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ART. I.—THE CONSTITUTION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

THE Protestant reformation proceeded from the practical development of two propositions, the one of which embodied its formal, the other its material principle. The first is, that the Scriptures are the only rule of Christian faith and practice; and the second, that justification before God is solely through the righteousness of Christ, imputed to the believer, without the works of the law. The former of these principles inaugurates the right of private judgment, and rescues the liberties of the church and people of God from the bondage of a usurping priesthood. The latter enunciates a theology, which, whether designated, from its unanimous reception by the divines of the reformation, by the name of "Reformed;" or from its great expounders called Calvinistic, Augustinian, or Pauline, has always proved itself the alone sure basis of a stable faith; and the only reliable fountain of a pure morality.

Viewed in its practical bearings the reformation was characterized by their cardinal features, springing from these principles. These were, the preaching of a Pauline theology, instead of the Pelagianism of the papacy; the vindication of the morality of the divine law, in contrast with the licentiousness of Rome; and the establishment of a scriptural polity and order in the church, in opposition to the hierarchy of a domineering priesthood. The three elements thus indicated, that is, doctrines, morals, and polity, sustain to each other relations exceedingly intimate and almost inseparable. A pure morality has never long survived that

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theology, which, whilst it disclaims all reliance on works for justification, yet developes, in love, the only principle which is adequate to produce the fruits of a holy obedience. On the other hand, permanent defections from sound doctrine have always been either preceded or attended by departures from scriptural principles of church order and government. In this respect the opposite extremes of Hierarchy and Independency have alike proved incompetent to the maintenance, either of truth in doctrine or purity in practice. Whilst error has never entered a Presbyterian church, without at once assailing the principles of its polity, and striving to arrest or neutralize their operation; it is in all its forms found in congenial and quiescent alliance with the lofty pretensions and imposing ceremonies of hierarchical systems, and the popular constitutions and irresponsible separation of Independent churches.

The distinguishing characteristic of Hierarchy is, that it attributes to the clergy the primary and sole possession of all the rights and prerogatives of ecclesiastical authority and grace; asserting that every sacred function is vested immediately in them by the Head of the church. If it be true that church power exists essentially in the clergy and not in the church at large, it follows that the divine prerogatives thus arrogated can only be vested in any by the interposition of such as are already endowed; and so at each antecedent step back to the investiture of the apostles by the Son of God. It further results that none are members of the church of Christ, or entitled to appropriate the promises of the Gospel, except such as submit themselves to the guidance of these divinely commissioned officers; and that no degree of depravity in morals, or heresy in their doctrines, would justify the people of God in withdrawing from their communion, or in the least slighting their teachings or authority. Nor do such conclusions attach exclusively to the prelatial system, although in that they find their normal organization. They cleave alike to any and every theory which rests church power primarily in the ministry.

It must be manifest that whenever the church is required to bow to such an authority as this, claiming to act in the name of her Lord, Christ, she is imperiously bound, by the very allegiance which she joyfully owns, to demand an open display of the commission which assumes to convey such powers. With the utmost jealousy must she examine its terms, and inspect the seal, knowing the words of Christ, that "many shall come in his name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many;" and giving heed to the warning of the beloved apostle,—“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” (1 John, iv: 1.) Nor in such a case will probable evidence be sufficient. The very face

of the claim which is to be tested, implies that mistake may involve imminent hazard of perdition. The beloved bride of Christ is not incautiously to be entrusted to the hands of those who may prove emissaries of the Man of Sin. Interests involving the redemption of the blood-bought Church, the glory of God, and the great realities of a future state, are not to be staked on doubtful evidence. Nothing less than demonstration is adequate to this occasion. To effect this, two alternatives occur. The claimant of a divine commission may show miraculous evidence of his authority. This the apostles everywhere exhibited, "God bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost." (Heb. ii: 4.) The fact of such attestation being given to them, adds emphasis to the demand for similar proof, in every similar case. Failing this, two things must be made to appear. *First*, the derivation of office through a lineal succession fully authenticated in every link, from such as had miraculous attestations on their behalf. *Second*, that these predecessors, acting under this seal of divine authority, directed the powers exercised by them, to be thus lineally transmitted from age to age. Neither of these points may be assumed without proof; nor will the proof of either of them alone, sustain the claim which is under consideration. Both must be demonstrated, to be of any avail.

It may be thought that these alternatives may be avoided, and the claim of hierarchy justified, by the plea of prescriptive right; that although there be irreparable defects in the evidence of succession, and it be even possible that the chain has been completely severed, and the apostolic ordination utterly lost, still the acquiescence of the Church, and the undisputed possession of its authoritative offices for ages, has fully compensated for any such defect, and given validity in its present exercise to an authority, which, in its origin, may have been irregular and invalid. If by this reference to the acquiescence of the Church, as embodied in its private members, it is meant to acknowledge that she has received from the Lord Jesus Christ, power adequate to the perpetuation of the ordinances, and her own edification, even in default of a regular succession of officers; and that the ministry now possessed derives its authority from that source; it is manifest that such a concession in fact abandons the pretence of hierarchical authority. It is an acknowledgment that, in the last resort, ecclesiastical power abides essentially in the body of the faithful; in the Church, and not in her officers. Otherwise it must remain a mystery how the acquiescence of the Church, which, by the terms of the statement, was originally, and remains perpetually, without any share in the power of the keys, can by

the mere lapse of centuries, exercise a force so extraordinary, as to beget for the usurping officers a valid commission, and that, not from her, but from heaven; or how it can have any other effect than to implicate the acquiescent Church, in common with her officers, in the guilt of treason to her Head. If, therefore, miraculous powers be not displayed, or apostolic ordination and commission demonstrated, not approximately but absolutely, the figment of hierarchy is left without a shadow of foundation. Should either of these proofs, however, be given, it would only remain, that all must yield cheerful and unreserved submission to an authority, which, in its dominion over doctrines, morals, and order, must, in the nature of the case, be unlimited by anything short of direct and signal interposition from heaven.

In this doctrine of clerical prerogative, is revealed the fundamental heresy of the papal system; the pregnant germ from whence every essential feature of that apostacy results, by direct logical consequence. Necessarily involved in it is the doctrine of *opus operatum*, or the essential efficacy of outward forms and rites for conveying spiritual gifts and graces to the soul—a doctrine which strikes directly at the root of the cardinal principle in the Pauline system, that is, the sole and entire sufficiency of Christ's righteousness, without any difference, "unto all and upon all them that believe." Admit the hierarchical pretensions, and private judgment is impious, as assuming to sit in trial of the instructions of acknowledged oracles of God; the Bible becomes not needles only, but a temptation and a snare, and its instructions must be received only so far and in such sense as they may be affirmed by the living teacher; rites and ceremonies appointed by these officers are to be received at once as of divine appointment; and this power, "sitting in the temple of God, and showing itself that it is God," may confound every distinction in morals, canonize the grossest sensuality, smile upon the most loathsome vice, and discard every principle of virtue; and yet no man may protest, or hesitate to submit his faith and his senses alike to the atrocious dicta. A refusal to acquiesce involves the guilt of rebellion against God, and apostacy from the fold and the salvation of Christ. The fact that many who adopt the premises shrink with horror from these conclusions, does credit to their hearts at the expense of their understandings. Admit the primary position, and the conclusions are as inevitable as the demonstration that follows a theory of Euclid.

It is not necessary here to enter into detail in illustration of the essential connexion that subsists between the hierarchical theory, and the prelatic organization of the Church. The one is in fact

the normal development, in practice, of the other. Admit the prerogatives thus ascribed to the ministry, and it at once becomes important, that some be set apart as the official conservators and dispensers of the powers and grace thus possessed; men who shall be authorized to take charge of their proper distribution and transmission, for the present edification of the Church, and its perpetuation in after time. Precisely such are the distinguishing characteristics and functions of diocesan bishops; whose office as preachers of the word, is entirely subordinate and secondary to that more important jurisdiction which they exercise in the ordination of ministers, and the confirmation of catechumens. In these rites they, by the imposition of hands, assume to bestow upon the one and the other that mysterious and inappreciable gift of the Holy Ghost, which, whilst it neither works faith nor any grace in the heart, nor loveliness in the life, yet entitles the one to arrogate to himself, and those who have been similarly ordained, the supreme and exclusive title to dispense the privileges and blessings of God's covenant of mercy to a lost world; and makes the other a child of God, and heir of heaven. All this—although the one may be a Simon Magus in heart, and the other a worker of iniquity in his life.

The Constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church, exhibits a modified form of hierarchy singularly anomalous in all its aspects. Its author, John Wesley; a professed believer in the primitive purity of the ministry, yet an adherent of one prelatic church, and founder of another. Citing his faith in the original equality of the ministry, as a justification of his own position, when in the act of trampling that equality under foot, by the assumption to himself of apostolical authority, in the ordination of prelates to rule in a foreign church, and the erection of a system of hierarchy, as unmitigated in its usurpation over popular rights, as that of the English establishment itself. Nor is the system any less remarkable in its structure than its origin. Here is a ministry which does not pretend to derive its authority by immediate commission from heaven, which cannot claim apostolic succession, and which is, therefore, shut up to the alternative of admitting, that any prerogatives they may possess must be conveyed to them through the mediation of the Church—the body of believers. Yet, notwithstanding, from the day of their commission by Wesley, to the present time, they have held the reins then seized, without pretending to secure from the people, in any form, their sanction to the original investiture, or the subsequent use; or admitting them to any share of authority, or any right of interposition in the exercise of the powers thus acquired. Here are prelates confessing that the system is not derived from the word of God; and

a ministry, whose warrant is in a ministerial succession which terminates in the person of a disorderly presbyter, who violated the obligations of his own ministry, and cast indignity on the authorities and order of his own church in originating theirs. In short, the system is one whose only pretence of excuse is necessity; whose justification was opportunity; and whose only present vindication is the consent of the people, obscurely indicated in their unresisting acquiescence. Incapable of vindication in argument, its security is silence.

On the opposite extreme of opinions on this subject, Independency secures, indeed, the liberties of the people of God against the domination of usurping officers, but it is at the expense of the existence of the Church itself. It is dissolved, and out of the elements are created a multitude of petty democracies, each congregation being erected into a sect, responsible to no common authority and bound to the rest by no common organization. "Each congregation, assembly, or brotherhood of professing Christians meeting for religious purposes in one place, is a complete Church, receiving from Christ the right to appoint its own officers, to discharge the duties of worship, to observe the instituted sacraments, and to exercise discipline upon its own members."*

If it be true that each particular congregation is thus complete in itself, and possessed of such privileges and independence as are here claimed, it is evident that they are thereby involved in an imperative obligation to maintain in full integrity the invaluable trust thus committed to them by the Lord Jesus Christ. As to them belongs the privilege, so on them alone rests the obligation and responsibility, of designating officers, of directing worship, and of exercising discipline within their own assemblies. Faithfulness to Christ forbids that they should transfer any of these prerogatives to others, or permit their integrity to be impaired, by allowing any measure of interference, any the least weight of obligation, to extraneous influences and sister organizations. Whilst thus sedulous in guarding their own rights, they are on the other hand bound by a reciprocal obligation as carefully to respect those of sister congregations, abstaining from any attempt to influence the choice of officers, the exercises of worship, or the formularies of doctrine, or to interfere in any way beyond the limits of their own fold.

A modified form of this system is displayed in Congregationalism, which does not essentially differ from it in principle. It is an attempt to inoculate independency with the efficiency and ex-

* Upham's *Ratio Disciplina*, or Constitution of the Congregational Churches. p. 44.

pansiveness of Presbyterianism, by a partial adoption of its forms and modes of action. The result, so far as it differs from strict independency, is a congeries of compromises and expedients; not rising to the dignity of a system; reducible to no ultimate principles; recognizing no law, but the necessities of the occasion; and exhibiting no uniformity in its results, as developed in the constitutions and proceedings of the multiplied Councils, Unions, Conventions, Conferences, Associations and Consociations, Anabaptist and Pædo-baptist, to which it has given existence.

Although the Congregational system departs so far from pure Independency, as to admit of the organization of councils and synods, both occasional and stated; yet it is held as a cardinal principle, that particular churches retain the right of examining their decisions by the light of reason and Scripture. "If they find them agreeable to the scriptures, and satisfactory to their consciences, they are to be received; but if otherwise, they may be rejected."* The synods of these churches are not like those of other churches; for they have no weapons but what are spiritual. They pretend to, nor desire any power that is judicial. If they can but instruct and persuade, they gain their end. But when they have done all, the churches are still free to refuse or accept their advice.† The particular worshipping assembly is, therefore, the tribunal of the last resort; in fact, the only authoritative body known to the system. In the varying phases of Congregationalism, we do indeed sometimes find features which suggest the authoritative supervision and control of Presbyterian synods. Yet, however intimately the churches may be associated in mutual confidence and fellowship, they still remain mere conferences of independent sovereignties. Each is entitled, in the last resort, by the fundamental principles of the system, to do what may seem good in its own eyes, irrespective of the opinions or expostulations of the rest. This renders such organizations altogether inadequate to resist the incursions of error. Strictly interpreting their principles, the churches have no right to go behind their mutual profession of a common faith; or inquire whether any of their number may not have departed from the truth of the Gospel. This would be assuming a right to sit in judgment one upon another. Necessity has, indeed, induced the partial abandonment of this principle, by the adoption of systems of association, cemented by rules of discipline. But the feeble influence thus exerted, has only partially protected the

* Upham, p. 205.

† Samuel Mather, in Upham, p. 205.

bodies thus organized from the continual and desolating inroads of error in every form. Arminian, Pelagian, Antinomian, Arian, and Socinian heresies, have alternatively swept over their fairest fields, until scarcely a remnant is left to lift up a standard for the primitive faith, which was inscribed by their fathers in the Savoy confession of 1658, the Boston confession of 1680, and the London Baptist confession of 1689, identical as were each of these in doctrines, almost in terms, with the confession of the Westminster Assembly. Nor is it unworthy of special note, that the Pelagian tendencies, which have been so actively developed in the Congregational churches of this country within the last half century, have proceeded at an equal pace with a corresponding disposition to cast off the stricter regimen of Presbyterio-congregationalism, and to recur to the principles of pure Independency.

An equally weighty objection to the Independent polity, occurs in the fact that it is entirely deficient in any provision for sending abroad the Gospel, and evangelizing the destitute, and the heathen world. On the contrary, its principles present great obstacles in the way of such attempts. It hence happens that whenever churches thus organized, have attempted to do anything for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, it has been through organizations extraneous to the churches, abnormal to their system, and which, at every point of contact with the churches, are sustained and borne forward in violation of the fundamental principles of their polity. The mission of a minister of the Gospel to labour among the barbarians of Rarotonga, implies, on the part of the Church which sends him forth, authority competent to the exercise of ecclesiastical jurisdiction in that distant field. The moment a church in Boston or Plymouth attempts to designate a church officer to exercise his official functions in a foreign field, the idea of authority limited to the bounds of its own assembly is abandoned. A right is thus assumed of effectually interposing as to the mode of worship, the qualification of members, and the exercise of discipline in assemblies separated from her, perhaps by the diameter of the globe. This, too, not in its proper form by the assembled Church, but by an individual designated to act for her in this behalf. The sons of the pilgrims, as well as many of our Baptist brethren, are entitled to praise in all the churches for their noble exertions on behalf of the heathen world. But the manner in which they are compelled to act in every branch of evangelic effort is, of itself, an overwhelming argument against this system of polity. Take the example of the American Board—a society originating in the casual association of a few individuals, impelled, indeed, by noble purposes, but in whose designation the churches as such had no

more to do, than in the organization of a bank or an insurance company. Thus independent of the churches in its origin, it is equally so in its perpetuation; being a close corporation with the sole right within itself of electing its own members from time to time, and exercising that right by the election of men who are not officers in any church, and men who never belonged to a Congregational church at all. A society whose powers are derived, not from the churches by any mode of delegation, but from the Legislature of Massachusetts, and defined in a municipal charter. The theory is, that the prerogative of calling men to the ministry belongs exclusively to the several churches, each for itself. The practice is, that the call of the missionaries comes neither from church nor church-court, but from this civil corporation. The theory is, that the ordaining council exercises an authority delegated to it, by the church from which the call proceeds, and in the bosom of which the labors of the minister elect are to be bestowed. The practice is, that the council, when assembled, consists of ministers and messengers from churches, none of which expect to enjoy his stated ministry; who do not pretend to have been called together, or authorized to act by any church which does; who, with one voice, repudiate any right of jurisdiction beyond the bounds of their several churches; and yet, in the teeth of all this, they go forward, and, by the laying on of hands, assume to invest with the Gospel ministry, men whom they design to exercise its functions in foreign lands, and among other people. The doctrine is, that the power of the keys belongs to the body of worshippers in a particular church. The practice is, that it is assumed by the missionary, if there be but one, or by the council of the mission in the earlier stages of missionary operations. Subsequently, according as the preferences of the missionaries, or the necessities of their situation have determined, the practice varies between a *quasi* congregationalism, in which the Church has a nominal share of power, but is held in real subordination to the authority of the general council of the mission; and defectively organized Presbyterianism, exercised by the missionary pastor, with his college of parochial assistants, subordinate to the presbytery of the mission.

Thus have the principles of this polity met and withstood the friends of missions in every step of their progress and every department of their operations; and compelled them to seek, in a purely civil corporation, a channel through which to exercise their zeal for a perishing world: and to yield to this body an ecclesiastical jurisdiction over ministers and churches,—the rising temple of God in heathen lands,—as authoritative, and often more direct and effectual, than is ever exerted by the highest court of

the Presbyterian church. All honor to those men of God whose love of souls impelled them, despite all obstacles, to embark in this cause, and organize that Board, and send forth that host which has planted the standard of the Cross among the many islands of the sea, and upon the shores of every continent, and unfurled to the breeze that blood-sprinkled banner, whose folds display the only hope of a perishing world. Future ages, and many nations will rise up and call them blessed. Yet, still it remains that the very existence of that Board, and of the other Congregational, miscalled national societies, is a standing protest against the Congregational theory. Churches which are precluded, by the essential principles of their polity, from acting *per se* in the work of missions,—which are compelled by defect of provision in their constitution to abandon extraneous and independent organizations, the duty of obeying the last command of the ascending Redeemer are self-condemned. A form of government, which is found practically inapplicable to the case of churches newly gathered from the heathen, cannot be the true constitution of the Gospel Church.

Broadly distinguished from Hierarchy on the one hand, and Congregationalism or Independency on the other, is the Reformed or Presbyterian constitution of the Church. Of this system the fundamental principle is that the power of the keys is, by the Lord Jesus Christ, vested primarily and essentially in the Catholic or Universal church, which “consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children, and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God.”* The powers thus attributed to the Church at large, are a common investment for the benefit alike of all the members. These hold their interest in it, not by a joint, but several title; so that where distance, diversity of nation, or other cause, precludes a common organization and joint use of its privileges, those who can thus associate, are fully endowed with all the prerogatives of the keys, and assured of the presence and sanction of the Head of the Church, to their proper exercise of ecclesiastical functions. Ministerially, these functions are exercised by officers whose several qualifications and duties are defined in the Scriptures; and who are called and designated to the service by the Church, acting under the promised guidance of the Spirit of Christ, leading her to the choice of such persons as he has qualified and prepared for her service. Thus, the powers exercised by church officers, are not theirs primarily and essen-

* Westminster Confession, chap. 25, sec. 2.

tially, but only mediately and representatively. In their several spheres they minister in the name of the Church, acting as its representatives, and under responsibility to its ultimate authority. "Unto the Catholic visible church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life, to the end of the world."*

The services which the ordinary exigencies of the Church and its members demand are of two kinds, namely—pastoral care and supervision of the flock of Christ; and the management of temporalities. Hence arise two classes of officers,—elders or bishops, who, according to their several gifts and qualifications, labor in word and doctrine, and in the exercise of government and discipline;—and deacons, whose office it is to take charge of the temporal affairs, and dispense the charities of the Church.† Although the functions and services of these officers appertain to the Church at large, yet as their labors are ordinarily, by the nature of the case, confined to specific fields of more or less limited extent; so are they called and set apart to their work through the intervention of particular congregations, or associations of them; in this, as in all other proceedings, acting under the constant supervision and corrective authority of the whole body; to whose final decision all disputed questions of whatever kind are ultimately brought.

The number, names, and particular distribution of functions, in the series of courts which normally grew out of these principles, are entirely immaterial to the integrity of the Reformed system. They are determined, according to the exigencies of each particular case, by what is found requisite, in order to the exercise of an efficient and active supply and supervision of every part of the body. The Scotch church possessed as pure and complete an organization, when it had no intermediate court between the church session and the General Assembly; and our American church, when it had only the sessions subordinate to the general presbytery, or when the latter body had interposed a system of classical presbyteries between it and the sessions; as does either body as now expanded, with its gradation of sessions, presbyteries, synods, and General Assembly. The Waldensian church does not fall below the purest standard of Presbyterian order, because its organization contains but the two elements of the parochial session and the synod; nor, on the other hand, would it involve any deviation from the same standard, should our church in the United States find it expedient to interpose a

* Westminster Confession, chap. 25, sec. 3.

† "Of this settlement, [of the Scotch church,] besides that profession of the evangelical faith which is common to all the churches of the Reformation, the peculiar and

system of provincial synods between the particular synods now existing, and the supreme court. In this respect the principles which control the system are,—unity in the body, the source of all the functions exercised by its members;—subdivision and delegation of ministerial powers to the parts, so far as requisite for the purposes of local efficiency;—and subordination of every part to the primary authority residing in the unity of the body; thus securing active supervision, coöperation, and expansive action in the work of Christ.

Development by growth and subdivision is the law of this system. The growing church at Jerusalem sends forth its shoots to all quarters of the world, each of which taking root becomes a new centre of expansive and healing influence, pushing forth into other regions as yet unevangelized. At the same time, all recognize and cherish the relation of unity to the parent stock, and subordination to the authority which resides in the body of which it is the centre. The church of Scotland, planted by the labors of a few divinely enlightened men, maintains at first the communion of its members through the annual convocation of its pastors and elders in one assembly. As it expands, this body develops an organization of subordinate synods, which, in their turn, are divided into presbyteries, each exercising in its sphere its distributive part of the functions of the body. A few missionaries of this church organize in Ulster a presbytery, which, by a like process, becomes the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church in Ireland. Driven from their homes by privation and persecution, a handful of members of these churches find themselves exiles from the means of grace, scattered in the wilds of the new world. Their call for help is heard; and a missionary from their native land erects, in their midst, the standard of the Cross, and performs the work of an evangelist by planting churches and dispensing the ordinances of the Gospel beneath the shades of the primeval forests. Others join in his labors, and the organization of the Church is completed. At first, half a dozen names make up their roll when met in full assembly. But, as years roll on, the infant Church expands with the widening continent, and creates out of its bosom a numerous retinue of synods and presbyteries, whose annual commissioners, in General Assembly, perpetuate the succession of the original court. Hun-

essential features are: I. The government of the Church by presbyters alone, or by that order of men which is indicated in the New Testament indiscriminately, by the terms presbyters and bishops, or overseers,—*πρεσβυτεροι*, and *ἐπισκοποι*. And II. The subjection of the Church in all things spiritual to Christ as her only Head, and his word as her only rule."—*Act and Declaration of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, May 31, 1851.*

dreds of thousands of souls, the flock of Christ in her fold, are led in the paths of knowledge and holiness by a growing multitude of ministers, her sons. By them the call of mercy is urged on unconverted millions throughout the land. Herself planted by the spirit of missions; her organization constructed in special adaptation to that work; her commission from Him who is the Prince of the kings of the earth; and her field the world; missionaries trained in her schools, commissioned and sent forth through her executive agencies, sustained by her contributions, and followed with her prayers, bear the glad tidings of salvation to the dark tribes of Asia and Africa, the aborigines of America, and the baptized pagans of Europe; and her General Assembly welcomes to its bosom commissioners from presbyteries which are springing into existence in India, China and Africa; the germinating courts of churches which shall yet flourish among regenerated nations, where heathenism now broods amid the gloom of the shadow of death.

Neither historically, nor in theory, is the system which thus unfolds itself one of confederate association, but of organic union. The functions and powers exercised under it are not derived by concessions of the inferior courts; nor do they primarily reside in them. Originating in the fountain Christ, and replenishing the spring-head—the Church catholic—his body; they flow downward from the higher courts in a rich and exhaustless stream, which, freighted with the riches of immortality, permeates every congregation, and pours the blessings of life and salvation into the heart of every believer. “*Labitur, et labetur in omne volubilis ævum.*”

It does not enter into the present design to exhibit the scriptural argument in favor of the system of polity which is here defined. It is a fact, however, worthy of being marked with peculiar emphasis, that unadulterated Presbyterianism has never been found in permanent connection with a corrupted theology. The first step in the apostacy of Rome, was a departure from the simple Presbyterian constitution of the primitive Church, the erection of a towering system of clerical orders, and a gradual assumption of hierarchical prerogatives. The subsequent history of the Church presents abundant examples of a similar character, illustrating the intimate relation there is between a corrupted polity, and unsound theology. On the other hand, sound doctrine has almost invariably found congenial alliance with Presbyterian order. During the ages when the Roman antichrist sat enthroned among the nations, the Culdees, the Waldenses, and the Lollards; the Presbyterians of the Alps and of Britain, were

almost alone the martyr confessions of a Scriptural faith. So soon as the returning light burst upon Europe, the reformers with one voice, in Germany, in Switzerland, in France, in Holland, and in Britain, concurred in bearing witness to the divine authority of the Presbyterian system. In every instance where the churches were organized without secular intervention, it was under this form. Without exception, prelacy was borrowed from Rome, and imposed by secular influences, and for the promotion of secular ends upon unwilling churches. Full fledged hierarchy, and independency, are alike of later origin in the Reformed church. The former transplanted from Rome, and freely germinating in a soil prepared by prelatial organization, Arminian theology, and alliance with the State; the latter born of oppression which "makes wise men mad." Its victims driven into exile, or pursued with inquisitions and fines, scourgings and imprisonment, tortures and death; no wonder if a morbid state of mind was induced,—if eagerness to escape the persecutions that oppressed them should result in comparative forgetfulness, or indifference to other considerations. Under such circumstances independency originated. Starting with the fundamental proposition that Christ has no visible Church upon earth, except the particular congregations of worshippers, it hence seemed to follow that establishments and persecutions for dissent must necessarily cease; inasmuch as there could not, on this theory, be a church geographically coextensive with the nation, to enjoy the prerogatives of an establishment, or direct the engines of persecution. It was reserved for the fathers of New England to exhibit a practical illustration of the fact, that it is possible to erect an establishment of Independent churches; and that the spirit of persecution may find exercise under that system as effectually as through the towering and gorgeous structure of an established prelacy. To the alliance of the churches of the pilgrims with their State authorities, serving as it did for a bond of union and discipline, is to be attributed much of their earlier prosperity. To it they owe their preservation from the intrusions of disorganizing heresies sheltered under their own form of polity; as well as the effectual exclusion of Presbyterianism from their soil. Yet, that alliance sprang from other causes, and was sustained through other influences, than any essential adaptation or peculiar tendency of Independent principles to such a connexion with the civil power.

In this respect the affinities which characterize the three systems here described are sufficiently obvious, and their operation plainly marked in the history of the churches. Hierarchy originating in a spirit of ambitious self-aggrandizement, under that

influence, naturally seeks to strengthen itself in irresponsible lordship in spiritual things, by alliance with the civil rulers, and by then exaggerating the authority of the powers on which it thus leans. On the other hand its dignitaries, persuaded that salvation depends on submission to their authority, and acceptance of the ordinances as dispensed by them, readily conclude that the magistrate cannot exercise his authority more properly, than in constraining men to come within the fold, and accept the grace that flows from the imposition of a bishop's hands; and that mercy itself may require that souls be snatched from perdition, even though at the expense of tortures to their bodies, and the erection of the stake for the destruction of the finally contumacious, and the warning of others. And this especially, as those who refuse to conform, are not only chargeable with treason to their own souls, the souls of others, the Church and her Head; but also with insubordination to the laws and the powers that be.

Independency originating in instincts of self preservation, and looking no farther than the safety of the village congregation, withdraws from the unity of the Church, as well as from contact with the State, and seeks in solitude the enjoyment of an unlimited freedom. If heresy enter a neighbor congregation it is her own concern. If it threaten to cut off, in detail, the great body of the churches and impregnate all fountains with the waters of death; the evil may be lamented, but it is without remedy; the sister churches may not interfere; their sphere is their own fold. If the cry of distress comes up from the heathen world, relief may be provided, and the Gospel given them through other channels and by other agencies; the churches have no provision for such a case; and their principles forbid them to interfere.

Of Presbyterianism, the normal condition is that of enterprising activity, alike unaided and untrammelled by State alliance; devoted to the vigorous prosecution of measures for the conquest of the world to the sceptre of Immanuel. Her republican institutions and inflexible temper disqualify her for winning the smiles of royalty; whilst her recognition of the people as the source of power, indisposes her to set a high value upon them; and her doctrine of faith which worketh by love, and alone justifies the ungodly, can expect no advantage to souls from the arguments of the civil power which appeal only to fear. Cherishing with peculiar prominence and affection the doctrine of the kingship of Christ, and his title to the dominion of the entire world; and in connexion with this holding to the catholicity of the Church, her commission to preach the Gospel to every creature, and to recall the world to its rightful subjection to Immanuel's crown; and her endowment, by Christ, with all the prerogatives

and powers which are requisite to that end ; there hence arises, and is cherished an expansive and aggressive tendency, the true spirit of evangelic activity and spring of the missionary enterprise.

Hierarchical organizations have existed without alliance with the State, and in republican lands ; Independent congregations have been consociated, established, and endowed ; and Presbyterian churches have been allied to the throne and wrapped in inactivity and sloth. But these have been accidental and anomalous positions, at variance with the native adaptations and tendencies of the several systems ; and so far as influential, their bearing has been to restrain and modify their native dispositions and normal action.

We have thus sketched the outlines of Presbyterian polity, broadly marked as they are in themselves, and still more clearly as compared with the two contrasted systems. Popularly known as Presbyterian, its more appropriate title is that primitive name by which the early disciples loved to call the bride of Christ, "the Catholic church,"—a designation intended to signalize her organic unity, and her universality ; and by which her polity, tracing all authority and prerogative to that unity as its source, is descriptively distinguished from hierarchy on the one hand and independence on the other. Of this Catholic constitution the annals of the Presbyterian church in the United States exhibit the appropriate results. Excluded by fire and imprisonment from the goodly shores of New England ; planted on the peninsula of Maryland at a time when the unbroken forest still waved in native majesty over the breadth of the continent ; compelled to struggle in infancy against the arrogant pretensions and oppressions of an established hierarchy ; subsequently a conspicuous victim to the calamities of the war of the revolution, and in later years, harrassed and betrayed by the intrigues of "false brethren, come in at unawares ;"—successfully resisting the interposition of the State clothed in the allurements of endowment and honor ; and from first to last knowing no other resource, but in the free and normal operation of her principles, and the approving presence of her Head ;—her history presents a theme and unfolds results which her children may contemplate with pleasure and thankfulness, and others may study with intense interest and advantage.