, which his special gift enabled him to do better than others. Take half a dozen good men of superior attainments, it will be found on trial that they are variously endowed. One is better fitted than all the others to preach or to expound the scriptures, another to speak with profit to the sick or to the afflicted, another to interest and edify the young, another is possessed of more tact and experience in dealing with human nature, another is best qualified to plan and to arrange details. ~~X~~ In such circumstances, no elder of good sense, seeking the edification of the flock, would insist on doing, simply because he had a right to do it, that particular portion of duty for which he was least fitted. Even although he could do so if necessary, no elder would insist on instructing the congregation in presence of one more gifted than himself, who was willing to speak, and who as a speaker was more acceptable to the people; and no teacher, how-

1 Pet. iv. 10; Rom. xii. 6-8.

+ But surely the 13 bishops or
elders ref^d to in 1 Pet. 111 & 112, 1,
were bound to teach. They were to be
qualified to teach — to preach the

eve ready as a speaker, would insist on ruling in opposition to older and wiser men. Nothing is more natural than that each elder should follow his bent, and do most frequently the work that he could do best. Common sense would teach them that this is the way in which the church is most likely to profit ; but no church could be edified if every man would insist on doing the part of the work for which he is worst fitted. So it was in the New Testament Church ; some ruled, others taught and others attempted both. As might be expected some were diligent, others not so diligent in their work.¹ Endless diversities of this kind would as a thing of course, shew themselves among the spiritual overseers of a congregation. The result of each attending to the special department for which he found he had a special adaptation, was that the whole work of the ministry was better done than it could have been done on any other system. This enables us to see why it was that, while all elders were to manifest the same qualifications, though, of course, not in an equal degree, and to hold the same office, some of them gave attention to one department without forfeiting their claim to the "double honour." One who "ruled well" was worthy of double honour, even though he did not as a general rule take much to do with

¹ 1 Tim. v. 17 ; Rom. xii. 8.

gospel & defend it when attacked. There is no use in your excusing himself on the, See of Unfitness. If this be valid he is not such an elder as is left to in the hands

teaching ; but if he was a laborious teacher no less than a successful ruler, he had special claims.¹ X

The elders of the congregation were entitled to remuneration for their services. The "honour" of 1 Tim. v. 17, whatever else it means, certainly includes substantial recompense, otherwise the reason which the following verse assigns for the injunction is entirely out of place.[#] It does not follow, however, that the apostolic elder always accepted payment ; he might, as the apostle did, forego his claims, or the church might be too poor to offer it, or for some other reason he might decline to receive it. If an elder was a successful ruler, he not only had a claim, but a double claim if he chose to assert it, and the claim was strengthened if he laboured in teaching as well. The remuneration to which he was entitled was in proportion to his work. The instruction of the congregation, if done as it ought to be done, was a laborious work ; it required higher talents, made heavy demands upon a man's time, required a greater expenditure of means and power, and in the early ages danger was often incurred in its discharge. He who acts as a laborious teacher as well as a diligent ruler, has therefore

The regulation of the *Second Book of Discipline* is quite in accordance with the primitive practice:—"It is not necessary that all elders be also teachers of the word, albeit the chief ought to be such ; and so are worthy of double honour."—Ch. vi. sect. 5.

X This is begging the whole question.
Not necessarily.

the strongest claim to pecuniary reward. But the diligent ruler, who does not habitually teach, is entitled to "double honour," and this has led some to ask, "Why reward a man for doing only one-half the duties of his office?" The answer is found in that division of labour to which we have adverted. Here is how the case stands. A number of men are appointed to an important work, the government and instruction of a Christian community; they divide the duties among them, giving each man that part of the work that he is best qualified to perform, and the result is that the whole work is better done than if each man had done a little at everything. If each has been diligent in his place, and if the work on this plan has been better done, each man is entitled to his full reward, and it is not fair to charge any of them with neglecting half his duty, simply because he has attended entirely to one department in order to allow his neighbour room to attend entirely to another. While an elder must, to some extent, be qualified for any department, yet the work will always be the best done by every man doing that portion of it for which he is best qualified; and if he so act, it would be wrong to charge him with neglect of duty, or to deprive him of his just reward.

Apart, however, from remunerat. there are tokens of appreciation that no church was entitled to withhold from

x Are all elders called by Christ to preach the Gospel, to labour in the Word & doctrine? P

the faithful rulers and guides of their souls, The members of the church have it in command to "obey" them, to "submit" to them, to "remember" them, and to be followers of their faith as well as to "know" and to "esteem them very highly in love for their work sake."¹ To a generous mind such tokens of appreciation are always acceptable, and if more substantial recompense is not accepted, there is an additional reason why Christians should so feel and so act to those who are over them in the Lord. The duties of the office are correlative. If he that ruleth is to "rule with diligence," and the teacher is to "labour" in word and doctrine, then by the same authority, they who receive the benefit are bound over to adequate remuneration, to obedience and esteem.

The office of the elder is permanent in the church. The extraordinary spiritual gifts of the apostolic age have passed away. We no longer meet with the gift of miracles, the gift of prophecy or the gift of tongues; but it is not so with the gifts of teaching and of government, which lie at the basis of the elder's office. They still are continued in the Christian society; nor can we conceive of a time, while the church exists in its present condition, that it can afford to dispense with government and instruction, If the gifts that

¹Heb. xiii. 7, 17; 1 Thess. v. 12, 13.

enable men to teach and govern are continued, and if the church needs to be taught and governed, why should those who possess the gifts not exercise them? The practice of the apostles in ordaining elders in every church, and the minuteness with which their qualifications and duties are described in Scripture, shew that it was not the Divine intention that the eldership should be a temporary institution, or vanish out of the world like the apostleship itself.

Such is the Biblical idea of the eldership. The apostles, so far as we are informed, never left any church permanently in charge of an individual elder or pastor; but they themselves formed, or sent some of their associates to form, a bench of elders, and under this bench of elders they placed the congregation. The work of these officers was to instruct and govern the Christian community over which they were appointed. As a matter of fact the responsibility was divided; some ruled, some taught, some did both, as the necessities of the congregation or their own abilities, inclination and opportunities prompted. By this division of labour there was less risk of unpleasant interference with each other, and the church was better served.

The advantages of such an arrangement in the circumstances of the time are, indeed, obvious. It was well adapted to a community consisting of a great number of

*Are men entitled to labour in the
land &c without a call for it, & without
the qualifications required in Scripture?*

poor and uneducated people, and which could not command the services of men trained for the performance of pastoral work. Apostles and their assistants for a time made other leaders unnecessary ; but they had soon to remove elsewhere in the fulfilment of their commission, and, ever pushing forward into new fields, had afterwards to content themselves with an occasional visit to the churches that they had been the first to plant. Soon also such visits would cease, as death would call one after another away. Each little Christian society required to make from within itself provision for its government and instruction, and to have such an organisation conferred upon it as would help to keep Christianity alive within, even though the first founder should return no more. How was this done? Modern appliances for the production of educated teachers are the growth of ages, and did not then exist : men sufficiently trained to enter at once on the work of the ministry were then rarely to be found. There was no help for it in the circumstances, but that the most intelligent members of each Christian society should be taken and set over those who were not so far advanced in religious knowledge as themselves. The elders were therefore, without exception, taken out of the local congregation. The duties were, however, too onerous to be discharged by a single individual ; and, even if they were not, churches were in general too poor to remunerate him for his whole

X There was the Ministry of gifts in every cov^{nt}. At first there was no stated Ministry of the word.

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time. To obviate this difficulty, a number were chosen, and these divided the duties among them. The division of labour lightened the duty of each, and secured that the whole work should be better done. The result of every man doing what he could do best, was that each church enjoyed the advantage of the best teaching that its membership could afford : that if by the calls of business, or by sickness, or by death, the most prominent elder was called away, there were others in training fit to take his place and instruct the people ; and that in no case, short of some calamity that would deprive them of all their eldership at a stroke, could any church be left entirely without government and guidance. Certainly no better system could have been adopted for the instruction of a society of poor people, knowing a little Christianity, and anxious to know more, but who, in their circumstances could not enjoy permanently the advantage of trained teachers.¹ X

It is manifest from the circumstances of the apostolic age, that few, if any, of the elders of the local churches could have been educated men. Of the apostles themselves, perhaps Paul alone was entitled to be so regarded ; but the personal

¹It is interesting to notice how John Knox, at an early stage of the Scottish Reformation, devised a similar expedient for instructing the people when ministers of the gospel could not be had :—"As there were no ministers among them, they continued for some time to be deprived of the dispensation of the sacraments ; but certain intelligent and pious men of their number were chosen to read the Scriptures, exhort, and offer up prayers in their assemblies."—McCrie's Life of Knox, Period v.

*As we all were not poor & illiterate.
There were educated presbyters.
Even the Apostles were not illiterate.*

instructions of the Lord during his earthly life, and the possession of supernatural powers prepared the others for their work. The elders of the first churches, however, did not possess these advantages. It was the first converts, the most intelligent and experienced Christians of the congregation, who were appointed to teach the others, and that, in some instances, as in the case of Acts xiv. 23, when they themselves had been but a short time under Christian instruction. The first pastors of the churches were all untrained men, but this did not disqualify them from office, nor, when appointed, from doing all that pastors and bishops ought to do. This is in accordance with the well-known statement of Clement of Rome, in which, referring to the apostles, he says: "Thus preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits [of their labours], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe."¹ This statement is valuable, not only as shewing the material from which the office-bearers were taken, but as proving that in the time of Clement—the oldest uninspired Christian writer—all the local office-bearers were included in two classes, the bishops and deacons.

¹First Epistle to the Corinthians. Chap. xlii.

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It is a matter of history that the state of things, which entrusted the spiritual oversight of the congregation to a number of elders of equal rank and authority, did not last for any considerable time. The eldership of each congregation had to meet for counsel, and must have a president or chairman in their meetings. So soon as one of the elders, whether from age, talent, or the "double honour" to which superior labour is entitled, came to be recognized as permanent president in meetings of his brethren, it was impossible to keep the idea from spreading that the president was of a rank superior to the other elders. A difference in rank and in duty requires, of course, a difference in name in order to express it. The name *bishop*, originally common to all, became the appropriated designation of that presbyter who was the stated president at meetings of the eldership; and the name *elder* became limited to those over whom he presided. So early as the end of the second century, the notion had become common that the bishop was superior to the presbyter. It is these facts which justify the statement of Ambrose, who makes it the main distinction of the bishop even in the fourth century, that he was "*first among the presbyters.*"¹ The notion of a difference in rank led gradu-

¹"Uterque enim sacerdos est, sed episcopus primus est; ut omnise episcopus presbyter sit, non tamen omnis presbyter episcopus; hic enim episcopus est, qui inter presbyteros primus est."—Comment, in 1 Tim. iii. 8.

ally to a difference in duty, and it came to be believed that the other elders were officially inferior to him, and that various functions, which from ancient times they had discharged by right of office, were now performed by his delegation and authority. When the bishop or presiding presbyter, in the third and fourth centuries, assigned a congregation or section of the original church to each of his presbyters, which he could the more easily do, as the right of teaching belonged to all of them, he became at once a full-blown prelate. The parish priest, with his bishop over him, is the ecclesiastical descendant of the ancient elder; but the descendant is no more like his ecclesiastical ancestor than the sacrifice of the mass, accompanied with sound of bell and smoke of incense, is like that simple ordinance which Christ instituted in the upper room on the night of his betrayal. The *seniores plebis*, with whom Cyprian and the third century bishops consulted, and in whom our Presbyterian fathers delighted to trace the relics of the ruling elder,¹ were in reality wise and influential Christians, laymen, not clergy, who, at a time when Judaizing tendencies were abroad, and when the bishop, the presbyters, and the deacons were supposed to correspond to the high priest, the priests and the

¹Gillespie's *Assertion*, chap. x.; *Vindication of Presbyterian Government*, p. 45; *Divine right of Church Government*, p. 169.

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Levites of the old dispensation were sometimes taken into counsel by the bishops, after the fashion that Moses was accustomed to consult with the elders of Israel. In short, the superiority of the bishop to the presbyter, which, however, unauthorised by the New Testament, had grown into fact in the third century, was the first step to that hierarchical system which finally culminated in the Papacy. If the presbyters of a city required to be governed by a bishop, the bishops of a province equally needed an archbishop, archbishops needed a patriarch, and the patriarchs needed a pope.

At the Reformation, when men awoke from the long sleep of the Middle Ages to the consciousness of life, there was a desire to return to apostolic precedent, and an attempt was made to restore the eldership to the Christian congregation. Among the Waldenses, the institution had existed from time immemorial: Huss and the Bohemian churches followed in the fifteenth century; and afterwards, Geneva, France and Scotland. In each city or church there was instituted a board of elders, whose duty it was to assist ministers in the government of the church. The early Independents, no less than the Presbyterians, revived the eldership;¹ but among the latter only does it still remain. Still there has been a failure on all sides alike to reproduce the apostolic elders

¹See Robinson's *Just and Necessary Apology*, ch. iv.; *Broadmead Records*, pp. 43, 51, 60, 185; Owen's *Gospel Church*, ch. vii.

and to put all members of the Presbytery on that footing of official equality in which they stood in the New Testament age. The modern elder sits in the congregational presbytery, assists in the government of the society, and is represented in the superior courts ; but he does not preach and ordain and administer the sacraments. The consequence is that a very wide difference exists between the first elder of the congregation and the others ; the former rules and teaches ; the latter rules, but does not venture to speak from the pulpit, to lay on hands, to baptize, or to break bread. This difference in duty is so marked as to demand a difference in name, so that in our ordinary discourse the teaching elder is known as *the minister*, and the others, to the exclusion of the minister, are usually designated *the elders*.

The apostolic eldership is thus the difficulty of every existing system of church government. The difficulty of prelacy is, that every one of these primitive elders in the congregation was a bishop. The difficulty of Independency is, that there was a plurality of pastors in every church. The difficulty of Presbytery is, that the majority of the elders are forbidden to do¹ what it is admitted the minister or first elder

¹“Unto the pastors *only* appertains the administration of the sacraments, in like manner as the administration of the Word.”—*Second Book of Discipline*, ch. iv. “Every minister of the Word is to be ordained by imposition of hands and prayer, with fasting, by those *preaching presbyters* to whom it doth belong.”—*Westminster Form*

has a perfect right to do in the congregation, and what was in the apostolic age competent to every elder. The contrariety between the position of the elder in ancient times, and that of his modern namesake, is so marked that various attempts have been made, with more or less success, to account for and to justify it, and in this way has arisen what has been called THEORIES OF THE ELDERSHIP.

THE FIRST THEORY.

The FIRST and oldest of these theories admits that there is a broad official distinction between the minister and ruling elder, and claims for it direct Scriptural authority. It asserts that the New Testament recognises one order only, but adds, that in this order there are two degrees or classes, the pastoral elder, whose office is to teach and to rule, and the ruling elder, whose office is to rule, but not to preach the Gospel, nor to administer baptism and the supper, nor to ordain office-bearers. In support of this official distinction between the first elders, it is usual to claim the authority of 1 Tim. v. 17—"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour especially they who labour in word

of Church Government. "Baptism and the Supper of the Lord; neither of which may be dispensed by any but by a minister of the Word lawfully ordained."—West. Confession, ch. xxvii. 4. "In short the elder is to speak nothing to the church from the pulpit."—*Pardean* i. 7, 9.

and doctrine"—from which it is evident, as every candid man must admit, that there were some of the apostolic elders who ruled, and yet did not labour in word and doctrine. This theory is supported by the great names of Calvin and Gillespie, as well as by many other Presbyterian writers.

But to this view of the case there are very serious objections which we cannot afford to overlook. 1. The first of these is that there is no passage in Scripture except one, that even seems to indicate any distinction between teaching and ruling elders; if such a distinction really existed, it is strange that it crops up in no part of the New Testament except this solitary passage. Some indeed quote Rom. xii. 8—"He that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence: he that sheweth mercy with cheerfulness"—and I Cor. xii. 28—"And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that, miracles, then gifts [of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues]"—but these passages imply merely that there were some who exercised government in the church—a fact common to all the theories, and denied by nobody; but they do not touch the point in question—they do not shew that there were in the church men who had authority to rule, but no authority to teach. 2. It is not by any means certain

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Causes of the Pastor's Elevation.

that in the passage cited, the apostle meant to sanction any official distinction among the elders. His words prove indeed that some took part in one department of the work only, as a division of labour necessarily required, but there is nothing in the language used to indicate that an elder had no right to take part in any other department of the work if he pleased. His words rather seem to imply that if an elder wrought in both departments of the work, and did well in both, he was specially deserving of double honour.¹

3. To limit one class of elders to government, and to deny their right to give public instruction, is inconsistent with the qualification, "apt to teach." Why are all, without exception, required to be fit to teach, or "skilled in teaching," if the great majority are, by virtue of their office, forbidden to teach from the moment that they are appointed? 4. The notion that some elders are authorised to rule, but forbidden to preach, is inconsistent with the well-established fact that bishop and presbyter are different names for the same office-bearer. * All admit that the apostolic bishop had a right to preach, to administer the sacraments, and to ordain—no in-

¹Dr. Campbell (*Theory*, p. 31) quotes Vitringa as taking this view: "Paul, therefore, does not in this place refuse to any presbyters the right of teaching. He merely supposes that some do not teach. He wishes, however, that all should teach; nay, he stimulates and exhorts all to do so, when he declares those who teach specially worthy of double honour." The quotation is taken from B. II. Ch. iii. Ed. of 1696, p. 493.

x not the same.

stance is known to the contrary ; but if elder and bishop be identical, the elder must have an equal right. 5. Duties are assigned to elders, without the slightest intimation that these duties were intended for one class and not for the other.

X When Paul commands the elders of Ephesus to "feed the church of God," he never intimates that there was any excep-

X "feed the flock of God," does he hint that some of the elders were forbidden to do such a thing? Why does he press this duty on all elders, if in case of some of them it was forbidden to do it? Why does he exhort all, if he does not wish all to take his advice? Let any man consider how this injunction, addressed to all elders, can be carried out by all, if one class of them is interdicted from teaching or preaching. In what other way was it possible for an elder

XX to feed the flock? 6. Had any such official distinction existed in the apostolic age, it would have required a distinct nomenclature to express it in order to prevent confusion.

XX+ When the president of the congregational presbytery came towards the end of the second century to have duties different from those of his colleagues, the new distinction required a new name ; he was called the "bishop" and they were called "presbyters." The obvious distinction that exists in

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the duties of the members of the Session of a Presbyterian congregation, requires that one shall be called the minister and the others the elders. But those charged with the oversight of a local church in the apostolic age were called indiscriminately elders, pastors, bishops, teachers, presbyters and ministers. We infer, therefore, that as there was no distinction in the duties. If under one general name we class individuals who have entirely different duties to perform, the penalty of such impropriety is that no man can know from our language when we mean the one class and when we mean the other. Presbyterian writers have often had to complain of the absurd epithet, Lay elder,¹ yet by making two classes of elders we have given occasion for some such name. In order to be understood, we are ourselves obliged for distinction sake to call the officer in question the *ruling* elder; but the term is not very precise, inasmuch as the minister is a ruling elder also. 7. Lastly, there is the general consideration alluded to already, that in the apostolic

F. Collier

¹ "Some reproachfully, and others ignorantly, call them lay elders." Gillespie, *Assertion*, Part I, Ch. i. "The name of lay elder was affixed to this officer by way of reproach and scorn."—*Vindication of the Pres. Gov.*, p. 30. "Presbyterians wholly repudiate the title 'lay elders,' which is sometimes most improperly applied to the officers in question."—Crawford's *Presbyterianism Defended*, App. B.

xxx / in only two passages is a presbyter
said to teach. The presbyter is
addressed as minister.

age it is to those who governed that the work of instruction is also committed ; it was those who "ruled over" the members, that "spoke to them the word of God," and watched for their souls ;" it was the same persons who were "over them in the Lord," that "laboured among them" and "admonished" them. For these reasons we conclude that, although as a matter of fact some of the apostolic elders did not teach, nevertheless the Apostle did not mean to draw any official distinction between two different classes in the one order.¹

This theory accounts in some degree for the limitations of duty imposed by our standards on the ruling elder ; for there can be no doubt that most of those who drew them up had the notion, derived most probably from Calvin, that the Scripture makes some sort of official distinction between two classes of elders. But to us it seems clear that the whole theory rests on a misconception of the force of the passage, 1 Tim. v. 17, and therefore cannot be any real justification for the difference that actually exists between the ruling elder and the minister.

THE SECOND THEORY.

The SECOND theory, designed to account for and to justify the present position of the elder, asserts that the modern

¹See this whole matter discussed, and, as I think, proved conclusively in Vitringa, *De Syn.* ii. 2 an¹ 3.

ruling elder is not, and is not designed to be, the elder of the New Testament, and asserts that it is a sort of misnomer to call him by the name ; he is a mere layman, chosen to represent the laity in church courts, and has no other duties than simply to assist ministers in governing the church. It asserts that, "Ruling elders are *properly the representatives of the people*, chosen by them for the purpose of exercising government and discipline, in conjunction with pastors or ministers."¹ This theory has lately been put forward in this country by Principal Campbell of Aberdeen, who quotes in its favour the respectable names of Wodrow, the historian, Dr. George Campbell, of Aberdeen, and Dr. Hill, of St. Andrews. How many human authorities can be quoted in support of an opinion, the truth of which must stand or fall by the Word of God, is a matter of very minor consequence indeed ; it may be remarked, however, that although Wodrow's leanings are to this opinion, he admits that he "never *rightly digested anything* upon this head," and as he is not therefore in a position to give anything but first thoughts, it is scarcely fair to appeal to him as an authority on the subject.² On this theory we take leave to remark :

¹American "Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church," chapter v.

²Wodrow Correspondence, vol. i. Letter 59.

1. It takes from the elder all spiritual duties whatever. He may visit and pray with the sick, or conduct a prayer-meeting, or teach in a Sabbath school, but he does so, not as a church officer, but only as a private Christian. All that devolves on him is to express the mind of the people in Presbytery, Synod or Assembly. There is no necessity for such a man being "apt to teach;" teaching is not his business. It would be out of place for an apostle to tell such an elder to "feed the flock;" with feeding the flock he has nothing to do. Such a man is not made "an overseer by the Holy Ghost;" he is merely chosen by the people to represent the people. Church rulers in the apostolic age "spoke the Word of God," laboured among the people, "admonished them," and "watched for souls;" but all that this man has to do is to give expression to the popular mind, and counsel pastors in the management of church affairs. See the awkward position in which this places any man chosen to the office. He is called by the name "elder," but finds from Scripture that the elder has duties which it is not his business to perform as a mere representative of the people: he finds from the Scripture that an elder must be "apt to teach," but he requires no such qualification—instead of giving instructions, it would be more becoming in him to take instruction from those whom it is his office to

x Κοινωνοὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν
 τὴν ἐκκλησίαν

represent ; he is called upon to rule, and yet expected by those who know the Scriptures, to do something more than rule ; he is authorized by the Bible to "feed the flock," and yet chosen by the people to do something very different. If a man is chosen merely to represent the people, it is absurd to give him any other name than that of a representative of the people. He has no right to the name of elder.

2. On this theory, he is nothing but a layman. This is admitted by its advocates. The distinction between clergy and laity is not made in the Scriptures ; the only distinction there, is that between the office-bearers of the church and the private members. Still the name is convenient, in order to express the difference between the official and non-official members of the Christian society. The representative of the laity is, of course, only a mere layman. The original constitution of the church gives him no standing ground as a church-officer. But elders are not laymen, the only ground for calling them by the name is that most of them are engaged in secular pursuits ; but if following a trade were enough to disqualify for a clergyman, Peter and Paul might have difficulty in sustaining their claims. The elder is, by divine institution, an office-bearer in the church, ordained to office, duly appointed to the discharge of spiritual functions, and in so doing, acting by authority of the Holy Spirit ; a

If ~~represent~~ layman means one who is not a member of the flock, the elder is a layman

position that it might be difficult to substantiate on behalf of some who pass for clerics. The Scriptural elder is not a layman ; the eldership is as much a spiritual function as the apostleship itself.

3. If the theory be true, there is no necessity for ordination. Every one recognizes the propriety of a spiritual functionary being set apart to office by fasting, prayer and laying on of hands ; but there would be no more propriety in ordaining a layman chosen to represent laymen in church courts, than there would be in ordaining a Member of Parliament, a State Senator, or a Town Councillor.

4. If the elder is properly the representative of the people, it is quite plain that he cannot, and ought not to be, a permanent officer. He must constantly return to the congregation to have his authority renewed ; for he who represents the popular sentiment to-day, may not do it next year. Quite in consistency with this theory is the regulation of the American General Assembly of 1872, to the effect that elders may be chosen in churches for stated times, at the end of which they either go out of office entirely, or go back to the people for re-election. This is reverting to the crude and imperfect form of the Presbyterianism presented in the *First Book of Discipline*, which made the election of elders

A man may be ordained to
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annual,¹ and would open a door for the popular demand for a more adequate popular representation. There is, in fact, no end to the inconvenient consequences of a false theory.

5. A functionary, chosen only to represent the people in church courts, is unknown to the New Testament. In the divine charter of our constitution he has neither standing nor name. No such duty is ever assigned in Scripture to the apostolic elder ; all he had to do was to perform the duties of governing and teaching the church in conformity to the rules of the Divine Word, and as seemed best for the edification of the members, without troubling himself about representing any one. He represented the opinion of the people exactly as a bishop, pastor or apostle did, but no farther ; his business was much more to educate and guide popular opinion than to give it voice. But a man merely chosen to represent the congregation in the governing body, who or what is he ? Scripture knows no such man. It mentions bishops and deacons, but never representative rulers. It assigns them no duties ; it prescribes for them no qualifications ; it gives them no name. Principal Campbell calls this officer the "lay ruler," the "lay councillor," the "lay assessor in church government ;" a very proper

¹See Chap. vii.

name for the functionary whom he describes, but neither office nor name is to be found in the Bible.

6. The introduction into the church constitution of an official who can plead no warrant for his office from the Scripture, opens a wide door for the creation of other offices, as expediency may suggest or human wisdom determine. It is hard to see on what principle, if we admit a "lay councillor," we could object to an acolyth. If human wisdom is at liberty to introduce a "lay assessor," on what principle could we object to the "Court of Arches" being introduced into our ecclesiastical system? And where is all this to end? Could any principle be devised more certain to turn a divine system into a human? Is not Popery the result of the fact, that man for ages has been always attempting to improve upon the Divine? Is not the aggregate of these so-called improvements the incubus now pressing upon Christendom?

7. The passages quoted in favour of a "lay assessor" in church government are Acts xv. 23—"And they wrote *letters* by them after this manner; The apostles and elders ~~and~~ brethren *send* greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia"—and xi. 12 "And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting.

*See R. V. - these elders are the brethren
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Moreover, these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house"—passages which of themselves indicate how little foundation the theory has in the Bible. It is evident that in the apostolic council, the elders did not represent "the brethren," for the brethren were themselves present. The private members were not represented on the occasion, for they were present in mass. That they were present at the deliberations, and concurred in the finding, is all that the record indicates¹; it is not in evidence that they sat as constituent members of the council. But if they did, this proves that the laity possess the right of taking part as a body in ecclesiastical deliberations; it supplies no reason for granting them a bare representation. On the other hand, if the laity were present only as auditors, and if the deliberations of the apostles and elders were conducted in their hearing, which we are persuaded was the case, why should any one claim for them a higher privilege now? We may admit that "leading men among the brethren" were sent to carry the apostolic letter to Antioch, and that certain brethren accompanied Peter when he went from Joppa to Cesarea to preach the gospel to Cornelius; but how either fact proves

¹The passage, Acts 15, 23, is quoted as shewing that the "brethren joined in the apostolic letter. There is no evidence of this outside the English version. The word "and" is not found in the Codex Vaticanus¹ the Alexandrian Codex, and three other of the most ancient manuscripts, so that the true reading is "The Apostles and elders—brethren," or as given in Dean Alford's revision, "The Apostles and brethren, which are elders."

that the laity are entitled to have themselves represented by laymen in church courts, we confess that it is beyond our power to see. It is in vain to appeal to Rom. xii. 8—"Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that teacheth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness"—and 1 Cor. xii. 28—for as has been shewn, all stated within these passages squares with either theory. From these considerations it is manifest that the idea of a "lay councillor," who is not an elder, taking part with elders in the government of the church is an idea entirely foreign to the Scriptures.

8. The New Testament elder is not the representative of the people. The theory of civil government existing in Britain and America is based on a system of popular representation, and nothing is more natural than for people to imagine that some such idea ought to be carried out in the government of the church. If the constitution of the church were a mere human construction, which could be altered or repaired at pleasure, no doubt we could have representation, or anything else we pleased. But if the church is a society, constituted on certain principles that are prescribed by its Founder, what we have to do is not to set about improving these principles, but to ascertain what they are, and to adapt

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ourselves to them as best we can. In studying the constitution of the New Testament church, we have not to devise what ought to be, but to study what is. In that constitution there is no doubt a virtual representation, in so far as the administrative authority is in the hands of a few who are chosen by the many; but there is no representation in the sense that bishop or deacon, or any body, is appointed to express the popular opinion. The plain truth is that no office-bearer in the church has a right to do anything except what by the Divine Constitution, contained in the written charter, which is the Word of God, it can be shewn that he is authorised to do. It is written there that the elder is to rule and to teach in the church; it is not written there that he is to represent the people. The people choose him, not to represent them, but to discharge the duties which God appoints him to do. In the exercise of the office to which he is appointed under the Divine charter of the Christian society, he sits in the assemblies of his brethren, and does all that is necessary in order to enable him to govern; but he does that by right of office, not in consequence of representing any one. He is not to make himself "a lord over God's heritage," but to govern in accordance with the Word of God, and to act as is best for the spiritual good of the people; but to express the opinions of the multitude, or to

X *Write correct. He must
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obey their instructions in the discharge of the obligations that God lays upon him, he has no authority whatever. Such a notion would degrade the apostolic elder to the level of a church-warden.

This theory is suggested by the undeniable fact of the difference between the New Testament elder and his modern namesake ; but it assumes that the modern functionary does all that he ought to do, and it attempts to find for him as such a position in the New Testament. It looks at the Constitution of the Apostolic Church through the mist of the present order of things ; from what now exists, it argues as to what was in the New Testament age ; and because many persons called elders now go to the presbytery or synod merely to represent the people, and imagine that in doing so they are fulfilling all their functions, this theory goes to Scripture, and vainly endeavours to find authority for such a notion in the apostolic age.

THE THIRD THEORY.

The THIRD, and as we believe the only true theory, does not attempt to justify the difference between the modern elder and his ancient prototype ; it accounts for the difference, and throws out suggestions for its reduction, if not for

its removal. Calvin would say that the ruling elder is a true copy of the apostolic original. Principal Campbell and our American friends would say, he is not, and does not profess to be a copy ; he is only a "lay assessor," or something of that sort. We say, he is intended for a copy, but is manifestly an incomplete copy, requiring to be retouched in order to become like the original.

The difference in question is mainly owing to three things : a change of circumstances, a popular sentiment, and an ecclesiastical enactment. The first of these is inevitable, the second erroneous, and the third unnecessary ; but all have operated in one direction, to make a difference between the existing elder and the elder of the apostolic age.

The entire change of circumstances under which the Reformed Churches found themselves, when they had parted company with Rome, prevented the possibility of a return to the exact state of things which prevailed in the first century. This change of circumstances was in some degree produced by the total withdrawal of those supernatural gifts which the Apostles would confer upon their converts, and which enabled those on which they were conferred to assume the position of teachers in case they were called thereto, as well as by that higher average intelligence

among church members in the sixteenth century, which was the natural effect of the rise of the universities, the discovery of the art of printing,] the circulation of books, the diffusion of knowledge, and the stimulus given to the popular mind by such a religious revolution as the Reformation itself. To meet this higher state of intelligence, it became necessary to provide the populace with instructions of a higher type. It was found to be essential to the edification of the people that each congregation should have among its elders at least one man, who, by education, training, and a life devoted to the study of the Scriptures, should be qualified as a public instructor ; and as it could not be reasonably expected that any man would undertake the labour and expense of passing through this long course of training without the assurance that, when it was finished, the congregation which he taught should charge itself with his entire support, this resulted in a state of things entirely different from what existed in the apostolic age. The one elder who, by the force of circumstances, is obliged to pass through a process of preparation to fit himself for his work, finds himself in a position different from the other elders ; he has been subjected to a long course of intellectual and moral training ; he adopts the pastoral work as the business and pleasure of his life ; he is better able to make the adminis-

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tration of ordinances profitable to the people than any untrained man can be. The consequence is, that the whole labour of giving public instruction is by general consent developed upon him, and as a matter of course the remuneration is in proportion, and by way of distinction he is designated the *minister* or *pastor*. The other elders, by right of office, are his equals, but never having received his training, and therefore not being so well qualified for the work of public instruction, devolve that duty wholly on the minister, because they are of opinion that from making instruction the work of his life, he is best qualified to edify the church; and each of them, in proportion to the grace given him, devotes what time he can withdraw conveniently from secular avocations to assist the trained elder or minister, owing to training, labour, and the "double honour" which labour implies, has risen above it. The educated elder undertakes the whole work, and usually receives the whole remuneration. There is not now the same necessity for ordinary elders to preach, because each congregation now commands the service of a trained elder, who usually can from his training preach better and with more acceptance. It is not therefore so necessary for them to improve their gift for public instruction, because the supply of ordinances can never devolve upon them now except by the rarest

chance, and that only for a time ; and the stated preacher and instructor of the congregation is not selected out of their number. They, in consequence, turn to the other department of the work, and give their attention to the government of the society, a sphere in which each of them can make himself useful. Owing to a change of circumstances, which can no more be altered than the earth can be stopped in its orbit, the concentration of training, of labour, and of remuneration upon one of the elders has elevated him above his colleagues, and compelled them to give their main strength to the department of ruling the church. This is the chief cause of the difference that appears to exist between the minister and elder, which difference, when the cause of it is thoroughly understood, is in no way discreditable to either.

Popular prejudice is another obstacle in the way of the ordinary elder doing all that the apostolic elder did, and that the minister still continues to do. The popular sentiment would now be offended if one of the ruling elders should venture to speak from the pulpit, or to lay on hands, or to preside at the administration of the Lord's Supper. The strange thing is, that there is no feeling as if a sacred spot was desecrated when the pulpit is taken by a probationer, who is not a church-officer of any grade, but merely a lay-

These changes must have been foreseen.

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man on trial for the ministry. A layman, therefore, may preach, but if it were known that a layman administered baptism, the sensitiveness of the Christian community would receive another shock ; though the fact, that while the apostle Paul preached constantly himself, he devolved the duty of baptizing for the most part on others, proves that the administration of sacraments, however important, was little in his estimation compared with the proclamation of the tidings of salvation.¹ The popular prejudice against ordination and the administration of the sacraments, by any except a minister, arises partly from the fact that the people have rarely seen such acts performed by any others, and partly from a vague notion, that in such rites there is a mysterious undeniable something inherent, and that there is a sacerdotal character attached to the minister which does not belong to the ordinary elder. But whatever its origin, the prejudice rests on no scriptural or rational basis whatever. The elder is in everything, except in training and the consequences of training, the very same as a minister. The only thing that makes it proper for a minister rather than an elder to preach and to administer the sacraments, is, that owing to his education and professional studies, he is

not relevant

11Cor. i. 14 ; ix 16.

better able to make these ordinances edifying to the congregation.

Ecclesiastical enactment lends its influence to perpetuate the difference. The ruling elder is interdicted from speaking to the people from the pulpit, from laying on hands in ordination, and from administering baptism and the Lord's Supper.¹ The language of the Westminster Confession, that neither baptism nor the Lord's Supper "may be dispensed by any but a minister of the Word lawfully ordained," is perhaps capable of an interpretation in harmony with our opinions, and one which would not denude the elder of his rights as an apostolic officer; but it is quite certain that the design of its authors was different, and that they intended to exclude the ruling elder, if indeed they acknowledged such an officer,² from the right of administering the sacraments. The reason of the regulation was praiseworthy enough; it could not have been their design to elevate the ministry at the expense of the eldership: it was rather that they, or at least the majority of them did not

¹See *Pardovan* I. vii. 1 and 9; *Westminster form of Government, Doctrine of Ordination*, 4; and *Confession of Faith*, xxvii. 4.

²Notice how they speak of him so guardedly in the chapter, "Other Church Governors," in *Form of Government*. Gillespie proposed in the Assembly to call these Governors "ruling elders," but the motion did not carry.

rightly understand the true position and functions of the Christian eldership ; they desired to make the administration of all the ordinances as profitable to the congregation as it was possible to do ; and perhaps they were not entirely free themselves from the prejudice that supposes the minister to be invested to some extent with a priestly character—a relic of Romish sentiment which has not even yet died entirely out of the Reformed churches.

The reasons now stated account sufficiently for the double fact that the modern elders do not, to the full extent, exercise the rights possessed by those of the apostolic age, and that between the first elder or minister, and his colleagues in the eldership, there is a greater difference now than existed in the lifetime of the apostles. To remove this difference to some extent is possible, and so far as it is possible it ought to be removed. The ecclesiastical enactment most certainly ought never to have been made. It is an instance of the over-legislation, prompted by the best intentions, which usually does not compensate by its advantages for the inconvenience which it occasions. The design was good, namely, to keep unqualified persons from administering the most important ordinances of religion, but the effect in practice is to curtail by statute the rights and functions of an office-bearer of the church, who has his position and duties

assigned to him in the Word of God. Good might result if this ecclesiastical enactment were allowed to drop into disuse meanwhile ; the expediency of omitting it must come up for consideration when the revision of our standards can be attempted with advantage. No possible harm could result from allowing a ruling elder to join in the act of ordination ; nay, it would remove a glaring anomaly in our practice, namely, our saying that "ordination is the act of a *presbytery*," and then refusing to allow one-half of the members of the presbytery to perform the act which belongs to them all. It is worse than an anomaly that the elders of a congregation are not permitted to lay on hands in ordaining a brother to act along with them in the same session or congregational presbytery.¹ No harm can result when the ruling elder executes his commission to "feed the church," by teaching the young in the Sabbath-school, conducting the prayer-meeting, preaching to the people of his district, or even in the public congregation, when the services of a minister cannot be obtained. The apostles of error teach over the coun-

¹Voetius says, "Nullo Scripturæ apice probabitur, nefas esse, si seniores in confirmatione ministri una manus imponant"—"It cannot be proved by a single fragment of Scripture that it is wrong if elders, in the ordination of a minister, should join in the imposition of hands."—*Polit. Eccles.*

Dr. Miller thought it the plainest dictate of common sense that elders should be ordained in the congregation with the laying on of "the hands of the Parochial Presbytery." See *Southern Presbyterian Review* for January, 1861, page 805.

He does feed the church by
teaching, for that is what
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try, and preach without stint or limit ; why muzzle those who know the truth, and in whose character and doctrinal soundness we have confidence, if it be found that they have time and inclination to devote themselves in some degree to that department of spiritual work? We need not be the least afraid of them preaching too much ; the fact is, that the more they preach, it is all the better. Let any one consider what the local preacher and class-leader has done for Methodism, and say whether it would not be an advantage if every Presbyterian elder would act as a preacher and guide to the people in his own district. As to the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, we ought to divest ourselves of the last relic of that old sacramental theory, that the ordinances lose all their influence if not dispensed by the hands of a minister, and admit the fact, that there is no reason why they should be administered by the pastoral elder rather than the ruling elder, except that the former is usually best qualified, when administering the rite, to edify the people at the same time. What mystery is there about these symbolic institutions, that we should believe them to be more efficacious when administered by one of the elders rather than by another? Is such a notion consistent with our own doctrine, that "the sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them or *in him that doth ad-*

minister them ?” Are we to perpetuate the absurdity that no spiritual good is conveyed by a sacrament, except it is dispensed by the one among the elders who is better educated than his brethren? Education certainly has its advantages; but we make too much of education if we suppose that the want of it in a church-officer deprives of its validity the ordinance of Christ.

Besides, such legislation was unnecessary even for the object which its authors had in view. Had matters been let alone, the practice of the apostolic age, in regard to the eldership, would have become general without any special enactment; the elders endowed with the best gifts for preaching would have preached, and those best able to rule would have ruled, and some would have done both; and thus the church would have enjoyed the best gifts of all its officers, without the necessity of any legislative restriction whatever. Such a division of labour is always more acceptable when it arises from choice or custom, than when it is enforced by law. Of the 658 gentlemen who sit in the Lower House of Parliament, it may be a fact that not more than one hundred ever attempt to address the House under any circumstances; but nobody would like to see an act passed restricting the speakers in the House of Commons to a hundred, even though it might be alleged on its behalf that it would

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save the members from the risk of having to listen to a very poor orator occasionally. So a member of the eldership ought not to have his tongue tied by legislation. It should be left to his own good sense when to speak and when to be silent. Even if he were sometimes to speak weakly and out of season, greater calamities might happen.

Unnecessary regulations may be repealed or allowed to become obsolete ; even popular prejudice may give way to a higher intelligence ; but an entire change of circumstances, produced by the moral and intellectual growth of human society, cannot be so lightly set aside. So far as the difference between the pastoral and ruling elders depends on this, it cannot be removed. We find ourselves in a position entirely different from that of Christians in the apostolic age. We cannot recover the supernatural gifts that abounded in the first century, nor go back to the general ignorance that existed when there was not a printed book in the world, and no church member possessed a perfect copy of the Holy Scriptures. The shadow will not go back ten degrees on the dial even if we wished it ; the world moves on, and we must move along as the world moves. No church can now dispense with the services of at least one trained elder, and amid the growing intelligence of our times it should not think of doing so. If every elder could be trained, and a

Was this matter provided for?

number engaged in the service of every congregation, it would do much to solve the difficulty ; but this of course is impossible of attainment in ordinary circumstances. In much the greatest number of instances, the majority of elders in the congregation will always consist of untrained men. Here then is a disparity between the trained elder and the others which it is impossible to remove ; a disparity in gifts and attainments leads to disparity in labour and remuneration, so that if all ecclesiastical enactments were swept away to-morrow, the obvious disparity in training, in labour, and in honour, would not be sensibly diminished. Our only comfort in the case supposed would be, that in the apostolic age a similar disparity existed, though not perhaps to the same degree. Even then some were worthy of honour, and others of double honour.

We conclude with one or two practical suggestions. So far as the existing state of affairs requires a remedy, it lies not in the depression of the minister, but in the elevation of the other elders. Holy Scripture does not limit any church to any particular number of elders ; its aim should be to include in its office-bearers as many as possible of its members who possess the scriptural qualifications, and as few as possible of those who do not. Suitable gifts should be

more carefully sought after. The church has no right to encroach upon the time that a man requires for his secular affairs, except it is prepared to reimburse him for his loss and give him the wages that his work deserves ; in every instance where this is not done, the amount of time and trouble that a man gives to the duties of the office must be left to himself to decide. Many do give it very considerable time, and their disinterested efforts to advance the glory of God and the good of His church are valuable beyond all price. They know well that whatever duties and privileges may be assigned it in theory, the office can rise in public estimation only by hard, honest, faithful work on the part of those who fill it. Let every elder, however humble his position or his gifts, thus labour in proportion to the grace that is given him of God ; and if the people from any cause withhold remuneration, they are all the more bound to repay with gratitude, respect, and love, the labours of those who, by Divine appointment, are rulers and teachers in the House of God—the UNTRAINED PASTORS OF THE CHURCH.

THOMAS WITHEROW.

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