

THE SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW.

VOL. XV.—NO. 3.

JANUARY, MDCCCLXIII.

ARTICLE I.

ON THE NATURE AND USES OF ART.

By the intelligent people, and even by many highly cultivated men, Fine Art is looked upon as essentially a mere pleasant illusion—as some thing entirely unreal and unsubstantial, or else as only a shadowy and imperfect imitation of nature. In its effects upon the mind, its uses in a scheme of human culture, it is looked upon as at best of doubtful import; as at best a pleasant recreation and relaxation from the sterner duties of conflict with nature; an amusement of an essentially low order; a purely sensuous enjoyment, which, though it may relax and rest our strength, can not in any sense be said to exercise and cultivate our higher faculties; but on the contrary, is almost certain to dissipate our strength, to paralyze our energies, to relax and effeminate our whole nature; or, still worse, to cultivate and strengthen the senses at the expense of the intellect, and thus degrade and brutify the nature. Plausibility is given to this view of art, by reference to the present condition of southern nations which have excelled in art, especially the Greeks and Italians. It would carry us too far

VOL. XV., NO. III.—40

ARTICLE IV.

REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE CHURCH.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE SYNOD OF VIRGINIA, DURING ITS SESSIONS IN STAUNTON, OCTOBER, 1862, BY THE REV. A. W. MILLER, PETERSBURG, VA.

The present may be considered a critical period in the history of the Church. Horrid war has rolled its tide of desolation into her midst, extinguished many bright lights, and greatly crippled her resources. Some have yielded to the temptations of an evil time, and brought reproach upon the Christian name. An extraordinary providence addresses to her an extraordinary call to duty. Straited in herself the Church may be, but straitened in her Divine Head she never can be. The resources of Jehovah are pledged to sustain her; the influences of the Spirit animate her; ministering angels wait upon her; whilst all the wisdom, all the power, all the love of the Holy Trinity are engaged to uphold, preserve, and save her! The Lord in the midst of her is mighty. His kingdom can never be moved; no opposition can shake it; no internal decays ruin it. The spring of it is in Him who liveth for ever and ever, and hath the keys of hell and death. It survives amidst falling thrones and dissolving dynasties. Other kingdoms decline and perish. But their fall, equally with their rise, only contributes to its advancement. It takes no step backward. Its course is ever onward. For it was founded by its omniscient King, not only in full view of all the multiform hostility it would encounter, but with the fixed purpose of overruling and converting all opposition into instrumentalities for its developement, extension, and final triumph. The bruising of the serpent's head follows the bruising of the Saviour's heel. The kingdom of provi-

dence, with its ceaseless changes, its tumults, its revolutions, its wars, has been put in subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, who has made it subservient to His great kingdom of grace, the design and end of all His works. Hence, the course of nature and the providence of God have, in every age, ministered to the Gospel, preserving, defending, opening before it its appointed way, and propelling it in its onward career over all opposition of individuals, kingdoms, states, and the embattled hosts of the mighty powers of darkness.

These thoughts afford encouragement in this day of darkness and rebuke. Zion shall not always be left to mourn. God is still in the midst of her. He will help her, and that right early. Though He chasten, He will not cast off for ever. He has come to quicken His Church—come to rouse her from her lethargy—come to rebuke her pride, wean her from self-confidence, reprove her for her unbelief, her indolence, her supineness, her neglect of duty, and excite her to call more earnestly upon the name of the Lord, that He may return to her, and show her His salvation.

Will she "hear the rod," and lay its lessons to heart? Will she humble herself before the Lord, and repent of her sins? Will she address herself to her work with redoubled diligence and ardor? Or will she, even under the chastening hand of God, sink down into torpor and indifference greater than before, and slumber over her tremendous responsibilities? responsibilities, too, that are greatly increased by the stirring events of our day. The successful termination of the war we are now waging against infidelity and despotism, will place our Southern Church more prominently before the world than ever she has been before. She will stand alone. The eyes of the world will be upon her. Her course will be watched—every act scrutinized by the nations—their sympathies not yet with her, and given only when forced to acknowledge the evident tokens of favor bestowed by her Divine Head, and her signal devotion

to His service. But, above all, the eyes of God are upon her. She has a great work to do. And it becomes her to realize its magnitude, and prepare, in the strength of the Lord, to do it. It is taken for granted that the discipline through which she is now passing will not be lost upon her; that she will come out of the furnace purified; the line that separates her from the world more distinct than ever; her standard higher, her aims loftier, her zeal more steady, her determination more fixed to consecrate to the service of the Master the great resources He has lavished upon her, and to signalize the power of His grace by a devotion more uniform, more intense, more universal, more constant, than has ever marked her history before. Her experience has taught her that sacrifices of one kind or another she must make; and that if she excuses herself from making easy sacrifices for Christ's cause, notwithstanding the priceless benefits He has conferred upon her, His righteous retributive providence will compel His people to make very painful sacrifices for the possession of jeopardized minor benefits, more valued, but infinitely less valuable, than those they had lightly esteemed. She has thus read her sin in her punishment. Shall not this lesson, so painfully learned, abide with her evermore? and the practical teaching of providence produce most blessed results hereafter? As the disasters which, months ago, befell the Confederacy proved the means of arousing it from its inaction, and exciting it to suitable efforts, which Providence graciously owned and blessed, so shall it not be with the Church now? Will she not with renewed assiduity and zeal prosecute her high and holy mission, address herself with greater fidelity to the discharge of her duties, and, in the boldness and confidence of a true faith and love, and in humble dependence upon the promised agency of the Spirit, take a firmer grasp of the appointed instrumentalities, for the ingathering of God's elect, the building up of the body of

Christ, and the complete establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom throughout the earth?

O for a fresh baptism of the Spirit in this, the outset of her new career! Some of those appointed instrumentalities have never been fully employed, not only by our Virginia church, but by the Presbyterian church generally, though again and again brought to her notice, and though appeal after appeal has been made to her to come up to the full measure of her duty. The Church, to this day, continues guilty of culpable remissness in regard to them, and the consequence is comparative leanness and barrenness. The fulness of the Holy Ghost will never be given, so long as the established order of Christ's house is broken down. "No revival of religion can adequately meet the necessities of the Church, which does not restore her ordinances and ministries to their true place and efficiency." And no revival of religion can have any permanent influence upon the Church, which does not tend to produce this blessed result. "It is only in the body of Christ, rightly knit together in all its parts by divine joints and bands, that the Spirit of Christ can do His mightiest works." If the Church will not honor her Divine King, He will not honor her.

I. One great instrumentality appointed by Christ, but neglected by our church, is the office of Evangelist. This is not an extraordinary or a temporary office, but a permanent office in the church, and will exist just as long as there are countries, lands, and settlements, that are destitute of the Gospel. It represents the aggressive feature of the constitution of the church, by which she invades the kingdom of darkness, the dominions of the prince of this world, where Satan reigns supreme. This aggressive feature strongly distinguishes the New Testament Church from the Old. The spirit of the latter was exclusive; that of the former is diffusive. The Jews had no intercourse with any but Jews. They were shut up within themselves. They were

forbidden to go out amongst the nations around them, and endeavor to propagate their religion. For wise reasons, this was made one distinguishing feature of their economy, in order that it might accomplish the design for which God had instituted it. But it is different now. The spirit of the Gospel is not exclusive. Partition walls are broken down. The old economy made the Church stationary, and expected the world to send to it. The new economy makes the Church missionary, and requires it to go into all the world. The character of the one, it is well remarked, was emblematically represented by the bending cherubim on the mercy-seat; that of the other by the mighty angel flying in mid-heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, that dwell upon the earth! The office of evangelist, then, represents the grand, distinguishing characteristic of the New Testament Church. The pastoral office represents the conservative feature of the church, by which the church, after it is gathered, is built up, edified, protected, fed, its energies developed and rightly directed; its members brought more and more into harmony with Christ, adorned more and more with the gifts and graces of the Spirit, and abounding more and more in every good word and work. Both offices are essential to the growth and prosperity of the church, and each is necessary to the other. The office of evangelist is incorporated in our Presbyterian system—has always been there—but it is the sin of the church that this feature of our constitution has been practically recognized only to a very limited extent. These officers are too few, by far, with us. They are our foreign and domestic missionaries. But many foreign missionaries are in reality pastors. We need, not one, but many evangelists in every Presbytery. It is not saying too much to affirm that not a few ministers who are now in the pastoral office have mistaken their calling, and would prove far greater blessings to the church as evangelists, than as pastors. This is proved by the fact

that, when settled, they accomplish little or nothing; but, when itinerating as evangelists, they are signally honored by the Spirit's blessing. Our church has suffered greatly from relying almost entirely upon one arm of her power only. And she will continue to suffer, if the experience of the past lead her not to alter her course. What is to be expected, but that she will more and more decline and droop, if she persists in contravening the appointments of her Divine Head, and ignoring the most distinguishing characteristics of the New Testament Church? The fundamental feature of that Church is its evangelistic, aggressive spirit. And yet, that which chiefly distinguishes the Presbyterian church in our day is the absence, to so great an extent, of the evangelist. How little, then, in this respect are we conformed to the New Testament Church! The great end for which the Christian Church is constituted is, in the name and stead of her ascended Head, to act unceasingly the part of an evangelist to all the world. And this is the appointed condition of her success. An evangelistic church is a flourishing church; and a church which drops the evangelistic character, speedily lapses into superannuation and decay. The cessation of its activity is the cessation of its prosperity. If it ceases to be evangelistic, it will ere long cease to be evangelical, and then it ceases to be a church of God. Not to advance is to recede, and to continue to recede, until it becomes extinct. Let the aggressive feature vanish, and the conservative feature will one day vanish too, for there will be nothing left to conserve. If the office of the evangelist is slighted, the slight will ultimately tell with wasting effect on the office of the pastor. The whole history of the Church affords striking testimony to the indispensableness of the evangelistic spirit to its vitality and growth. The period most marked by the exhibition of this spirit was the primitive, or apostolical. Then the entire Christian community seemed to act under an overpowering conviction of their responsibilities, as the

evangelists of a perishing world. The Redeemer's parting command seemed to ring in every ear, and influence every heart. All seemed to regard it as much their duty to propagate the knowledge of salvation, as to yield obedience to the Decalogue. And were not those the days when the Church shone forth in spiritual beauty and brightness, the luminary of the world, the theme of admiration and praise to all succeeding generations? But no sooner did she begin to contract the sphere of her efforts in diffusing the light of the Gospel; no sooner did she settle down to enjoy the glorious privileges bestowed by her great Head, forgetful of the multitudes around her famishing for lack of knowledge; no sooner did the evangelistic spirit decline; than she, too, began to decline under the hiding of Jehovah's countenance, and the frown of His displeasure. Look, too, at the condition of the Protestant Church at the close of the Reformation. "It would seem as if the very windows of heaven had been opened, and the showers of grace had descended in an inundation of spiritual gifts and graces, converting the parched lands into pools of water, and the barren wilderness into gardens that bloomed and blossomed as the rose. And now look at the same Church a century afterwards. What a poor, torpid, shrunken, shrivelled thing! As if the heavens were of brass, and the earth of iron, and no dew descending, the very waters of the sanctuary became stagnant, and bred and sent forth a teeming progeny of heresies, schisms, and dissents. Whence the cause of so sad a discomfiture? It was not from the violence of anti-christian adversaries, for never did the Church enjoy a safer respite from the myrmidons of her popish foes. It was not from the fires of political persecution, for never did the Church enjoy a more undisturbed security from the State. No; it was the blight and mildew of Jehovah's displeasure, on account of a neglected and unfaithful stewardship." Instead of extending the triumphs of Protestant Christianity over the realms of paganism, she cast

aside her weapons of aggressive warfare, and settled down in inglorious ease, to enjoy the conquests she had won. And what was the consequence? Her active energy, denied a suitable outlet in aggressive efforts beyond her domain, found ample vent for itself in fomenting intestine discords and divisions within her borders.

Will not our own beloved Presbyterian church lay this lesson to heart? Is it not high time for her to awake out of sinful sleep? Will she continue to be content with just "holding her own?" That she can not do. That she has not done. Failing to advance, she has receded. She has lost ground, and will continue to lose ground, so long as she neglects to use the great arm of her power. Will her slumbers be broken, or will they continue until she is completely shorn of her strength? What, then, is her first duty? Evidently, to call upon her God for help! The evil spirit of unbelief, supineness and indolence, which has possessed her so long, will not be cast out without much fasting, humiliation, and prayer. A call to prayer, then, is the first call which God gives her—to united, fervent, importunate prayer. Is Christ upon His throne? Are His ascension gifts still conferred upon His churches? Has He promised to bestow them when truly desired, and earnestly sought? Is there such an agent in His Church as the almighty Spirit of God? Is He present to animate her with the missionary spirit of her Master? to put her in sympathy with her Great King; to prompt and inspire her petitions for the Redeemer's royal gifts? and then, in His great name, to raise up, qualify, and lead forth to the Church for her acceptance, men called and qualified by Him; men of faith, wisdom, experience, ability, devotion, self-denial, such as Timothy was, "to do the work of an evangelist"? Is it true that the Holy Ghost is with us, to do for us these great things? and that His aid can be obtained by prayer? Do we believe it? Do we expect it? Oh, then, ye that love the Lord, keep not silence; send up a loud, long, united,

unsparing entreaty for His promised aid! "Prove me now, saith the Lord, whether I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing." Shall we not accept the generous challenge? May He open our hearts to expect, and then to receive the promised blessing? Let us never forget that a Pentecost of power was preceded by a Pentecost of prayer. When the disciples were all with one accord in one place, continuing in prayer and supplication, then was the promise of the Father fulfilled, and the powerful influences of the Holy Ghost were poured upon the Church. Were the Presbyteries, during their sessions, in the habit of setting apart a stated season for supplication and prayer, that the Lord Jesus would give to His Church "evangelists," as well as "pastors and teachers," would she not receive them? "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth laborers into His harvest." And were the churches also alive to the importance of this office, so as likewise in their meetings for prayer to put up earnest petitions for the same great gifts, would they not be bestowed; and would not the necessary support be, not grudgingly, but freely, liberally, provided? "According to your faith, so be it unto you," is the plain declaration of the Master.

II. A second great instrumentality, appointed by Christ, but neglected by the Church, is the office of the Ruling Elder—that office, we mean, as it exists in the word of God. According to the Scriptures, ruling elders are representatives, bishops, pastors, and watchers for souls.

1. They are representatives, not deputies. The distinction between these two has long been recognized and admitted. A deputy is one clothed with delegated power, the mere organ, tool, of his constituents, whose instructions he is bound to obey—a substitute, and nothing else. Ruling elders are not such, but officers divinely appointed, and elected by the people to discharge the duties Christ has connected with their office. Christ, not the people, is the

source of their power. And to Christ, not to the people, are they directly responsible. And it is a sad and painful spectacle, to see one invested with this high office recognizing his relations to his Master, not first of all, but last of all, if at all, and weak, timid, wavering, agitated by every breath of popular opinion. They are representatives of Christ—His rights—and the interests of His kingdom. They represent, not the wishes and opinions of the people, but their rights, their duties, their obligations, as these are laid down in the word of God. They are appointed to administer those laws which sustain Christ's authority, and uphold His government over the hearts and lives of His people. To no small extent, are the honor and the glory of the Master intrusted to their keeping. It is a solemn and an awful trust! If that trust is not sacredly guarded, if His rights are compromised, then His judicial visitations need not excite wonder and surprise. For He is God—jealous of His honor and glory. They are to beware, lest they be brought into bondage, either by the favor or the frowns of men. And they need ever to remember that to their own Master they stand or fall.

2. Ruling elders are bishops, the only bishops known to the word of God. "Presbyter" and "bishop" are interchangeable—the former denoting ruling, simply; the latter, the nature of that rule. The apostle Paul thus addresses elders: "Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock, over whom the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers," or bishops. The oversight of the church, then, or its episcopacy, is committed to the elders. They are required to look narrowly into the state of the church, become acquainted with the spiritual condition of its members, counsel, direct, encourage, stimulate, admonish, rebuke, and lead them to a diligent use of all the means for the faithful performance of their solemn covenanted engagements. "Take heed to all the flock"—overlooking none. The very humblest member is to be cared for. The lambs, especially, are to be con-

stantly tended. "The Holy Ghost hath made you overseers." Solemn thought! It is not in the power of man to remove a particle of their responsibility.

3. Ruling elders are pastors. In common usage, this term is exclusively applied to the teaching elder. Such is not the usage of Scripture, which designates the rulers of the Church pastors. It does not belong to the teaching elder, as a teaching elder, but as he, too, is a ruling elder. The term pastor, or shepherd, expresses the general idea of guidance and authority. "Out of thee shall come a governor, that shall be the pastor, or shepherd, of my people Israel." "David, my servant, shall be king over them, and they all shall have one pastor." Elders are enjoined by the apostles Paul and Peter to exercise the pastorate, or shepherd the flock of God; guarding them from enemies, preventing them from wandering, restoring such as have strayed away.

4. Ruling elders are to "watch for souls, as they that must give account." The word "watch," used here, denotes a watchfulness with the greatest care and diligence, and that not without trouble or danger. "They watch for souls!" Words few, but solemn! How important and responsible the office of the ruling elder! It is any thing but a sinecure! They are to watch for souls. It is not a matter of indifference whether their flocks are saved or lost, for "they must give account." This watching implies laboring for their spiritual good with earnestness and self-denying zeal; looking out for opportunities of promoting their spiritual benefit, and then improving these to the utmost.

Ruling elders, then, are, in Scripture, representatives, (not deputies,) bishops, pastors, and watchers for souls. It is deeply to be regretted that these terms have not been uniformly applied to them by us, and that they have been suffered to be exclusively appropriated to the teachers of the church, to whom, as teachers, they do not belong at all.

We have suffered a prelatical mode of thinking, and a prelatical dialect, to intrude into our church, and partially to supplant that which is strictly Presbyterian. To such an extent has this been carried, that no habit is more common amongst us, than to apply to our elders certain terms which actually ignore and deny to them the position of officers in God's house. We call them "laymen," or, worse still, "lay-elders!" A "layman" is a man of the people, and designates a private member in the Church. How apply such a term to an officer? And "lay-elder" is an absurd contradiction in terms. "Lay" implies that he is a private member, and "elder" implies that he is an officer! And yet these ridiculous "nick-names," as Gillespie well characterized them, are constantly applied to officers of God's appointment! It is not a little matter to slight an office that the Holy Ghost hath instituted.

The duties, then, devolving on ruling elders, are the exercising of episcopal and pastoral functions—overseeing and shepherding the flock, and ever watching over precious, immortal souls. It is true that these duties belong also to the minister, because he, too, is an elder, a ruler. But they belong to him in a subordinate degree. They are not his highest duties. The duty of instructing the church is his first duty, his great work, to which, above all things, he must give himself, and to which he must make all things subservient. The duties that are common to the ministers and the elders can not be fully discharged by the former alone. It is impossible. In the vain attempt to monopolize the pastoral care of the flock, he is compelled to neglect the laborious study of the Word, and the requisite preparation for the pulpit. It has been well remarked, by an eminent minister of the Methodist church, Dr. Olin, that "nothing is more idle than the common plea of much preaching, or much pastoral visiting, as an apology for little study, and poor, stale sermons." This

remark is just, and will commend itself to the sober judgment of all. It is an unscriptural sentiment, which has found currency in our day, and is even some times uttered by ministers themselves, that "pastoral visitation is a more important exercise of ministerial duty than preaching the Word." This is either a pretext for the neglect of a most arduous duty, or it is a melancholy delusion. Visiting is, indeed, important; but it is less important and less laborious, in fact is light and easy, compared with that careful preparation necessary to meet the demands of the pulpit. Every student knows that much study is a weariness to the flesh. And the flesh would be more gratified in spending the week in making the tour of the congregation, than in devoting hours and days to exhausting mental toil. It is perfectly idle to quote the example of the apostle Paul, "teaching from house to house." It is perverting this much-abused text to derive from it an obligation on the part of ministers now to pursue a line of conduct similar to that of the apostles. Our circumstances are widely different. The apostolic churches had inspired teachers, who had no need of study, and could, therefore, well devote the whole week to pastoral visitation. But this is not the case with us. Diligent study is absolutely necessary. God's command to ministers is, "Give attendance to reading; meditate upon these things—give thyself wholly to them; if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed." "Approved unto God"—not merely to the people. A minister may succeed in pleasing his people, and yet offend his God! God requires that we honor Him with our best offerings, and will not hold us guiltless, when we bring our meanest. "The lame" He forbids us to sacrifice unto the Lord our God.

These considerations serve to show that it is quite impossible for the teaching elder alone to discharge all the duties

of the pastoral office, and meet the whole wants of the church. The coöperation of the other pastors, the ruling elders, is absolutely necessary. Whatever influence the pulpit may exert, how is it possible that it can be secured for the benefit of the hearers, unless it is followed up through the week? How is it possible that the public instructions of the sanctuary can exert a general, abiding, permanent influence upon the congregation, whilst a whole week intervenes, in which little or nothing is done to maintain that influence, and much is constantly occurring to dissipate and destroy it? How much will public appeals, repeated after an interval of six days, effect, if no subsidiary instrumentality is used during that interval? The links are separate from each other, and can not constitute a chain of living, holy, mighty influence to bind together the Church of God, and to cause each member to feel his or her connexion with the whole body, and with Christ, the common Head. What is needed to counteract that insidious influence which is ever setting from the world to the Church is, to employ that very agency which Christ has provided for her welfare, and defence; the faithful, united, constant oversight of elders. Have we not suffered sufficiently from the rebukes of the Master for our apathy and shameful neglect of duty? The church should expect of her elders the fulfilment of solemn vows, and the discharge of most important and necessary duties. She has no option, but is shut up to this by the injunction of her Divine Head.

Every church should be furnished with a sufficient number of pastors and bishops, and the congregation should be divided into as many districts as there are pastors, each having his own district, and each watching for souls as one that must give account. Thus every member of the church would be brought under the influence of this continued inspection, and never allowed to forget his union with the

body, or cease to feel its influence.* Thus, that unnatural distance and coldness which has been allowed to find a place amongst Christ's members would be banished. The vital fluid which flows from the heart of Jesus would circulate freely, unimpeded, throughout the entire body, conveying life and health to every member, and creating a sympathy between them all, which would afford a cheering and refreshing proof of the reality of the union; and which, whilst preserving to each its own relative importance, yet will not suffer the eye to say to the hand, "I have no need of thee," nor the head to the feet, "I have no need of you;" but will rather lead them to feel that, though the members be many, yet they are all members of one and the same body; so that if "one member suffer, all the members suffer with it, or if one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it;" and thus a practical demonstration be given of the power of a genuine, living Christianity, to unite the various classes of society into one great body; so that, whilst the artificial distinctions that have been created by man are permitted to exist, it is only to show that these are controlled by that higher, nobler unity, which has been created by God—that the tie which binds is stronger than the influence which would repel—and that however diverse in intellectual endowments, in social position, in the gifts of fortune, they may be, they still are, ONE in Christ, their common Head!

Such, then, are the ends contemplated by the office of the elder, the most important, most honorable, most responsible office on earth. To the eye of the world, it is paltry and insignificant. They behold in the offices of Christ's

* Another denomination aims to secure this great and all-important end by its class-leader system. Our church has a system designed to accomplish the same end—a system free from those evils which pertain to the other—a system not of man's decree, but of God's appointment—and yet our system is neglected, whilst theirs is worked! They have elders in reality, without the name—we have the name only, without the reality!

appointment, as in Christ Himself, no beauty whatever, that they should be desired. But to the eye of angels and of God, the ruling elder in the Church occupies a position of greater honor, dignity, and influence, than the king upon his throne. The latter has intrusted to him the temporal welfare of his subjects; the former, the spiritual and eternal interests of his flock. The latter is Christ's servant in the state. "By me," says He, "kings reign, by me princes decree justice." The former is Christ's officer in the Church—the Church which sustains the closest relation to Him; purchased with His blood; upheld by His providence against the combined assaults of two worlds; for whose sake kingdoms rise and fall; for whose sake Christ wears many crowns upon His brow, being "Head over all things to the Church!" Surely, to be associated with Christ, the King of kings, in the government of His Church, which controls the destinies of a universe, is the highest honor that can be conferred upon mortal man! "Know you not," says the apostle to the saints, "that we shall judge angels?" If such be the exalted position the office of elder holds in the word of God, the inquiry naturally arises: Why does not this divinely appointed office hold the same exalted position in the eye of the church? Why this most unnatural and painful contrast between the elders of the Scriptures and the elders of the churches?—the great majority of them, we mean, for there are some noble exceptions, to whom all honor is due. Who is to be blamed for this sad declension, this marring the integrity and efficiency of our noble system, this mournful apathy, this death-like stupor, which, to an alarming extent, possesses our entire Presbyterian church, and stifles its energies? The answer which truth unhesitatingly gives, is: All are to be blamed—ministers, elders, and people, are all guilty before God.

1. Ministers are guilty, in not declaring the whole counsel of God upon this important subject, in not presenting before the Church a full exhibition of the teachings of Scrip-

ture with respect to this office. Some are even reluctant to admit the identity of the office of elder with their own, his parity with themselves, and degrade him to a subordinate and inferior rank; whether from prejudice, ambition, jealousy, or, as Ambrose, in the fourth century, thought, from pride; "they alone," says he, "wishing to appear something."

2. Elders themselves are guilty, in not fully recognizing and assuming the responsibilities which the Holy Ghost has devolved upon them. Some doubt whether these high responsibilities are, indeed, theirs, and say that they had no thought of assuming such when they accepted the office. The question is, not what their intentions were, but what do the Scriptures teach? "Whatever is not of faith, is sin." "He that doubteth is condemned," are solemn words, which they would do well to ponder. It is a matter of too great consequence to allow any doubting. They are bound to search the Scriptures, and see whether these things be so, and if convinced that they are, then, either in the fear of God and by the help of His grace, address themselves diligently to their work; or, if unwilling to discharge the legitimate duties of the office, to vacate the office itself; for woe to that man who persists in retaining an office in the church to which God never called him! It is a dangerous thing to trifle with the institutions of the Holy Ghost. It may be said that this doctrine would empty the church of its elders. If it did, it would only empty it of those who have no right to be elders; the loss of whom would be to the church great gain. For just as there may be ministers whom God never called to preach the Gospel, so also may there be elders whom God never called to rule. That this doctrine would remove from the eldership a single individual who had a right to be in it, is quite impossible. The providing the Church with faithful officers, is not the work of man, but the work of Him on whom the Church depends; her ever-living, glorious Head. Elders, truly called,

are among the ascension-gifts of Christ, and are kept in office just as long as it pleases their divine Master to keep them. To say that the promulgation of a doctrine founded on Scripture has a tendency to eject from an office, appointed by Christ, the men whom Christ called to it, is a horrible absurdity.

Again: Some elders there are, who do not doubt, but deny, that their office involves any such responsibilities as we have indicated. These are bound to maintain their position out of the Scriptures—which they never will do. As the doctrine of this paper is the doctrine of our Synod,* it becomes those who take this ground to vacate their office. If they do not, they should be required to discharge its duties. If they decline, they should be admonished; and if they still refuse, they should be deposed. And so should all who will not perform the duties of bishops and pastors, and watchers for souls.

Again: Some there are, who assume it to be their vocation to take oversight of the minister, instead of the flock, and are as willing to discharge the duty of the presbytery, in this respect, as they are to neglect their own. Narrow-minded, conceited, arrogant, and overbearing, they aspire to lord it over God's heritage, vainly imagining themselves to be the "main pillars" of their churches, whilst justly regarded by the spiritually-minded portion of the members as the main obstacles to its welfare. This class, we are happy to believe, is comparatively small.

But, to specify no others, how few of the large body of elders in our churches have any just ideas of the character and duties of their office! How many look upon it as a mere

* The proof of this will appear by referring to the carefully prepared "Report on the State of the Church," made to the Synod in Lewisburg, Sept. 4, 1857, and to the accompanying resolutions, adopted by the Synod; also, by referring to the excellent discourse of Dr. Ramsey, on the office of Ruling Elder, the re-publication of which, and distribution in every congregation, was recommended by the Synod.

human appointment, whose duties they may discharge only as inclination prompts or leisure permits! How general is the notion, that by serving the communion-table, by attending upon the meetings of session, and occasionally on other ecclesiastical bodies, they have exhausted the duties of their office! Whereas the first-named service, the distribution of the sacramental elements, so far from being their characteristic duty, is not their duty at all—it forming a part of that table-service which Christ has assigned to the deacons, and which was performed by them in the primitive church and subsequently, as is abundantly shown by the testimonies of Justin Martyr, who lived within fifty years of the apostle John; the learned Bingham; Dr. Owen, who, congregationalist though he was, recognized the distinction between ruling elders and deacons; Dr. Guyse; John Brown of Haddington, who has been well characterized as “one of the most decisive, consistent, and devoted Presbyterians that ever lived;” Rutheford; the Church of Scotland, as shown by the “Collections of Steuart of Pardovan;” and by the testimony of many others. And yet this is the service which is more commonly associated with the eldership, in the minds of most, than any other! How large a number are found treating as a sinecure the highest office on earth, to which they have been called, if called at all, by the Holy Ghost! How few are jealous of the sacred rights which Christ has given them! A neglect of the duties of an office naturally leads to a surrender of the rights pertaining to it. A return to duties will be followed by an acknowledgment of rights. For it is idle for any to dream that their rights will be respected whilst their duties are trampled under foot. A return to duties will do more than aught beside to recommend the symmetry, the beauty, and the power of the Presbyterianism of the Scriptures! Now, let us grant that, to constitute an efficient, active, zealous, devoted elder, much effort, self-denial, and sacrifice are necessary; what

then? Shall we shrink back on this account? Is any thing really valuable ever accomplished without sacrifice? Was not our salvation effected by sacrifice? Was not Christ, altogether, soul and body, a sacrifice for us? Is not heaven ours by sacrifice? And does not Christ promise to the faithful elder "a crown of glory that fadeth not away;" a richer crown in the kingdom above than will be allotted to the private Christian, whose duties and responsibilities are not so great, and whose sacrifices are less? And whatever sacrifice of feeling may be involved, should it not be made the more readily, when it is remembered that the cross feels heavy only because they have not been accustomed to bear it, only because of a long-continued neglect of most important duties? And if their inexperience renders them reluctant to act as spiritual overseers, yet habitual and intimate intercourse with their people will soon reconcile them to their employment, and ultimately convert into enjoyment what at first was felt to be a trial. The inquiry of the sincere Christian with regard to any point of duty is, not whether the performance of it is difficult, dangerous, or even seemingly impossible, but simply, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" "The practicability of a duty is felt to be properly judged of, not by the appearance it presents to our judgment, but by the command of our Lord. If He has commanded, we go forward, fearing nothing that may seem to lie in our way. The greater the task, the more real is the testimony and expression of love, and therefore the more acceptable to God. If the Israelites had, through fear, declined to obey God's command to go down into the Red Sea, the Church of God in that day would have been extinct."

3. The people, also, share, to no little extent, this guilt with ministers and elders. They do not look upon this office in its true scriptural light. Elders are among the ascension-gifts of Christ. "When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. And

He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for a work of service, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Here we are distinctly taught that pastors, or elders, are Christ's ascension-gifts to the Church, which she can not dispense with. To undervalue them, then, is to insult the Lord Jesus Christ, now upon His throne, by undervaluing His precious gifts to His Church. As gifts, they must be sought, and earnestly sought, from Christ. The appeal here is made, as every where else, to the faith of the church. The church must look upon these officers with the eye of faith, as gifts from Christ. The eye of faith only can see the divine appointment, and the obligations growing out thereof, and the excellence, beauty, and glory of the office. If not viewed by faith, if not sought by faith, if not received by faith, what right has the church to expect a blessing with them? "Whatever is not of faith is sin." Here we touch the root of the evil in the church. The office is looked upon with the natural eye, not with the spiritual. Hence, the same associations, the same views and feelings are generally connected with this, as with any other office. Many, very many, feel as little reverence when engaged in the election of a ruling elder, as in the election of an alderman. And yet, the election of a ruling elder is a solemn act of worship on the part of the church! The office is a divine appointment; the officer is a divine gift; for Christ not only founded the pastorate, but He gives the pastors. "He gave some, pastors." The men, then, are His gifts. When, therefore, the church assembles for the election of elders, for what does she assemble, but to receive Christ's gifts from Christ's hands? And how much solemn deliberation, investigation, patient reflection, above all, how much earnest prayer for divine guidance, is necessary, that the people of God may not err in their choice! If the appointed means have been faithfully used; if the qualifications for the office have been closely marked, as

these are laid down in the Scriptures; and if, with singleness of eye to the divine glory, they have, after earnest prayer, been led to cast their votes for those whom they judge to possess them; then, just as surely as Christ has promised His presence with His Church, just so surely are they warranted to believe that His Spirit and providence have led them to choose those whom He has chosen and set apart for this exalted office; an additional evidence of which is supplied by the conviction of duty which He fastens upon the minds of those thus chosen, so that they dare not disobey the divine call. Now, are the churches wont to exercise such care, such watchfulness, such an inspection into their own hearts, lest they be influenced by carnal motives; sending up to the throne earnest petitions for the guidance of the Spirit; pleading for Christ's gifts; acting as in the immediate presence of Christ Himself; and approaching a divine ordinance with so much reverence, that their act may justly be styled an act of worship; and then receiving from Christ's hands His own gifts, with some thing of that reverential affection with which He Himself receives them from the Father? When the Saviour was on earth, how did He act when about to engage in that most important work of choosing and setting apart His apostles? He spent the whole preceding night in fervent prayer to God! And then, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whose influences were given to Him without measure, He chose the men who subsequently proved to be such distinguished ornaments and priceless blessings to the Church. And what were these men? As to their extraordinary office, they were apostles. But as to their ordinary office, they were elders. Peter, addressing elders, styles himself "also an elder." Now, did the great Head of the Church Himself, pure and holy though He was, deem it meet to prepare Himself for so important a work as the selection of the men who should control the destinies of His Church, by a whole night spent in fervent prayer; and yet, shall the

Church, without due preparation, carelessly, irreverently, approach the same solemn work? Oh! is there no profaneness in this monstrous indifference? Is she not signally rebuked by the example of her Divine Head? And will He not signally rebuke her, by a judicial visitation, for this her sin? As she dishonors Him, will He not also dishonor her, and permit unworthy, incompetent, unfaithful men to intrude into a sacred office, that they may be obstacles and stumbling-blocks, and prove thus to be the rod with which He chastens her for her unbelief, her irreverence, and her carnality? And as such officers were not the offspring of faith, but were chosen from carnal motives, mere natural preference or relationship—chosen because of their social position, their wealth, influence, prominence, with a view to render their church thereby more respectable, more influential, elevate its social status in the eyes of the community—what is to be expected but a low standard of piety in those churches? And such officers can not fail to react upon the churches disastrously to their spirituality, and reduce their standard of piety lower still. Knowing well the motives which swayed the people in their election, they will be more careful to maintain their standing and promote their popularity, than to promote the true interests of the churches, by resolutely opposing any evil practices which obtain in them. They will be much more apt to wink at sin than to censure it. And as for enforcing discipline against offenders of influence and power, that is a duty which no one need expect them to perform. The stream can not rise above its source. Men chosen from carnal motives, to an exalted office, which demands no little degree of spirituality on the part of those who fill it, can not fail to carnalize the church still more. The offence of the cross entirely ceases. Instead of a cross-bearing, Christ-following church, that has power with God and man, we have a “highly respectable,” “influential,” “fashionable,” “aristocratic,” church, after the Laodicean model, that God

abhors, and the world despises. This is no fancy picture, but a stern and humbling reality. Faithful ministers, faithful elders, faithful members, have again and again complained of this sad state of things; have again and again gone to the Master, and laid their burdens before Him. Is not Christ jealous of His honor? Will not a day of reckoning come—a day of fearful visitation? And who may abide the day of His coming, when a retributive providence will avenge the dishonor cast upon His name, and the insults offered to His Spirit; when the various idols which men have set up and worshipped shall be dashed in pieces; and a fearful sifting and overturning vindicate Christ's authority over His own house, and prove Him to be "a consuming fire" to a carnal, worldly-minded, corrupted church!

But again: The fact must not be overlooked that the insensibility of many church-members to the importance and value of the eldership, arises from their indifference to the whole subject of church government. How often is the remark made, "I feel but little interest in the subject of church government." But how strange does such a sentiment sound, coming from a member of the church! What! A Christian taking no interest in what Christ has instituted! A Christian regarding one of the most valuable features of Christ's kingdom a matter of little consequence! A Christian treating a divine institution as a mere human expedient for the preservation of order! Every element of Christ's kingdom—its government and worship, as well as its doctrines—in short, every thing contained in Christianity, addresses itself to the faith of Christ's people. And if any thing relating to Christ's kingdom does not interest a Christian, it is owing to a defective faith. But faith is not a blind, but an enlightened principle, and how can it be called into exercise, where sufficient knowledge does not previously exist? It is a great mistake to suppose that a particular form of church government is a matter of little

consequence. Christ has not only instituted government, but its form. The relation between a form of church government and its doctrine and worship, is direct, close, and intimate. It is the shell which guards the kernel. It is the body which covers and preserves the soul. Every student of ecclesiastical history is forced to see this. Why is it that certain forms of government, and certain systems of doctrine, and certain modes of worship, are found uniformly associated together? Why are Presbyterianism and Calvinism in such close sympathy and union? Many of the churches of New England were once Presbyterian as to church government, and Calvinistic as to doctrine. When the Presbyterianism was gradually supplanted by Congregationalism, how did it happen that the Calvinism was not retained, but in like manner was supplanted by Socinianism? This same result uniformly obtains. But how can it be explained, if a particular form of government be a matter of indifference, and have, as many suppose, no influence upon the doctrines and worship of a church? It has been well remarked by the Rev. Mr. Thompson, a minister of Scotland, that "the grinding persecution to which the Presbyterians of England were subjected by Cromwell, an Independent, and by the Episcopalians, under the Stuarts, prevented them from erecting the platform of their scriptural polity, and familiarized many to the more attainable, plastic, and accommodating institutions of Congregationalism. Presbyterians began to look upon forms of church government as not of divine institution; they regarded them as merely human expedients for the preservation of order; that, therefore, a church might be just as scripturally constituted under one form as another. They talked, indeed, of Episcopacy being adapted to rich and gorgeous England, and of Presbyterianism being adapted to poor and homely Scotland. The necessary consequence of this miserable delusion was, that the strictness of discipline gave way; Presbyterianism came to be branded as stiff, rigid, puritan-

ical, and unaccommodating; and numbers of the churches lapsed into Independency, and thence sank into Socinianism. Seldom were pains taken to instruct the people in the counsel of God respecting the form and government of the church. Every thing relating to such matters was rather, indeed, studiously kept out of view. The result was inevitable; the people became ignorant of the subject, and as indifferent to it as they were ignorant of it. The consequence was, that the frame-work of Presbyterianism was, in many places, gradually and utterly dissolved; and congregation after congregation passed into other communions, without even an effort being made to retain them!" The description that this writer gives of the sad decline of Presbyterianism in England, applies with equal justice to many other countries. In Scotland, during the time that the General and Provincial Assemblies were suppressed, and the Presbyteries neglected, ministers became negligent, immorality and heresy prevailed, and popery increased. In Germany, where infidel tenets were substituted for the pure word of God, this lamentable condition is traceable to the deficient constitution of the German churches, and their entire want of control over the opinions of their own ministers. In Geneva itself, where a pure Calvinism has, to a great extent, been supplanted by the Socinian heresy, this was owing to the worldly character of the elders, and their exclusion from the highest ecclesiastical court, which is composed of ministers only. By these means, unprincipled men were enabled gradually and insidiously to supplant with Socinian formularies all the existing standards of the church. These instances show that there is not a more unfounded notion than that a particular form of church government is a matter of indifference. Let us cleave to our simple, pure, consistent, scriptural Presbyterianism! Let the flock of Christ give to their rulers that honor which is their due; let them place a high estimate upon their office, for its dignity, importance, and value.

Let them expect much from their elders, and encourage them in going forward to carry out the true idea of their office, remembering that they watch for souls as they that must give account; and remembering, too, that they themselves are responsible to Christ for any obstacles they place in the way of His officers to the faithful discharge of their duty. "Offences," or stumbling-blocks, said our Lord, "must needs come, but woe to that man by whom they come!" There is reason to fear that, in this matter, also, offences will come, that the faithful elder will encounter these stumbling-blocks. But if he is counted worthy to suffer with Christ, he shall also be permitted to reign with Christ. There is reason to fear that many who, by their profession, are numbered amongst the disciples of Christ, and the subjects of His kingdom, are yet opposed to the administration of His laws. Such persons would be sure to regard it as out of character, nay, even officious, in elders visiting from house to house, in their official capacity, for the purpose of religious conversation and prayer. Whilst the truly pious membership would rejoice to see the day when the elders of the church should again appear in their ancient, honored character of bishops and pastors of Christ's flock; yet, it is equally certain that the worldly-minded portion would dislike any such spiritual oversight; and although their constituted guardians go amongst the flock, not for the purpose of prying into the secrets of families, or of being busy-bodies in other men's matters, but simply to watch over them in the Lord, and stir them up to love and good works, yet would they esteem such oversight as this an intrusion, an encroachment upon their lawless liberty—their liberty to disgrace their profession and crucify their Master! The yoke of Christ is to them an intolerable burden, and they do not wish this man to reign over them. Such persons are in the church, but not of the church. They belong to the world, are the friends of the

world, the partisans of the world; and are in the church, as spies in the camp of an enemy, only to betray it.

These, then, are the causes of our shameful delinquency as a church. We have a noble system, not of man's device, but of God's appointment, but we have failed to work it fully as we ought. The evil influences which withstand the operation of our ecclesiastical machinery must be overcome, or we shall continue to languish and droop under the rebukes of the Master. To contemplate the vast resources with which Christ has endowed our Presbyterian Zion, and then contrast with these her actual achievements, is enough to sicken the heart. The statistics of the Virginia church, in former years, setting forth the additions made to the churches, have been carefully collected, and submitted to this Synod. We have examined those of later years, and find that, upon the whole, we have made little, if any progress. The facts are briefly these: In one year an average of one member to each minister; in another year, two members to each minister; in another year, four members to each minister; in another year, five members to each minister; in another year, three members to each minister.

And is this all that has been accomplished? Can we be content with such humiliating results? It is true, that by resorting to unscriptural measures, as others do, we could fill our churches with converts; but converts of man's making constitute poor materials for a church of God. The question is not, what have we done compared with other churches, but what have we done compared with what, having the ample furniture that God has given us, we should have done? The facts adduced show our shortcomings to be painfully great. We have need, as a church, to humble ourselves in the dust before God, confess with shame our sins, and address ourselves anew to the work He has assigned us. We greatly need a fresh baptism of the Holy Ghost. Why are His influences withheld? The answer is, we have refused to honor Him, and He has

refused to honor us. The instrumentalities He has appointed to accomplish the results we desire, we have neglected to employ. We are not using the means of His appointment. If He has provided the Church with the officers she requires for her nurture and growth; if He has appointed some to the high and responsible office of overseers, or bishops of souls, shepherds, or pastors of His flock; and we are slighting this office and thus slighting Him, esteeming it of little value, not acting faith in God, and expecting much from the discharge of its duties, and so not employing the appointed instrumentalities, what need we wonder that our condition should be just what it is, unfruitful, cold, and almost dead? The common opinion is, that if additions are not made to the churches, the ministry must be in fault. Is this necessarily so? Who gave the church the right to hold such an opinion? Who gave any elder the right to hold such an opinion? The Scriptures? No! They teach that, though Paul were the minister, yet if Christ's institutions were not observed, His Church would wither and die. A church may try to escape from her obligations, but the day of reckoning will come for her. An elder whose conscience is seared may seek to elude his responsibilities, transfer them all to the minister, and complacently attribute to him the languishing, declining condition of the church; but the hour will come when an aroused conscience will make him writhe under her scorpion lash, as the words of the Master fill his soul with confusion, fear, and horror: "Thou wicked and slothful servant!"

It is idle for the church to wonder at her want of success, when the well-known means instituted to secure it are ignored and neglected. When they are used, and in faith, God's wisdom and faithfulness are pledged to crown them with success, and bestow the needed blessings. But the inquiry arises, how can elders discharge such duties consistently with their secular engagements?

As example is better than precept, we invite attention to the following notice of one who well illustrated the power of the eldership, and the strength it gives to the church:

“The late Patrick Falconer, Esq., was first called to the eldership in the Tron Parish, under the pastoral charge of Dr. Chalmers, and subsequently in St. John’s. Of all the active, laborious, faithful men with whom Dr. C. was surrounded and supported, this gentleman was in labors the most abundant, and in perseverance the most unwearied, and with one accord the session of St. John’s concede to their departed brother the preëminence in this work and labor of love. For the last seventeen years of his life, he gave all his leisure, and for the last ten, the whole of his time to the duties of his office. Whilst many retired—and fortunate merchants think they have no account to render of their time to God—this good man increased in well-doing, as he increased in years; whilst some grew weary of their labor of love, he grew more devoted; and whilst others doffed their spiritual office, and shrunk into mere men of the world, he became more single-hearted as he advanced in life, and lived more exclusively for the glory of the Master whom he served. Every day, when in health, was he to be seen wending his way from his residence in the west end of the city, to the farthest extremity of the east, where his poor district lay; and punctual to his hour, the shop-keepers inquired if all was well, when they missed his familiar face. Twice or thrice every year, he regularly visited each of the eighty-three families in his district, besides his visitation of the sick; and we are assured that he was three hundred days, out of the three hundred and sixty-five, in his district. No London magistrate ever acquainted himself more laboriously with the work-districts of the metropolis, in order to detect and punish, than this gentleman did in his district, in order to prevent crime, and reform the criminal. On the practi-

cal experience of this laborious office-bearer in the church, all good men will set a just value. That experience we shall give in his own words. 'Perhaps there is a general feeling,' says he, 'that a man needs to be disengaged from business, in some considerable degree at least, before he can efficiently undertake the office of elder. My experience leads me to think that a man who can spare an hour a day, or even two hours a week, may do as much good in that little time as one who has the whole of his time at his disposal. Besides, in the evangelizing of the world, it is evident the great power must come from the little of each agent, accumulated into the aggregate of the many. Each and every man doing the little he can, is the source whence the irresistible force at length is to come, which, in Christ, is to overcome the deadness, darkness, and depravity which now pervade the earth. I can not, while on this point, forbear to notice the importance of doing all to the glory of God, and to be seen of Him, and of coming, not only to the feeling of this, as our motive for doing, but also as our excitement to do whatever we have within the compass of our power. Such a feeling as this will not permit us to withhold what we can do, because it is little. Under any other feeling, no individual will do anything, except it can be distinctly seen as a great thing; and this is the cause that vast power, which might be collected from the many, is lost. Proper division of labor is also vastly important. Various things, such as distributing tracts, or missionary intelligence, or reading to those who can not read for themselves, may be easily done by such as have no gift for exhortation or prayer. The exact plan which I think best for a spiritual elder to adopt, and which I am decidedly of opinion is requisite to an efficient religious superintendence is, that, together with the particular calls upon the sick, etc., he keep a regular progressive visit of the whole going on; so that he may visit every family once, twice, or as often as may be, within the year. I think it

very important that he do not allow himself to act as a judge or a divider, nor even very much as an adviser in worldly matters. Every elder should study to fill his mouth with arguments, in order to turn parental affection to the eternal interests of children, instead of allowing it to be absorbed entirely by their temporal concerns. Seek first, says Christ, the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. We should keep eternity constantly in view, and act under the felt impression of the unseen world. Every spiritually-minded elder will endeavor to press these things upon the people of his charge; he will be earnest to stir up parents to their religious duties.' "

May these weighty words of Mr. Falconer sink deep into the hearts of all elders! With such an example before us of the power, efficiency, and usefulness of the office of the eldership, and of the practicability, in any ordinary circumstances of business, of the duties it requires, are we not called upon, as we regard the purity, the peace, the stability, the increase of our church, to restore this office where it is wanting, and to perfect it where it already exists? We have here the testimony of a man of great experience, as well as great wisdom and piety. That testimony is entitled to be received. Consider what he says: "An elder who spares only two hours a week, may do as much good in that little time as one who has the whole of his time at his disposal." Now, whose secular engagements are so absorbing as not to afford him two hours in seven days to the duties of this office? If any plead that they can not spare even this, then it is evident that the business of this world occupies more of their time than it should, and that the sooner they vacate an office of such tremendous responsibilities, the better.

We find, in the autobiography of that judicious man, Dr. James W. Alexander, the following brief notice of a faithful elder: "Our theory of a church-session," says he, "is grand;

but O what a practice ! It is made for a church in a high spiritual state ; and this, I think, is in its favor. One of my elders makes up to every man, woman, and child, who frequents the church. He visits as much as I do ; knows every church-member ; talks to every inquirer ; goes often to every house, and when I point out any place, is sure to be there within twenty-four hours. This leads me to two practical reflections : 1. How important to have a number of young men in training for such offices. 2. How desirable for a pastor so to labor as to leave the church in the best possible state for his successor ; in regard particularly to the children, youth, family habits, etc.”

Are there not such men also in our own Synod ? There are : would that there were more ! Such shall never lose their reward. Their names are honored on earth ; their names are honored in heaven. The gratitude of the church is due to those who open, and widen, and deepen the channels for those streams of living water which gladden the city of God. Angels contemplate their radiant career with admiration and rejoicing ; and Jesus, from His illustrious throne, looks down upon them with delight ; and when the chief Shepherd shall appear, He will confer upon them a crown of life !

As we pen these lines, we naturally call to mind a noble example of a faithful, untiring, consistent, and devoted elder, who realized the responsibilities of his high calling, and was enabled by grace to fulfil them. He has passed from the service of the Master on earth, to the rich rewards of the Master in heaven. A distinguished blessing to the church which he so faithfully served, the memory of his elevated Christian character, his holy life, the rich unction of his prayers and exhortations, is devoutly cherished ; and consecrated for ever in the affections of a grateful people is the honored name of JOHN B. MARTIN.*

* Ruling elder in Second Presbyterian Church, Richmond.

We conclude our remarks upon this subject by expressing the wish that the time-honored, God-honored custom of presbyterial visitations, which obtained in the palmy days of the church in Scotland, may be restored amongst us. Let the presbyteries return to their duty. Let them visit, by committees, all the churches under their care, institute a close investigation into the spiritual condition of each, making minute inquiries as to the manner in which the minister, the elders, the deacons, and the people, discharge their respective duties. Will it be said that this practice requires too much time and trouble? Our honored fathers thought not thus of it, if thereby they could advance the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom, and promote the glory of the Redeemer's name. And shall we shrink from the sacrifices which they cheerfully and joyfully made? Then are we the degenerate children of a noble ancestry! If this custom should not be at once revived, let us endeavor at least to approximate to it as much as possible. Let the presbyteries require of sessions a written statement, to be presented at each spring meeting, of the number of pastoral visits which each minister and each elder makes during the year, and of the manner in which each discharges his duty. If, in the judgment of presbytery, the number of visits be not sufficient, let such persons be urged to greater diligence, and a record be made of this. Let such as are negligent be faithfully admonished by the presbyteries. And if any continue in the persistent violation of their solemn obligations, after admonition given again and again, then let all such delinquents be deposed, as a duty the presbytery owes to Christ, and to His Church. Let the Synod enjoin upon the presbyteries to require this report from the sessions. This will make elders, as well as ministers, amenable to presbytery, which they are not now, but are virtually independent; for the amenability of elders to the session is just the amenability of elders to themselves! This is a regulation which is consistently

Presbyterian, and which is absolutely necessary not only for promoting the growth of our church, but maintaining its vitality. Such an investigation may extend the meetings of presbyteries; but the approbation of the Master, and the benefit accruing to the churches, will abundantly compensate them for all the time and labor they expend in this noble work.

III. Another instrumentality appointed by Christ for the well-being of His Church, but too much neglected by her, is the Deaconship. Our limits forbid us giving that extended notice which is due to it.

Many persons, without sufficient examination, entertain the opinion that this office was, for the first time, introduced into the Church of God on the occasion recorded in the sixth chapter of Acts. This is to overlook the fact, which has been abundantly proved by learned Jewish and Christian writers, Maimonides, Vitringa,* Lightfoot, Hammond, Neander, Mosheim, Burnet, Olshausen, and others, that the office of deacon existed in the church long before the days of Christ and His apostles. In the Jewish church—in the synagogue—there were not only elders, but deacons. “The office of the deacon,” says the learned Lightfoot, “was translated from the Jewish to the Christian church. There were in every synagogue at least three deacons, to whom the care of the poor was intrusted.” “The synagogue-deacons,” says another learned scholar, “collected money for the maintenance of the poor, and for the general support of the synagogue, including the stipends of the office-bearers.” Many learned Jewish theologians affirm that this office belonged to the synagogue. Here, then, we have clear proof that the Christian church is modelled after the Jewish synagogue, not only with reference to the eldership,

* “*Totum Regimen Ecclesiarum Christi conformatum fuit ad synagogarum exemplar.*” “Res adeo est clara, ut de Diaconis synagogæ nullus fere possit cogitare, cujus mens continuo non deflectatur ad Diaconos Ecclesiæ.” *De Synagogâ Vetere.*

but to the deaconship also; and that, in the language of Archbishop Whateley, "wherever a Jewish synagogue existed, that was brought to embrace the Gospel, the apostles did not there so much form a Christian church or congregation, as make an existing congregation Christian, by introducing the Christian sacraments and worship, but leaving the machinery of government unchanged, the officers being already provided in the existing institutions." "A synagogue became a Christian church as soon as its members acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah." Thus, the Old Testament Church naturally glided into the New Testament Church. The deacons of the converted synagogue became the deacons of the Christian church. This is the reason why no record exists of the original institution of this office by the apostles. For the narrative contained in the sixth chapter of Acts implies that the seven chosen and ordained on that occasion were added to the number already existing. The office is not mentioned in that narrative: only the duties of the office are incidentally alluded to, which would imply that the office was already in existence. Those elected on that occasion were the first Grecian deacons. There were Hebrew deacons before this—deacons in every converted synagogue. Besides, the New Testament Church must have had some dispensers of its bounty before this, and therefore, either the apostles officiated as deacons, or else this officer already existed, and discharged his duty. But that the apostles did not officiate as deacons, is evident from their own words: "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables;"—shewing that they had not left the word of God and served tables. And, therefore, this service was discharged by the deacons themselves. The seven who were elected afterwards, were all Grecians, as their names shew, because the Grecians (or foreign Jews) had murmured against the Hebrews, (or native Jews,) on account of their widows being neglected in the daily ministration. Now, this surely would have produced in turn

a murmuring of the Hebrews against the Grecians, unless they had some already in office interested in looking after their rights.*

This office is not a temporary institution, but is to abide in the Church throughout all generations: 1. A necessity will always exist for this office. Ministers and elders can not attend to their own duties, and to this also. 2. The work itself, as a distinct work of service, is never to cease. 3. Deacons are reckoned, in Scripture, amongst the fixed officers of the Church. 4. Direction is given for their continuance in all the churches, and their qualifications are mentioned. It follows, then, that to give up this office in a church, where there are members who possess the required qualifications, or to give its duties to another, is to take the work of the Holy Ghost out of His own hands, and to interfere with the order Christ has instituted in His Church. The remarks of John Brown of Haddington deserve to be well pondered: "There is no hint in Scripture that the offices of ruling elder and deacon were designed to be temporary. Both of them were appointed on moral grounds and necessities, respecting every church and period. The rules concerning them both are to be observed till the end of the world. No congregation, therefore, can answer to Jesus Christ for dropping of deacon, any more than for dropping of elder."

The principal business of deacons is to serve tables. The old distinction, current for ages past, to the present time, refers the term "tables" to three separate departments: the table of the Lord, the table of the pastor, the table of the poor. The whole fiscal concerns of churches should be committed to them, and it would be well if, in every church, a bench of deacons were incorporated by law, that they might be enabled to hold and employ all the property of the church. Let those who are known to the church as

* See *Encyclopædia Metropolitana*; Article, *Ecclesiastical History*.*

deacons, be known to the state as trustees. It is far better in keeping with the character of a church, that its fiscal concerns should be intrusted to Christ's own officers, a bench of deacons, than to a board of trustees, who are not known to Scripture, and who are often chosen without regard to piety.*

It was also the business of the deacons, in the primitive church, says Bingham, in his "Christian Antiquities," to be "the regulators and directors of men's behavior in divine service. They had power to rebuke the irregular, to overlook and superintend the people, that no one did talk, or sleep, or laugh, but give ear to the word of God." It belongs to them, also, to receive the stranger who may visit the sanctuary with a kind welcome, and provide him with a suitable seat. In the whole routine of duty, in every service, even the least important, they are to remember that what they do, they do unto the Lord. And the dignity of His great name is lent to the smallest service they discharge. The deacon represents a most important part of solemn worship. For alms-giving is an office of Christian worship; and collecting for the poor and the spread of the Gospel, is an ordinance of God. The very existence of such an officer in the church is strikingly significant, and represents most important and valuable features in the character of the Church of God. Just as the appointment of the teaching elder represents the Church as a school, where saving truth is taught, and instruction imparted; just as the appointment of the ruling elder represents the Church as a government, a republic, so does the office of deacon represent the missionary character of the Church, as it dispenses the collections for the spread of the Gospel. Again, it

* A worthy minister of the Synod of Virginia, formerly the pastor of a church in Philadelphia, informed the writer that, during his ministry in that church, the president of the board of trustees was a rich Jew, who often complained of the trouble he had in keeping the session in order.

represents the Church as a charitable institution, in providing for the poor. And it represents, too, the fellowship of Christians in each other's gifts, showing that they are united to the same Head, and are members of the same body.

The appointment of the deacon in the Church is a signal token of God's care of the poor. The poor will always be in the world, and will always be in the church, and ought to be in every church. Christ has made them peculiarly His representatives on earth, and by ministering to them the church is ministering to Him. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me." The presence of the poor in the church is absolutely necessary for its prosperity, as they furnish the occasion for counteracting the greatest evil of our fallen nature, selfishness, and for developing the brightest graces of the Christian character. The deacons should enter into the spirit of their high calling, and seek, as the organ of the church, to minister to Christ, by ministering to His poor members, and to promote the interests of Christ's kingdom, not only by visiting the poor of their own flock, but the poor who belong to no flock, who are destitute of the means of grace, either willingly or unwillingly. It was the custom in Scotland for deacons to divide the suburbs of the towns and cities, where the poor generally dwelt, into so many different wards, each deacon having in his ward a given number of families, which he was expected to visit regularly for the purpose of religious conversation and prayer, as well as of contributing to supply their temporal wants. Hear the testimony of one of these working, faithful deacons: "With fifty-six families, in ordinary circumstances, very little of my time was occupied, and my office was by no means irksome; but when the families increased to eighty, one hundred, and^d upwards, I found it more difficult to keep up my acquaintance in the district, so that I had less comfort in going amongst them; and whilst my visits were in

reality more requisite, they became less frequent. It is easy to keep up a pleasant, familiar knowledge of a small number of families, which creates such interest as to carry one readily back to the district. My first aim was to become acquainted with all the families; and when any person applied for relief, I visited, and made a strict investigation, and then gave in a report of the case at our first monthly meeting. If the applicant was out of work, or had children able for work, we used such means as were within our reach to get employment for them. With few exceptions, I was well received; and in many cases most cordially welcomed, and much pressed to repeat my visit soon. The mainspring of my management consisted in kindness; prompt attention to every application, whether deserving or not; never administering help in ignorance, to save myself the trouble of a visit, rigid investigation, etc."

It is obvious at once what a prodigious influence for good the revival of this system of visitation on the part of the deacon would exert upon the poor, upon the church, upon society. A hallowed bond of union would thus be established between the various classes of society, differences would be softened, and jealousies and alienations, in great measure, checked. The Church would, through her organs, discharge the blessed office of the peace-maker in the world, binding the various classes together by sacred bonds, and causing them to feel a becoming interest in each other, and to realize that though the members were different, the body was one. The deacon thus represents the conservative influence of the Church upon society. How would the poor, too, be benefited by the working of such a noble system! How many vices would disappear, how many virtues would take their place, how would poverty itself, in many instances, be prevented or cured! With such a kind care exercised over the poor, looking mainly to their religious improvement, the exhortations and prayers of the faithful deacon, the Bibles, tracts, and re-

ligious newspapers with which he furnishes them, could not fail of elevating and blessing them for this world and the next. For the divine favor would crown this system with signal success. And how would the church herself be benefited? The blessing of the poor man, which is of no small price, would be her's; and, more than that, the approbation of her exalted Head. Seeking to do good in the way of His appointment, His special smile would rest upon her labors. What multitudes of poor would be added to her congregations, and ultimately to her communion! The present habitual non-attendance of thousands at any place of worship, is an alarming evil. Here is the divine remedy for correcting it. May we have grace given us to use it! Then will it be true of us, as it was of the church in apostolic days, that the appointment of faithful deacons was followed by this glorious result—"the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples was multiplied."

But the spirit that animated the primitive church must possess the church still, or the mere appointment of the deacon will be of no avail. That spirit was one of eminent liberality, the hearty consecration of the substance to Christ's cause. How poor are the offerings of the New Testament Church, compared with her high distinctions, her exalted privileges, her priceless blessings! Nay, how poor are the offerings of the New Testament Church compared with the offerings of the Old Testament Church. The great law of the tithe was then universally observed, but now how few there are who honor it! It is urged by some that this law, being a part of the Mosaic economy, ceased with it, and does no longer bind. Even if this were so, yet as our privileges far, far exceed those of the Jewish church, it would be a disgrace to us, if our offerings did not exceed theirs. But it is a mistake to suppose that the law of the tithe does not now bind. It existed ages before the Mosaic economy, and, of course, the dissolution of that economy affects it not. It is a patriarchal institution, ex-

isting in the earliest ages, honored by Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, ages before Moses was born—observed even by the Greeks, the Romans, and all heathen nations every where, who devote the tenth of their income to the service of religion. If this law has been abrogated, let the evidence be furnished, let the Scripture be produced. God's claims upon the Jewish church were numerous and heavy. Besides the tithes, there were the gifts; the meat-offerings, drink-offerings, firstlings, vast amounts for commemoration and consecration of events, persons, and things, and for the ransom of souls. Besides these, there were the sacrifices; burnt-offerings, sin-offerings, and trespass-offerings. So that it has been supposed, and with great probability, that the whole amount the Jews contributed could not have been less than one-third of all their income. And yet no community has ever been found on earth that was or is so prosperous, so rich as the Jewish community! Godliness is profitable for the life that now is, as well as for that which is to come. What the Church of Christ most lacks, is faith in God. Her unbelief dishonors God, and impoverishes herself. Were it not for unbelief and covetousness, what advances might she not have made! Did her fidelity answer in any way to the transcendent position she occupies, and the glorious privileges she possesses, did she freely give as she has freely received, the dark places of the earth, which are now full of the habitations of cruelty, would long since have been illumined by the glorious sun of the Gospel; the conquests of divine truth would have been complete; the empire of Satan would be dismantled and overthrown; and the glorious shout would thunder through the temple of God, "Alleluia! The kingdoms of the earth are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ!"

Other subjects claim our attention in this paper, but the time already occupied forbids their introduction here.

We close this report by adverting to one duty peculiarly binding upon our church, the neglect of which will bring upon her the frown of God—the partial neglect of which has brought upon her the frown of God. We allude to the religious instruction of our slaves. This is the great duty of the church in this Confederacy—the evangelization of that great multitude which the providence of God has subjected to us by ties so near and strong. The highest interests of these immortal souls are not in their own keeping, but in ours. Their destiny for eternity is dependent, to a great extent, upon us. It becomes us to contemplate seriously and steadfastly the mighty responsibility. If our Southern Zion shall fully awake to the magnitude of this great work, and address itself diligently to its discharge, then will she receive the rich smiles of her Divine Head, and the abundant tokens of His favor; then will the relation of master and slave, as it obtains with us, be vindicated in the eyes of the world; and then will our beloved Confederacy occupy a pinnacle of moral grandeur, and become a praise and a blessing in all the earth!