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Communications.

FOR THE PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE.

On the Nature of Virtue.

As almost every part of our knowledge involves some questions, which are beyond the reach of our powers, the great practical wisdom of the philosopher consists in directing his inquiries to their proper objects.

The schoolmen discovered perhaps as much acuteness and ingenuity, as any other class of writers. But the powers of their minds were wasted, and dissipated, upon subtle and unintelligible questions, which are now, almost universally, considered as beyond the comprehension of the human intellect.

They were equally mistaken about the proper mode of philosophizing. These ingenious men, supposing that they could discover the mysteries of nature by abstract speculation and syllogistic reasoning, disdained to submit to the labour of collecting facts, by observation and experiment.

In opposition to these erroneous views about the nature and object of our investigations, Bacon and Newton introduced a more rational philosophy. They clearly understood that the only proper business of the student of nature, is to observe its phenomena, and to ascertain its general laws.

In the same manner, the illustrious reformers, abandoning the jargon, and sophistry, of the middle ages, poured a pure and salutary

light, into most parts of morals and theology. These were the Christian heroes and genuine philosophers, who regenerated Europe by the simple exhibition of divine truth.

Metaphysics, consisting for the most part of useless speculations or unfounded theories, had fallen into some degree of discredit, when the incomparable Dr. Reid established it firmly upon the principles of common sense, and sound reasoning.

Notwithstanding these noble examples, many still discover a strong propensity to form theories, and to engage in speculations beyond the reach of the human powers. When this spirit extends itself to religious subjects, it becomes exceedingly dangerous. An inquirer of this description, is soon dissatisfied with the simplicity of revealed truth. Hence we are presented with a number of novel, and unscriptural theories, about the universal system—about the foundation and nature of virtue—about the powers of moral agents—about the essence of holiness and sin; and many others.

These remarks are sufficient to show the duty, and the wisdom, of adhering to the simple truth, as it is revealed in the word of God; of suspecting, nay of rejecting, without hesitation, every system of theology, the first principles of which, instead of resting on the infallible truth of God, have no other support than some doubtful, or demonstrably erroneous, metaphysical arguments.

True philosophy is always favour-

and there is so much absurdity on the face of their report, that they reject it at once, and seek only for arguments to disprove a deception, which they think is thus practised on the world."

Both the *indifference* and the *assigned cause of it*, are calculated to establish the doctrine, that the *understanding* of natural men is darkened, their *conscience* stupid, their *memory* little retentive of good, their *heart* debased, and their *will* perverse. If even the *religion* of the greater part of mankind is a source of pernicious influences, how depraved must they be in other things! Men must be wicked, or stupidly alienated from God, whose "popular creeds" tend to make men cast off restraint, reject divine revelation, and rebel against their Maker. Oh! deplorable state of the mass of the human family, when the very *religion* of nearly the whole of Christendom, promotes aversion from God, disgust at his moral precepts, and drives inquisitive persons "into the gloomy regions of scepticism!"

Reader, these proofs of man's depravity are derived from a single number of the *Miscellany*, and from the single piece of "An Old Unitarian" in that number. Can you doubt but that the future numbers will confirm and establish the doctrine, that mankind, until they are converted by the special grace of God, are the enemies of the truth, and the lovers of sinful pleasures more than of God? If any thing from us can be desired, in support of this humiliating truth; we would simply refer to the existence and circulation, of such a work as the *Unitarian Miscellany* in our country; for did men "like to retain God in their knowledge," even the "true God and eternal life," none would have written the little pamphlets, and none would have purchased them, unless they had been ignorant of their contents, or had designed to neutralize their poison.

F. S. E.

On Ruling Elders and Deacons.

No church in the world, it is presumed, can be shown to be perfectly conformed in officers, government and worship, to those, which were planted by the apostles and evangelists. Nor is it essential that they should be. A conformity to them in doctrines and practice is sufficient. Neither are the denominations agreed, nor the members of the same societies, whether in the first churches there were three orders, or two only. If, as we suppose, a plurality of presbyters and a plurality of deacons, the former to oversee and teach, the latter to aid them in the temporal concerns of the society, were left in every church, they could not continue. Changes in ecclesiastical government are no more excluded, than in civil. Accordingly there soon obtained among presbyters, a *first among equals* (*primus inter pares*) an angel, president, or bishop, whose power accumulated and advanced from a single church, to cities, provinces, kingdoms, the Christian world. The residue of the presbyters of a church, superseded by the talents and usefulness of more conspicuous teachers, yielding for the sake of public good, would be reduced in the exercise of functions to the very duties originally assigned to deacons. This hypothesis might account for ruling elders, but with Vitringa we doubt the early existence of such officers.*

If ruling elders existed in the first Christian churches, this affirmative ought to be shown, or it is not entitled to belief. Although concerned only to weigh the evidence upon which its advocates profess to

* "Hujusmodi vero presbyteros ego quidem nullos fuisse existimem in ecclesiâ veteri apostolicâ."—"Nullos etiam ecclesiâ temporum sequentium, nullos in scriptis apostolorum, aut monumentis sequentium ætatum, quantum illa, seu à me, seu ab aliis perlustrata sunt." De Synagogâ, lib. 2. cap. 2.

have founded their opinion, we can offer some countervailing proof.

Caution must be exercised not to confound names of officers, with the appellative senses of the words. Peter and John were old men (*πρεσβύτεροι*) not elders, for apostles are distinguished from elders. Acts xv. 6. Private men were (*αποστολοι*) *messengers* of a particular church, not apostles of Christ. 2 Cor. viii. 23. The apostles were (*διακονοι*, 1 Cor. iii. 5,) *servants* of Christ, not deacons of particular churches. The first fixed officers of the churches, who were generally seniors in point of age or grace, (*πρεσβύτεροι*) were designated by the official name *elders*; but were not always appellatively such. By virtue of their commission they were overseers (*επισκοποι*) *bishops* of their particular churches. They were appointed to feed and rule their flock, and were shepherds (*ποιμανεις*) *pastors*, which designated their office. They who presided in worship or government were (*προσβωλις*) *presidents* or ruling presbyters. But the same men were at the same time elders, bishops, pastors and presidents of the same church, by virtue of the same ordination, and appointed to the same duties. If there were two kinds of elders, there were also two kinds of bishops, and two kinds of pastors, otherwise elders and bishops were distinct offices.* And thus ruling elders are so far from being essential to Presbyterianism, their admission is an abandonment of it. But such defences are immoral. We are Christians, and should fearlessly follow truth, regardless of consequences. When the duties were various and the elders numerous, prudence must have assigned them

different employments. A plurality of them in the same church was, in the gospel days, important, not only because of their state of danger from persecution, but for the arduous work of instructing the Gentiles, both in public and private. Had one pastor only been fixed in each church, their existence would have been obviously too precarious.

The duties of elders and deacons were not the same, because the latter were appointed in relief of those, who ministered in the word. Acts vi. 2. Had there existed mute elders in the apostolic churches, deacons would have been unnecessary. Elders must "feed the church of God;" (Acts xx. 28.) deacons as such were exempted from labouring in word and doctrine; yet in all our churches the office of elder is now precisely that of the deacon in the scriptures, and our elders expect only to serve (*διακονειν* Acts vi. 1.) not to preside in worship; they are therefore elders, as seniors, not (*προσβωλις πρεσβυτεροι*) *presiding presbyters*.

A requisite qualification of a bishop or elder, as prescribed to the evangelists Timothy and Titus, to guide them in ordaining, was, that he should be "*apt to teach*," but this was not expected in a deacon. They were to *serve tables*, and they served at the sacramental tables.† The qualifications, "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom," were proper for any officer in the church, and necessary to them in their visitations and prayers. Evangelists were deacons in the appellative sense of the word, as servants of the apostles. Philip had both offi-

* That elder and bishop (*πρεσβυτερος* and *επισκοπος*) designated the same officer, may be seen by comparing Acts xx. 17. with ver. 28. Also Titus i. 5. with ver. 7. Also 1 Peter v. 1. with ver. 2. These were the "*pastors even teachers*." Ephes. iv. 11.

† Justin Martyr, Apol. I. p. 127—*διακονοι διδασκιν εκαστω των παριοντων μεταλαβειν απο του ευχρησιθηδενου αβλου, &c.* This was within about forty years of the apostle John. So in the apostolical constitutions, which are less credible, (c. 13. p. 405.) it is said, "*Ο δε διακονος κατεχειτω λο ποληριον, και επιδιδους λεγειω, αιμα χριστου, ποληριον ζων.*"

ces in succession. Stephen taught, and so might any gifted man.*

That there were but two orders of officers in the churches, may be shown by the addresses and letters to them, and numerous references in early writers.† Thus Paul and Timothy writing to the Philippians, address "all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." Phil. i. 1. If elders inferior to bishops had existed in that church, it is unaccountable, that they should have been omitted, and the deacons named. Clemens Romanus, who was cotemporary with the apostle Paul, says the apostles "appointed their first fruits for bishops and deacons;"‡ not for ruling elders. The letter to Timothy was framed evidently with such views. That evangelist received no directions about ruling elders, his business was to select suitable persons, and ordain them as bishops, and others of different qualifications, as deacons. The same two orders, elders to preach the gospel, and deacons to help them in other duties, were to be ordained by Titus. When we ordain elders in our churches, we never mean such as are named elders in the epistle to Titus, nor do we enjoin the duties there given in charge to elders, but others prescribed in the first letter to Timothy, and in the epistle to Titus, for deacons.

Peter (1 epistle, v. 1—5.) addressing the presbyters of the dispersion, makes no distinction between them,

* Ut cresceret plebs et multiplicaretur, omnibus inter initia concessum est, et evangelizare et baptizare.—Nunc neque diaconi in populo prædicant, &c. Ambros in Ephes. iv.

† Apost. Const. 44. 420.—Ονομα και οι πρεσβυτεροι και διακονοι, &c.

Clem. Alex. Strom. lib. vii. p. 700—Τη μεν βεληιωτικην οι πρεσβυτεροι σωζουσιν εικοα την υπηρετικην δε, οι διακονοι.

‡ Epist. 1. ad Cor. p. 54.—Καθιστανοντας απαρχας αυτων—εις επισκοπους και διακονους.

but supposes them clothed with the same office and powers; and equally charges all and every one of them; "Feed the flock (ποιμανατε—ποιμνιον, act as pastors to the flock) of God, which is among you, taking the oversight (επισκοπουσιν) exercising the office of bishops) not by constraint, but willingly," &c. There appears a semblance of inconsistency in some of our brethren, who argue with effect from this and such scriptures, that presbyters and bishops are the same officers, and that elders (πρεσβυτεροι) possess parity with each other; and yet strangely adopt a distinction between preaching and ruling elders; whilst the same arguments, by which they exclude diocesan episcopacy,§ destroy their own hypothesis. We refer not this to disingenuousness, it is a blindness springing from prepossession. If Presbyterians can find among presbyters some, who were inferior in office, Episcopalian may discover in the order of presbyters, others superior in office. The opinion is the same, except that ruling elders must not preach, which exception finds no support in the word of God. But the scriptures equally oppose both schemes; in the passage last cited, all without exception were elders (πρεσβυτεροι) all pastors, (ποιμανατε—ποιμνιον) and all bishops (επισκοπουσιν).

Presbyters must have differed in their gifts, graces and talents; some were best qualified for teaching, others for exhorting, or comforting, others for governing the church; each was required to exercise his particular powers.¶ But this by no

§ Mr Baxter wields this argument thus: "While we prove, that God appointed such entire presbyters, as are here described, and they cannot prove against us, that any one text speaketh of a lower order or rank, I think we need no other scripture evidence."

¶ Rom. xii. 8, here alluded to has been pressed to the support of ruling elders. "He that ruleth, with diligence." Ο προϊταμενος, εν σπουδη. Hear Schleusner. "Præses ecclesie (cujus curæ est deman-

means militates against the identity of order, manner of ordination, nature of commission, dignity of office, and general duties.

No where do we find in the history of the acts of the apostles, different orders of presbyters. Paul and Barnabas ordained elders, without any distinction of kinds, in all the churches. There appears to have been but one class of them at Ephesus. Paul sent for the elders, (Acts xx. 28.) they came to Miletus; if any of them had been merely *ruling* elders, in the modern sense of those terms, it is not discernible with what propriety he could have said, without discrimination, that the Holy Ghost had made them *bishops* (ἐπισκοπους) and that it was their duty (ποιμαίνειν) to act as *pastors* of the flock.

The question seems to be chiefly suspended upon a single passage of scripture, by the advocates of the intermediate, or third order. "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they, who labour in word and doctrine."* This passage shows these facts; that all the elders, therein said to be worthy of double honour, ruled well; that some of the same elders laboured in word and doctrine, and implies that others of them did not. These facts prove a diversity in the exercises of the presbyterial office, but not in the office itself. If there had been two kinds of elders, this scripture might be understood to relate to them. But the text alone will never establish such distinction, because it can be literally understood of various duties of the same order. So far is the word *ruling* (προεστώτες) from signifying a subordinate class of presbyters,

that Justin Martyr makes use of that identical word repeatedly, to mark out that presbyter, who gave thanks and dispensed the elements at the sacramental supper to the deacons to be carried to the communicants. The more advanced pastors, who presided (προεστώτες) on the most solemn occasions, blessing the elements, deserved double honour, but (καλίστῳ οἱ†) especially those, who performed the chief labour in preaching, were not to be passed by as unworthy. "All the saints salute you (καλίστῳ οἱ) chiefly they, that are of Cæsar's household." Phil. iv. 22. Who would ever imagine that the saints of Cæsar's household, were of a different kind from others? Their labours might be different, but they were equally saints, their salutations were especially earnest. This scripture cannot prove two kinds of presbyters, it merely alludes to different exercises of the same office.‡

The next which is a mere ancillary proof, is a passage (1 Cor. xii. 28.) which neither names such elders, nor admits any other than a conjectural interpretation of the single word, *governments*. "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles,

† Apol. l. p. 127.—Εὐχαριστήσαντες δευ προεστώτος, &c. p. 131. Ο προεστώτος διαλογου την νευθεσιαν—ἀγῆος προσφερεταις και οἶνος και υδαρ.

‡ The position of οἱ after καλίστῳ has been resorted to without effect. Οἱ without an adjunct is a pronoun, and has εἰς understood; its antecedent is πρεσβυτεροι προεστώτες, and the κοπιωντες are also προεστώτες.

§ "Though when a church hath many, the ablest may be the usual public preacher, and the rest be but his assistants; yet I never found any proof of elders, that were not teachers by office as well as rulers, and had not a commission to teach the flock according to their abilities, and might not preach, as the need of the church required it, however the weaker may give place to the abler in the exercise of his office."—Baxter.

datus cœtus christianus, qui alias ἐπισκοπος, πρεσβυτερος, ποιμην dicitur) sedulitatem præstat promptam."

* 1 Tim. v. 17. Οἱ καλως προεστώτες πρεσβυτεροι διπλης τιμης αξιουσθωσαν, καλιστα οἱ κοπιῶντες εν λογω και διδασκαλια.

then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." *Apostles* were instructed and commissioned by Christ; *prophets* spoke by inspiration; these were extraordinary officers of the church at large; *teachers* we suppose were the presbyters, pastors, or bishops of the particular churches, and were their ordinary, fixed officers to preach and rule. Of the rest the two first, *miracles and gifts of healing*, and the last *diversities of tongues*, were certainly extraordinary, and that the intermediate ones, *helps and governments*, were such gifts conferred on certain individuals, is reasonable. That *helps* mean deacons, and *governments* ruling elders, is wholly gratuitously alleged, and also improbable, both because it postpones the higher order, if such there be, and places them among the extraordinary gifts.

If a single proof of the existence of the order of ruling elders can be produced from the scriptures, it is sufficient. But if we clearly discern by them, that two orders only were constituted by the apostles; presbyters, who are elders, pastors, bishops, angels, or presidents; and deacons; the period of the introduction of the innovation is unimportant. If Ignatius's letters to the seven churches of provincial Asia, furnish a proof of ruling elders in his day, he proves what he never names, and the presbytery in each of those churches was precisely a church session. Cyprian speaks of presidents and deacons;* if among those who presided, ruling elders existed, because he speaks of teaching elders; both must have been of the same order, though variously occupied. It is by no means to be inferred from the occurrence in ancient authors of the terms (Presbyteri, Diaconi et Seniores plebis)

presbyters, deacons and seniors of the people, that ruling elders were intended. If these elders of the people meant ruling elders, the name is changed, they are also postponed to the deacons. But the word seniors is limited to those only, who were of *the people*, that is, uncommissioned. Seniors in several of the fathers is intended appellatively, and not as a designation of office.†

"The book of common order," which had been adopted by the English church at Geneva, was the directory for worship and government in the church of Scotland at its reformation.

The first book of discipline was made in a time of confusion. The order of intermediate elders, somewhat resembling those of Calvin, was seen to be an important expedient for effecting by laymen a reformation to which a small minority of their ecclesiastics were well affected. The second book has these remarkable expressions. (ch. vi. p. 84.) "The word Elder in the scriptures, sometimes is the name of age, and sometimes of office. When it is the name of any office, sometimes it is taken largely, comprehending as well the pastors and doctors, as them who are called seniors or elders."—"In our division, we call these elders, whom the apostles call presidents or governors. Their office as it is ordinary, so is it perpetual, and always necessary in the kirk of God. The eldership is a spiritual function, as is the ministry.—It is not necessary, that all elders be also teachers of the word, albeit the chief ought to be such, and swa are worthy of double honour." This language evidently excludes the elders therein recognised from the office of presbyters, the only ordinary and fixed preach-

* "Cum omnes omnino disciplinam tenere oporteat, multo magis Prepositos et Diaconos hoc curare fas est." Cyp. Ep. 4. p. 174.

† Dr. Doddridge observes, they "have no foundation in the word of God; nor can we trace the existence of such ruling elders higher than Constantine's time."

ers in the gospel churches; and nevertheless strangely accounts them "spiritual as is the ministry," and authorized to teach the word. There is here striking evidence of vacillation between scripture authority, and their favourite office, without the erection of which the first general assembly of the church of Scotland would have been composed of only six members, or would never have convened.

The form of church government made at Westminster, almost a century after the first book of discipline, and immediately adopted in Scotland, was compiled upon a full knowledge of the discipline in the church of North Britain, and in that of Geneva. Partaking of the same uncertainty, on the subject of the novel order of subordinate presbyters, it declares, that "Christ, who hath instituted a government, and governors ecclesiastical in the church, hath furnished some in his church, beside the ministers of the word, *with gifts for government*, and with commission to execute the same *when called thereunto*, who are to join with the minister in the government of the church. Which officers, reformed churches commonly call elders." There is in these words an obvious leaning upon 1 Cor. xii. 28. Those in italics discover a persuasion, that the *governments* (*κυβερνησεις*) mentioned in that scripture were extraordinary gifts; but the commission of which they speak, is destitute of support. Abandoning the elders or presbyters of a subordinate order, they compromise with the kirk, by allowing governors, who are laymen, to be in fact, though not in name, elders.

The Westminster confession was adopted by the Synod of Philadelphia in 1729; and their form of government by the Synods of New York and Philadelphia in their articles of union in 1758.*

* Perhaps the adoption was more early, but of those dates we have certainty.

In the first draught of a plan of government and discipline for the Presbyterian church in North America, proposed in 1786, by a committee of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, under the title, "of ruling elders," instead of "other church governors," as in the Westminster form, there is subjoined; "elders are properly the representatives of the people, chosen by them for the purpose of exercising government and discipline, *in a more convenient manner, than might otherwise be done; and are vested with all that authority which the assembly of believers possess over their own members, to rule the church*, in conjunction with the bishops or pastors. This office has been generally understood, by the greater part of the Protestant, reformed churches, to be designated in the holy scriptures by the titles of helps and governments, and those who rule well, but do not labour in word and doctrine."

The same words, except those in italics, and the substitution of ministers for bishops, were continued in the amended draught of 1787, and became the fourth chapter of the form of government, adopted by the church in 1788. They now constitute the fifth chapter of the revised form, proposed to the presbyteries, who are to report to the assembly of 1821.

The term *elders* had been adopted in the discipline of Knox, but was abandoned for the word *governors* by the divines, at Westminster; it was restored in the form of 1788, with the additional term *ruling*, evidently by a misinterpretation of 1 Tim. v. 17. That they "are properly the representatives of the people," is unquestionable; but how their being "chosen by them for the purpose of exercising government and discipline," can give them the authority of officers in the church of Christ, since it is certain that they belong to neither of the two orders, which were left in his church, remains

to be discovered. The argument of necessity may justify any thing, but in this instance the necessity was artificial, arising from the removal of deacons from the exercise of their original functions. Nevertheless, names are of minor importance: the term *elder* we interpret appellatively, and *ruling* understood exclusively, shows us he is not a presbyter; his appointment, ordination, engagements, and work, are all precisely those of a deacon. The mischief therefore only exists, when in the same church there are both elders and deacons; in such instances the former are not officers of Christ's church.

Three certainly, and we suppose others, of the committee, who reported the draught of 1786, were decisively against ruling elders, and pronounced it "an unscriptural office;" but considered their report a compromise, which would leave every one to the exercise of his own conscience.

The form of government, at present submitted to the presbyteries, has carefully retained the alternative, and gives to neither side just ground of offence. In it we cheerfully acquiesce. These outlines of the reasons upon which three orders have been refused, in, we believe, a majority of our churches, have been reluctantly drawn up; but the confident style of several recent publications of certain brethren of our church, who are of the opposite sentiment, have rendered the defence of our own opinion, and that of our fathers, a duty. The question is extremely simple. Did such a distinct intermediate order exist in the apostolic churches? If there did, let the affirmative fact be proved, and there can be no division of sentiments. But the conscience feels no obligation, unless the government of Christ's church is seen to be founded, not upon vague conjecture, but upon legitimate authority.

J. P. WILSON.

Sheppard's Sincere Convert,

ABRIDGED BY E. S. ELY.

(Continued from page 34.)

CHAPTER II.

God made all mankind at first, in Adam, in a most glorious estate.

God made man upright, or righteous. Eccl. vii. 29. There was a glory in all inferior creatures; but a greater glory in man, for whom they were made. *Let us make man, said the Deity, in our image.* A council was held on this subject, that the wisdom of the Trinity might be seen in man. The glory of man consisted in his bearing the image of the divine holiness. Inferior creatures exhibited God's wisdom, power and goodness; but he would have men only appear in the likeness of his holiness. God beheld his own infinite glory and excellence, and man originally had a correct *understanding* of these divine perfections; for God loved him, and revealed himself to Adam.

In his *affections* man bore the image of his God; for God loves himself supremely, and Adam loved his God above every other object. His continual delight, for a time, was in the Lord. In his *will* too, man resembled his God; for God wills only from regard to himself, as the last end of all his actions, and wills nothing but what is good; and Adam, while holy, had a supreme regard in his volitions to the will of God, and chose nothing but good. As the Deity would have conducted, had he assumed human nature, so did Adam live, agreeably to the divine law. Holiness, like a lamp, burning in the heart of man, shone through his bodily organs: so that he pleased God, and was highly honoured and blessed by him, in freedom from sorrow, sickness, tears, fears, death, hell, and every evil. Had man stood in holiness; he would forever have remained happy.

But it is demanded, *How was this estate ours? We answer, As*