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THE ELDER AND THE DEACON IN SCRIPTURE.

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The most primitive form of government known to man is that in which authority is exercised by those superior in age and wisdom, "elders;" and the first who filled this office was Adam, the natural head and ruler of his house. Traces of this primitive custom are still to be seen in the names applied to rulers at the present time, such as, "senators," "alderman," etc.

The term "elder," as an official title, occurs first in Genesis 1. 7, where mention is made of "the elders of Egypt." At the time of the Exodus we find "the elders of Israel" exercising authority over that people, nor was the institution by any means confined to that people, as we find mention also of the elders of Moab and Midian, (Num. xxii. 4, 7). From this time on to the close of the Old Testament, we find constant mention made of these "elders of Israel," and, besides these, each tribe and city and village seems to have had its own elders, who exercised a local and subordinate authority.

These elders were primarily civil rulers, as is manifest by their functions, but they had also their religious and ecclesiastical functions as well. When the synagogue made its appearance after the Exile, we find that each synagogue had its bench of elders, and while they apparently still exercised certain civil functions, it is evident that they were primarily ecclesiastical rulers. They are referred to in the New Testament as "the rulers of the synagogue" (Mark v. 22; Acts xiii. 15; Cf. also, Luke vii. 41), and also as "the elders of the Jews" (Luke vii. 3). Apparently, there was one of their number who acted as pre-

THE PEOPLE IN CHURCH ELECTIONS.

BY REV. C. R. VAUGHAN, D. D.

1. It is a fundamental principle in the New Testament system of ecclesiastical polity that all the officials of the organization shall be elected by the body of the brotherhood. No pastor can lawfully assume charge of a Christian Congregation without the choice of the people. In those instances where a pastor is appointed by any other authority there lies back of the appointment an authority which is different from that recognized in the New Testament. Government appointments to chaplaincies are appointments to the use of official functions for specific government purposes—functions already conferred by proper ecclesiastical authority—and therefore not conferred by the act of the government. The present inquiry, however, has reference to the regular administration of the church in its ordinary and constant course, and not to those occasional and not numerous cases of specific appointments to meet specific demands for ministerial services. The general law of the Christian kingdom is clearly settled in the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. It makes law for the entire Christian body on all the earth, and for all time. This law is recognized as of absolute authority in the Presbyterian Church.

2. The second principle to be recognized is the logical and necessary consequence of the principle just stated. If the lawful election of all the officers of the church is placed in the hands of the people, who constitute the body of the church, every member, without exception, should feel an indelible responsibility for doing his part in the choice of pastors, elders and deacons when call is made for an election of any one or all of these officers. Unhappily, it is far too often the case that when an election is ordered by the authorities of the church, and the people are called upon to exercise a franchise which is lawfully imposed upon them and restricted to them, far too many of them will refuse to do it, and throw the responsibility upon others by leaving the church building. This is altogether wrong. By giving you a place in his church, God has laid this responsibility on you, whoever you may be, young or old, male or

female; and you cannot shirk it without sin. Even the youngest can usually ask advice touching their vote, and all can consult and find guidance that will be safe. On the choice of the people under their responsibility to God, rests the lawful use of all the offices of his kingdom.

3. It is the business of the voter to use his best efforts and opportunities to make the best available selection within his power. He is not bound to make the best choice *per se*, but the very best that is in reach. Hasty and ill-considered elections often fasten improper men on the church, under which it may suffer for years. If any man is notoriously and publicly known to be unfit for office, whether of pastor, elder or deacon, it is wisest to decline any election, rather than make a mistaken one, and take the chances of delay. Fitness for office is indispensable.

4. Fitness for one office is not necessarily fitness for any office. In the election for the eldership regard ought to be had in supreme degree to personal piety. It is also of great importance to have men who are intelligently and strongly attached to the doctrinal system for which the church stands before the world and before God. Errors sometimes creep in, and lay the foundation for trouble. Whether thus posted before election or not, it is the indispensable duty of the chosen elder to inform himself; or else he cannot be a faithful and wise watchman over the flock over which he has been made an overseer. One of the chief duties of an elder is to guard the purity of the doctrine taught to the people. An elder should be a man of sound judgment and have a heart full of charity and a merciful disposition. Often in the trials of accused members, delicate questions of character are involved; circumstances bearing on the issue are to be construed; the happiness of others beside the accused may be implicated, and the judges in the case ought to be men of judgment and kindly temper—men who not only fear God, but love both righteousness and mercy. Inasmuch as the elders are to act as a body, they ought to be men who are not of an imperious and self-asserting disposition; but both able and heartily willing to act in concert with others, and not disposed to have their own way, or else make trouble. We have known of a church actually ruined by a pragmatist elder. A practical rule which ought to be observed in the election of elders is this: Since the duties of this office call for so much prudence and discretion,

piety and self-control, it is always wise to constitute the Session of experienced men in the middle and advanced period of life. But with a decisive majority of such a class, it is generally advisable to have one or two young men who can be in training for the duties of the eldership against the time when they will have the main burden cast over upon them. These young elders will often be more available than the older officers in certain kinds of action that may be called for in the business of the Session—such as attending distant meetings of the higher courts in rough parts of the Presbyterian bounds, or in taking laborious records of evidence in cases under trial. As the general characters of men are generally well known in the communities where they reside, the voter who is to select them for this important office need feel no oppression in making up his choice.

5. The office of the deacon in the New Testament system, as construed and adopted in the Presbyterian branch of the kingdom, is one of the noblest and most important of all its offices. Yet it is less understood and more completely lost in its actual administration to its main design and purposes than any other of the divinely appointed arrangements of the Head of the Church. The deacon's office is well nigh universally taken to be nothing but an office of finance. Every kingdom must, of course, have its revenue laws and its revenue officers. This function is of great importance. But an inspection of the circumstances under which the deacon's office was appointed will show that it was originally established as a guardian to the poor and the widows of the Christian community. The office was the exponent of that character in the Church of Christ which made it as much of an institution for the charities of the Christian heart—for the care of the poor, the sick and the defenceless stranger, the guardians and advisors of the widows and orphans of the Church of our Lord, as if that was the only function of the institution. Christ, during his life on earth, was pre-eminently distinguished for his sympathy with the temporal ills of humanity; and it would have been most remarkable if he had made no recognition of them in the permanent arrangements of his organized kingdom. This, however, he has done in the appointment of the deacon's office; and great harm has been done by some branches of the church by the alteration of this office from a function which represents and insists upon this beautiful

character in the church, to a mere function of teaching in a lower class of the ministry as in the Prelatic churches; or a mere function of administration and all-work in the Congregational or Independent systems. The church is thus stripped of one glorious facet in its jewelled beauty. The widows and orphans of Christ have lost their guardians and advisers appointed for their protection by their compassionate Lord. The church itself is discounted before a gain-saying world; and the personal growth in grace and beautiful holiness is hindered by withdrawing from before their eyes the eminent requirement of the church of their affections, for all the saints to give themselves to the sympathies and cares of caring for the sons and daughters of affliction. The poor have lost their helpers, save so far as the loss of regular and organized assistance is made up by personal acts of Christian kindness. The stranger has lost his guides, the sick their compassionate nurses, and the church one of her chief glories! The Lord of the kingdom stands clear of all this robbery and mischief; for his arrangements to secure them all have been abolished from the organization of his church by the carelessness, ignorance, and unfaithfulness of his misguided servants. All this will be altered in some favored future day, and when the implication of this noble office of the deacon are wrought out as they ought to be, and as they will be, into the visible presentment of the Glorious Kingdom of the blessed God, then the church will appear fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners, and beautiful as the garden of God, the merciful and gracious!

As suggested in the case of the eldership, the men of the diaconate should be chiefly chosen from the young and active servants of the Master, with always a small contingent of the older and wiser men. The reason for this suggestion is that the work of the Board of Deacons on one side of its noble purview calls for energy and resolute perseverance; and on the other for wise and sober counsels. The due mixture of the old and the young in their consultations will secure both. It is certain that all who serve the office of a deacon well, will purchase to each one of themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith of the Lord Jesus. For there is great sanctifying and comforting power in the deacon's office well understood and well discharged. The mere financial side of the office is very valuable,

but there is no particular sanctifying power in that function of the office; but the chief end and aim of the diaconate discloses the meaning of the great apostle when he commends the sanctifying power of the deacon's functions in such strong and, to many, such mysterious terms. There is no mystery in his words, except when the office is construed as a mere incident to the finance of the kingdom.