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CHILDREN

OF

The Covenant.

Thomas Wright

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AN APPEAL
TO THE
BAPTIZED CHILDREN OF THE CHURCH.





“YE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE PROPHETS, AND OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD MADE WITH OUR FATHERS, SAYING UNTO ABRAHAM, AND IN THY SEED SHALL ALL THE KINDREDS OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED. UNTO YOU FIRST, GOD HAVING RAISED UP HIS SON JESUS, SENT HIM TO BLESS YOU, IN TURNING AWAY EVERY ONE OF YOU FROM HIS INIQUITIES.”—*Acts* iii. 25, 26.



TO THE BAPTIZED

CHILDREN OF THE CHURCH.



MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS—These pages have been written especially for you. The writer, who loves little children, has thought that it would be pleasant to you to read the lives of these bright and interesting children, who were taken away from this world by death in their early youth, and who are now, as we confidently trust, among the number of the redeemed ones in glory. He has hoped too that, while you are reading these little sketches, and after you have laid them down, the Holy Spirit may incline your hearts to love the same Saviour whom these sainted children loved, to seek the same experience of His love which they had, and to be prepared by His grace for the same bright world to which they have gone.

You have now read the story of their lives and deaths. You have looked upon the images of their young and pleasant faces. I do not feel that you are any longer strangers to me. Though I have never seen you, and may never see you in this world, I hope we are all going to that better land where we shall see each other, and know each other.

And now I would like for a little while just to imagine that I have you gathered around me, as the children of my own Sabbath school are accustomed to gather around me when we have our "children's meetings" on Sabbath afternoon. I would like to feel that you are looking up to me with your bright, sunny faces, ready to listen to all that I have to say.

"What is it then that I wish to say to you?" Many things; and first of all: *How very thankful you should be that you are among the number of the CHILDREN OF THE COVENANT.* Do you ever think how different your circumstances would have been, if you had been born, as so many children are, of heathen parents, in a pagan land, where there are no Bibles or

Sabbath Schools, or Christian sanctuaries; where the name of Jesus is never heard, and the children are taught to worship idols of wood and stone, instead of worshipping the true God? Do you ever think how different your condition would be if your parents were, like many others that you know, irreligious and wicked, who never send their children to the Sabbath school, or teach them to pray and read God's Holy Word, but suffer them to spend the Sabbath in wandering about the streets, and to learn from ungodly men to take God's sacred name in vain? Oh! my young friends, you can never be thankful enough for the priceless blessing of pious Christian parents.

You should be thankful too that when your parents were converted to God, they chose for their church one which recognizes the covenant of God with His people as extending also to their children, so that little children like yourselves are entitled to membership in the church. Many churches around you do not admit that little children have any interest in the covenant of God with His people. Therefore they will

not administer baptism, which is the outward seal of the covenant, to little children. Although our Saviour expressly says: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven," and although the apostles, whenever they baptized a believer who was the head of a household, always baptized his household with him, these churches will not baptize little children, and teach that, until they are old enough to enter into covenant for themselves with God, they have no interest in His covenanted promises.

Now it is one of your great blessings that your parents do recognize this covenant relation. In token of their faith in it, when you were yet a little child, they took you to the house of God, and there had the seal of the covenant applied to you publicly, in presence of the whole congregation. When you were baptized, this covenant of God with His people was solemnly ratified by your parents, and it is now your privilege to consider yourself, in a peculiar sense, one of the lambs of the Saviour's

fold. His name is now upon your forehead. Your parents have solemnly dedicated you to Him. He has been pleased, according to His gracious promise, to receive you under His special guardianship and care. You are now for your parents' sake, and for His covenant's sake, one of the objects of His most tender interest and regard. However wayward you may be; however forgetful of Him and of your duty to Him, the Great Shepherd does not forget you. He thinks of you as one of those given to Him in childhood, and He tenderly yearns over you, and longs for your return to His fold.

This is what Peter meant, when, on the day of Pentecost, he addressed the Jews, who were, like you, THE CHILDREN OF THE COVENANT, and had, like you, received the seal of the covenant in infancy, and said to them, "Unto you *first*"—as those in whom He felt the deepest interest, for whom He had the most anxious solicitude—"Unto you *first*, God, having raised up His son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." Is

it not a precious thought to you that, as one of the baptized children of the church, you are the Saviour's special care—that He feels in you a deeper interest than in those whose parents have never thus dedicated them to God, and claimed the promises of His covenant concerning them?

As I am writing now for children, and not for grown persons, I may claim the privilege, which I always use in speaking to children, of alluding to incidents connected with my boyhood as illustrations of what I wish to say. One of these will help you to understand what I mean, when I say that your relation to the Saviour is a more precious one than that of other children who have never been baptized.

Once, when a little fatherless boy, I was sent away from home by my mother, to attend a school in a distant village. Not far from the village lived a very wealthy gentleman, who was kind to all the children of the school, but did not seem to feel any special interest in them. When he learned that my mother had placed me there, he sent for me to come to his

house, and after showing me many marks of kindness, when I went to leave his house, and return to the village, he took both of my hands in his, and said, "My boy, your father and I were intimate friends for many years before his death. We had a mutual agreement, that if either of us needed any assistance, in money or in anything else, the other would be always ready to render it. Your father is no longer here, but I feel that he still lives in his son. The obligation is still upon me, and now I wish you to feel that, for your father's sake, I have a special interest in you, and you have a tender claim upon me. If you want anything at any time, remember my covenant with your father. Only let me know what you want, and I will be always ready to help you."

Now, do you not see how different my relations to this covenanted friend of my father were from those of other boys around me, how much more interest he had in me, and with how much more freedom I could go to him, and ask him for anything that I might want. Just so is it with this covenant between God and

your parents, dear child of the church. He has a special interest in you for your parents' sake. He admits you to a special place in His compassionate regard, because of the covenant between your parents and Himself. You may therefore feel that you are nearer to Him; you may go to Him with more freedom in prayer. You have special promises that you can plead. Like the Psalmist, you can not only say, "Oh, Lord, truly I am thy servant;" but you can also say, "I am thy servant, and the son of thine hand-maid." You can not only plead the promises that are made to those who penitently turn to God, but you can plead the promises that are made to the children, and to the children's children, of "such as love Him and keep His commandments."

Do not fail, then, to be thankful that you were dedicated to God in infancy by baptism; that the seal of the covenant was placed upon you, and that you are now one of the baptized children of the church. Whenever you think of the fact that you are a baptized child of the church, let it encourage in you such thoughts

as these: "The Lord Jesus feels a special interest in me. He loves me as one of the lambs of His fold. He seeks my love in return. Blessed Jesus! teach me to love Thee. Reclaim me from all my wanderings. Let me abide forever under thy gentle control—one of the sheep of thy pasture—one of the people of thy care."

A second thought which I wish to urge upon you, dear children, is that IT IS A VERY SIMPLE THING TO BE A CHRISTIAN—SO simple that the little child need not wait to grow older to become one. We have seen that little Sallie Kerr gave every evidence of being truly converted when only six or seven years of age. Now, my young readers must not suppose that Sallie was so different by nature from other children, that what was possible for her would be impossible for them. She had the same infirmities and temptations with other children. There was in her by nature the "same evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." She had, therefore, the same difficulties that you have to overcome. And yet, at an age

earlier than that to which most of you have attained, she was already a christian, rejoicing in the hope of pardon and acceptance through Christ. Do you ask me why this was? My dear young friends, it was simply because she had been brought to feel how sinful her heart was, and how much she needed to be pardoned and cleansed by the blessed Saviour, to put her trust in Him, and look to Him to make her holy, and prepare her for heaven. Feeling that she could never be good, or go to heaven of herself, she asked Jesus to take her as one of His redeemed children; and having His promise that "whosoever asketh receiveth," she trusted in Him, and was happy in the assurance that He would save the soul which she had committed to Him. Cannot you also do this? To be a christian is only to turn with all your heart to Jesus as the great Saviour, and trust in Him for pardon and grace, and all that you need. It is just to put your hand in His, and let Him lead you and support you and help you until He brings you safely to His home above.

Let me tell you another little story of my boyhood to illustrate this. Shortly after the incident to which I have already alluded, I was taken away from the village school, and sent to a school in the country near my home. This school was taught by a lady, and all the scholars were girls, except myself, and one little boy, scarcely large enough to go to school. I was sent more as a protector for my sisters, who were younger than myself, than for any other reason; for the walk to the school-house was a very long one, and a part of it very gloomy and difficult, and they needed some one older than themselves to assist them, and keep them from being afraid.

At one point, not far from the school-house, was a little stream which most of the scholars had to cross, and which was often greatly swollen by sudden rains. At these times the foot-logs would be all covered, and we would have to go further up the stream to a point where the banks were higher, and where a log had been thrown across the stream that the water could not overflow. This log, though,

was not hewn, nor provided with railings, like the foot-log, on the road; and as it was small, and the surface of it slippery from the recent rains, it was a very difficult matter for the children to walk over on it. The water rushing swiftly under it made the unsteady footing seem still more treacherous, and there was only one way in which the crossing could be safely made. Being the only boy in the crowd, and feeling that it devolved on me to provide for the safe crossing of all the girls, I was accustomed to roll up my pants, and taking a firm staff in one hand, wade out into the water by the side of the log and hold on to the hands of the girls, and support and steady them as they walked along. As I had frequently to play ferryman in this way, there was one thing which made a peculiar impression upon me. I always noticed that the *younger* the children were, the *less* difficulty I had in persuading them to cross over with my help. The little ones, whose hearts had been full of dismay when they first looked at the treacherous crossing and the rushing waters, so soon

as I had taken my place in the stream, and held forth my hand to them, telling them not to be afraid, for I would hold them, and not let them fall, would come at once, saying: "I'm not afraid; you won't let me fall, will you?" and would soon be on the other side, all safe and happy. The older ones would hesitate for a long time, and come at last with great trepidation, and sometimes it would be necessary to take hold of their hands violently, and almost force them to make the crossing.

I have often thought since of this little stream, with its narrow and difficult crossing. Between us and our home in heaven lies the deep and turbid stream of sin and temptation. We have no means of crossing it ourselves, but Jesus has thrown over it the bridge of His redemption. We must walk upon this crossing, or we can never enter heaven. We must have the righteousness of Jesus, His atonement, His obedience, His Spirit. All these He offers to us freely, and yet, if we were left to ourselves, we would be like the children at the crossing. We would be thinking of the greatness of our

sin, the power of temptation, the weakness of our hearts, and we would have no courage to venture upon the mercy and grace of God in Christ. But Jesus has not left us thus to ourselves. Having completed His work of salvation, He is still in spirit present with us. He stands, so to speak, in the midst of the turbid waters of our guilt and sin. He holds out His hand to us. He says to us, "Be not afraid, only believe; only trust in me, I will not let you perish; I will save you." Dear children, what an easy thing it is just to put your hand, as it were, into the hand of Jesus; just to say: "Precious Saviour, I give myself to Thee, for Thou wilt save me."

Do you feel a desire to love and serve this precious Saviour, and to trust in Him for salvation? Then go to Him at once in prayer, and give your heart to Him. Remember the words of the beautiful hymn which you often sing in the Sabbath-school,

"I'm but a child, a little child,
Yet Jesus died for me,
And through His blood, His precious blood
I shall from sin be free."

Do not think for a moment of waiting until you are older. Remember what I told you about the children at the crossing—how the little ones seemed to have so much less trouble than those that were older. It is just so with the decision of this great question of salvation. It will never be easier than it is now for you to become a christian. On the contrary, all the difficulties will increase as you grow older. When we have a revival of religion in one of our churches, every pastor knows how much more readily the young are induced to give up their hearts to the Saviour than those of maturer age. When the Holy Spirit begins to move upon the hearts of the very young, they are soon persuaded, and enabled by Him to embrace Jesus Christ as He is freely offered to them in the gospel. Their hearts soon experience the fulfilment of the precious promise: “They that seek Me early shall find Me.” They are soon rejoicing in the love of the blessed Saviour, and the hope of salvation through Him, while older persons, awakened to deep conviction of their sinfulness, find their minds

and hearts full of doubt and perplexity, and often go for months, and even years, bowed down under a weight of anxiety and despondency, before they can be brought to exercise a simple childlike faith in Christ.

Have you ever noticed, my young friends, how few persons are converted after they attain to manhood and womanhood; how few old persons become christians, and unite with the church? Have you ever thought in how many cases the Holy Spirit, who had moved upon their hearts in childhood, as He is now moving upon yours, after they had long refused to give their hearts to Jesus, became wearied and grieved, and ceased to move upon their hearts any more? Do you ever think that if you refuse to become christians in childhood, if you postpone this matter to some future time, He may also forsake you, and cease to invite you, and warn you to come to Christ? Oh, do not, then, for any consideration, put off until you are older the subject of religion. God requires you to come now and be saved. Jesus invites you to come now. The Holy Spirit urges you

to come now. Your conscience tells you to come now. It is only Satan that bids you wait until you grow older. You have fewer difficulties in your way now than you will have then. You have more encouragement now than you will have then. This is the most favourable moment you will ever find in which to come to Jesus.

“Youth is the most accepted time
To love and serve the Lord ;
A flower presented in its prime
Will much delight afford.

Give Him the morning of your days
And be forever blest,
’Tis none but those in wisdom’s ways
Enjoy substantial rest.”

I have one thing more which I wish to say to you, dear children, and then my task in the preparation of this little volume will be done. I wish to urge upon you that you cherish AN INTELLIGENT AND DEVOTED LOVE FOR THE CHURCH OF YOUR FATHERS. (I speak now particularly to those whose parents are members of the Presbyterian Church, since it is chiefly into their hands this little volume will fall.) You have

seen the ardent attachment of Hart and Mary to the church in which they were born, their eagerness to become fully acquainted with its doctrines and principles, and their readiness at all times to vindicate the principles of Presbyterianism, whenever and by whomsoever assailed. This was not a blind or bigoted attachment, in so far as we are able to judge. It was, on the contrary, an enlightened conviction of the truth of the system which they espoused; a conviction based upon a careful study of the word of God. They read the Scriptures, and read judiciously written books, that they might know the true principles of church government, and compare the creed of their fathers with the Scriptures of Eternal truth.

Such is the attachment which I wish you to have for Presbyterianism, and for the Presbyterian Church. No one despises bigotry or sectarianism more than I do. When I hear a member of one denomination of Christians asserting that his is the only true church, and that all others are mere societies outside of the visible body of Christ, I feel a kind of pity for him,

not altogether free from contempt. I think I have the same kind of feeling that Paul had for the same class of persons in his day. For you must remember that there were high-churchmen in the days of Paul as well as now. In Philippi, for instance, there was a body of men in the church who separated themselves from the rest of the brethren, and claimed to be the true church. They boasted of their regular line of succession through apostles and prophets from Abraham. As circumcision was the ordinance through which they held that the succession was *orderly transmitted*, they were accustomed to dignify themselves with the title of THE CIRCUMCISION, and all who refused to acknowledge their claims, and receive the ordinances at their hands, they called THE UNCIRCUMCISION, and refused to have fellowship with them, declaring that they were not members of the visible church of Christ, and, if saved at all, must be saved through the uncovenanted mercies of God.

Now, Paul writes a letter to the Philippian Christians, and instead of recognizing these

zealous advocates of circumcision as the true church, he sets aside their claims altogether, and recognizing those as the true Israel who worshipped God in the spirit, and put no confidence in outward ordinances, he admonishes them to beware of these high-churchmen. He does not dignify them with the title they have arrogated to themselves. He does not call them **THE CIRCUMCISION**, but, by way of expressing his contempt for bigotry and arrogance, he calls them **THE CONCISION**. "Beware of the concision," (Phil. iii. 2.)

Paul then tells us in the next verse whom we are to consider as belonging to the true church. "We are the circumcision, (that which these men claim to be,) which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." That is to be considered a part of the true church of Christ, not in which some outward ordinance is administered after a particular mode, but in which God is worshipped in spirit, Christ is held forth as He is revealed in the gospel, and no

confidence is placed in outward rites, or ceremonial observances.

It is this Scriptural view of the true church which I would have you take, so that you may be ready to recognize as your brethren in Christ, all members of evangelical churches, whether they are called Methodists or Baptists, Episcopalians or Presbyterians; whether they are Calvinists or Arminians, Lutherans or Reformed. Never be found among the number of *the concision*—those who will not recognize their brethren of other evangelical churches; who will not have fellowship with a man because he is not of their particular creed. And if at any time you hear one of your companions saying that his church is the only true church, and all others are only sects, just set him down as being one of *the concision*, and do as Paul says, beware of him: let him alone. It will do no good to argue with him. You can never reason a man out of arrogance and conceit. The more you argue with him, the more you pamper his pride, and nourish his self-conceit. The best thing you can do for him, is to pity

him as one of *the concision*, and let him alone.

It is a pleasant thing to know that there are but few of this class in any branch of the church. The most of our brethren, whatever they call themselves, Methodists, Baptists or Episcopalians, while they have a proper preference for their own church, make no invidious distinctions between themselves and us, but accord to us the right to be numbered among the members of the visible body of Christ. Let me entreat you always to cultivate such a spirit of charity towards christians of other denominations as shall lead you to rejoice in their prosperity, and to say with the apostle, "Grace be upon all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

But while you cherish a kindly spirit towards all other branches of the church, and guard yourselves against all sectarianism and bigotry, cultivate always a special devotion to the church of your choice. Be decided and frank in your attachment to Presbyterianism. Let others around you see that while you cheerfully ac-

cord to them the right to think differently from you, you rejoice in the fact that you are Presbyterians. Let them see that you love the faith and order of the Presbyterian Church, that its doctrines and polity, its history and memories are all dear to your heart.

That you may do this intelligently, let me say to you that the Presbyterian Church, with which your parents are connected, is, in its essential principles, the same that has existed, not only from the days of the apostles, but from the days of Abraham until now. I say *in its essential principles*, because, in points that are not essential, it has undergone many changes since Abraham's day; but from the time when it was first planted in the family of Abraham until now, the church, in its purest form, has always been Presbyterian. That it was so before the days of Abraham, we may safely conclude from the fact that it has been so since, although we have no definite information in reference to the form of the church before the calling of Abraham. When it was distinctly set up in visible form in the household of Abra-

ham, it was a Presbyterian Church. It continued to be such under the ministry of Christ and his apostles; and after the close of the period of inspiration, the purer part of the church of Christ continued through all the darkness of the middle ages to be Presbyterian, and to-day the great majority of those churches which are Evangelical, hold essentially to the faith and order of the Presbyterian Church.

These things may seem strange to many of you, because you have never given them serious attention, and therefore I ask you to follow me attentively for a little while, that I may show you that the church of God, as it existed in the days of Abraham, and in the days of the apostles, was essentially Presbyterian.

To do this we must first determine in our minds the question, what is a Presbyterian Church? To this I answer: It is a church whose government is vested, as its name implies, in PRESBYTERIES, or *bodies of Elders*. The word *Presbyter* means Elder, and any church which is governed exclusively by a body of Presbyters, or Elders, is, in this general

sense, a Presbyterian Church. It is a church which has no Bishops or Archbishops, in the sense in which these words are now employed by prelatical churches. Its ministers are all of the same rank and authority. They bear rule jointly, and not in subordination to one another.

To complete the idea of a Presbyterian Church, however, as it was originally instituted, and as it continues to exist, it is necessary that there shall be two kinds of Presbyters, or Elders. There are first the Ministers of the Gospel, who are sometimes called Teaching Elders, because they both rule and teach, or preach the gospel. Then there are the Elders chosen from among the people, and ordained to take part with the ministers in the government of the church. These are generally called Ruling Elders. That a church shall be Presbyterian, therefore, it is necessary that it shall be governed by these two kinds of Elders—Ministering Elders, and Ruling Elders—and shall have no other rulers in it. The Deacons in the Presbyterian Church are not rulers. They

have no authority in the government of the Church. They are only appointed to take care of its temporal interests.

Not only must a Presbyterian Church be governed exclusively by Elders; it is also essential that these Elders shall rule jointly, and not singly. They must not each one govern a particular part of the church, by his own independent authority; but they must govern through church courts, in which a greater or less number of them meet together, and deliberate, and decide upon questions of government. And these church courts must be so related to each other, that a question of discipline may be carried by appeal, or complaint, from a lower court to a higher one, representing a larger number of congregations, so that every part of the church shall, through these subordinated courts, be brought ultimately under the supervision and control of the whole.

In our own church, you know, we have first the Church Session, which is a court composed of the Pastor and Ruling Elders of a particular congregation. Then we have the Presby-

tery, composed of all the Ministers of a particular section of country, with a Ruling Elder from each church in the same. Then we have the Synod, composed of the Ministers and representatives of the churches in a larger section of country, comprising at least three Presbyteries. Then we have, lastly, the General Assembly, which is the highest court of all.

It is not necessary, in order that a church shall be Presbyterian, that it have precisely the same number of courts, or that they be called by precisely the same names. Many of the Reformed churches have what they call *classes*, which correspond to our Presbyteries, and a General Synod, instead of our General Assembly. The principle, however, is the same, namely, that the whole government of the Church is committed to courts composed of officers, who belong exclusively to the two classes of Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders; and that these courts sustain such a relation to each other, that the authority of a higher court is binding upon the lower ones, and thus, through them, the whole church is united together.

Now, this being the essential principle of Presbyterianism, it will not be difficult to show that the true church of God, in all the ages of the world, where it has been free from human innovations, has been essentially Presbyterian. Let us look first at the church of God under the Old Testament economy. The earliest record which we have of its permanent, visible organization, is that which is contained in the history of the calling of Abraham, and the constitution of a church within his house. This is the origin of the Jewish Church, which, for ages, was composed of the "seed of faithful Abraham." Now, let us ask the question: What officers were appointed in this visible church? The only officers we read of are the *Elders* of Abraham's house. One of these is distinctly mentioned (Gen. 24: 2,) as the servant and Elder of his house, (not the *eldest servant*, as it is translated in our version, but the *servant and Elder*.) We hear but little of these Elders during the lifetime of Abraham, as we hear but little of the constitution of the church; but afterwards they appear as distinctly recog-

nized officers of the house of God. Thus, when Moses was sent as the deliverer of God's people from the bondage of Egypt, he was directed (Ex. 3: 16,) to go and gather the "Elders of Israel" together, and deliver his message to them, as the divinely appointed rulers of the congregation. When he was sent to demand of Pharaoh the release of the children of Israel, he was instructed to take with him (Ex. 3: 18,) the "Elders of Israel," as the representatives of the chosen people. When in the wilderness Moses received the Law from the hands of Jehovah, on Mount Sinai, he wrote it, and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, and *the Elders* (Deut. 31: 9) as the spiritual rulers of God's people. And so in every instance in which any authority is exercised, or any discipline administered, we find these *Elders* referred to as the rulers in the Church. They are sometimes called "the Elders," sometimes "the Elders of Israel;" sometimes "the Elders of the congregation;" sometimes "the Elders of the people," but they appear on every

page of the history of the Jewish church, as its divinely appointed and recognized rulers.

The term *Elder* was not one simply of seniority, or of respect, as some have supposed. There were many Elders in age, who were not Elders in office. The term *Elder* implied official rank and position. Thus, when the Lord directed Moses to select out of the Elders of the tribes, seventy, who should constitute the highest council of the church, or, as we might say, its General Assembly, he instructed him (Numb. 11: 16,) to choose only those whom he certainly knew to be "Elders of the people, and officers over them."

The Jewish Church was, therefore, governed by Elders in the days of Moses. .It was so in the days of Joshua, when there were Elders in every city, (Josh. 7: 6; 20: 4; 24: 31, &c.,) and in the days of the Judges, (Judges 2: 7; 8: 16; Ruth 4: 2, &c.,) and in the days of Samuel, (1 Sam. 15: 30; 16: 4; &c.,) and in the days of David, (2 Sam. 5: 3; 17: 4, &c.,) and in the days of Elijah, and Elisha, (1 Kings 21: 11; 2 Kings 6: 32, &c.,) and in the days of Ezekiel,

(Ezek. 14: 1; 20: 1, &c.,) and in the days of Ezra, when the Old Testament canon was completed, (Ezra 10: 14, &c.,) and in the days when our Saviour appeared in the world, (Matt. 21: 23; 27: 1; Mark 8: 31; Luke 22: 52, &c.)

It is sometimes asserted that these Elders were only civil rulers, and not ecclesiastical; that they were officers of the State, and not of the Church; that in the Jewish commonwealth the priests had the exclusive authority in spiritual matters, and the Elders in secular matters. But, so far is this from being the case, that, as we shall soon see, the priests themselves, ruled, not as priests, but as Elders, and in every act of government were associated with the "Elders of the people;" while the Council of the Seventy, or the *Sanhedrim*, as it was afterwards called, was composed entirely of Elders, chosen from the different tribes of Israel. It is true, that these Elders had many civil duties to perform, because at that time the Church and State were temporarily united. But their functions as civil officers, resulting from this temporary connection, were only in-

cidental and temporary. Their highest functions were spiritual. They were pre-eminently ecclesiastical rulers. They had charge of all the interests of the "church of God, which was in the wilderness with the Angel which spake to Moses in the Mount Sinai." The fact that they had civil duties to perform, and secular questions to decide, no more proves that they were not church officers, than does the sitting of the Bishops of the Established Church of England in the House of Lords prove that they are not church officers.

In this sense, therefore, we may certainly say that the Old Testament Church was Presbyterian, inasmuch as its whole government was administered by *Elders*, chosen from among the people, and set apart to the office of rulers over the house of God. It was also Presbyterian in a second sense, and a very important one, namely, that these Elders were of two distinct kinds, Elders of the priests, and Elders of the people. This appears very clearly in the composition of the Sanhedrim, or highest council of the Jews. This body consisted *ex-*

clusively of Elders. (Numb. 11: 16.) These seventy Elders were chosen from "all the tribes of Israel." Those, therefore, from the tribe of Levi were, of course, of the priestly office. They were, therefore, both Elders and Priests, adding to their functions as rulers, those of ministers before the altars in the Tabernacle. To distinguish them from those Elders who were taken from the other tribes, they were called Priest Elders, or Elders of the Priests (2 Kings 19: 2; Is. 37: 2, &c.,) and afterwards Chief Priests, one being taken, in later days, from each of the twenty-four courses of priests in the Temple. We have, therefore, the two kinds of Elders, called in the Old Testament, "Elders of the Priests," and "Elders of the People," constituting together the "Elders of the Congregation," or the "Elders of Israel," called in the New Testament "the Chief Priests and Elders of the people."

Here, therefore, you have, under the Old Economy, two kinds of Elders, precisely corresponding to the two kinds in the Presbyterian Church at the present day. You have the

Elders of the people, who are chosen simply to rule, like our Ruling Elders; and you have the Elders of the Priests, who, in addition to their functions as rulers, have the higher and holier ones of administering before God in sacred things, as do the ministers of the gospel at the present day.

The identity of the two forms of government becomes still more apparent when you consider that, under the Old Economy, the Elders of Israel ruled, not singly, but jointly, in regularly organized church courts. No officer in the Jewish church had any such individual authority as that now exercised by a Bishop in the Episcopal Diocese, or a Presiding Elder in a Methodist District. In every city of the tribes there was a "Bench of Elders," which held its sessions in the gate of the city; and to this court of Elders all questions of government in the district were submitted. In the smaller cities, this court corresponded to our Presbyterian Church Sessions; in the larger to our Presbytery. There was another court, as we learn from Jewish writers, composed of

not less than twenty-three Elders, to which appeals could be made from the decision of the "Elders of the Gates," and which correspond in this respect to our Synod; while above all these was the Sanhedrim, or highest court of appeal, corresponding to our General Assembly.

Having thus seen that the Church, under the Old Economy, was essentially Presbyterian, let us see if it remained so after the coming of Christ. In order to understand this more clearly, we must look for a moment at some changes that had taken place during the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, and after their return. As, during the period of captivity, the Jews were cut off from all the privileges of the temple service, they had instituted—no doubt by divine direction—the system of synagogue worship; and as, after their return, there were great obstacles in the way of their attendance upon the annual feasts at Jerusalem, this system was still continued. In every city the Elders caused a house of worship to be erected, which was called a synagogue, or place of assemblage. There, on every Sabbath day, they

collected the people for religious worship. They were known as the Elders, or Rulers of the Synagogue. They had one of their number, who usually conducted public worship, and was called the Angel, or *Messenger* of the synagogue, because he read, or delivered God's message to the people. The services on Sabbath consisted of prayer, the singing of psalms and hymns, the reading of the Scriptures, exhortations, and collections of alms for the poor. When our Saviour appeared, therefore, He found, in every city of the Jews, a synagogue, with its bench of Elders, its ordinances of worship, and its provisions for the poor, as we have them in our congregations at the present day. When He went from city to city, He entered into their synagogues on the Sabbath day, and taught the people. He instructed his disciples to submit questions of discipline to the Church; that is, to these officers, who were its representatives. It is true that these church-sessions, if I may so call them, did not recognize, in most instances, the authority of our Saviour. "He came to His own, and His own received

Him not." The Elders joined with the Scribes and the Priests in putting him to death. But after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, on the day of Pentecost, there were many of these Jewish congregations, in which great numbers were converted to Christianity, so that the congregation was, in faith, no longer Jewish, but Christian. In these cases the synagogue became a church edifice. The Elders of the synagogue became Elders of the Christian Church. The rite of Baptism took the place of the rite of Circumcision. The Lord's Supper came in the room of the Passover. The first day of the week took the place of the Jewish Sabbath. Hymns to Christ as God mingled with the old synagogue anthems to Jehovah. The epistles of inspired Apostles were read along with the Old Testament Scriptures; and thus, by a transition as natural as it was impressive, the Jewish church became Christian, with all its essential features unchanged.

That this is no mere theory, or special pleading on the part of the advocates of Presbyterianism, will be evident to every attentive reader

of the following extracts from the works of one of the most learned and eminent prelates of the Episcopal Church. The late Archbishop Whately, of Dublin, as distinguished for his learning as for his integrity and piety, in his work, entitled "THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST DELINEATED, in which he traces the origin of the first Christian churches planted by apostolic hands, uses the following language. (See Ed. of Carter & Bros., New York, 1864, p. 29.)

"It appears highly probable—I might say morally certain—that wherever a Jewish synagogue existed, that was brought, the whole or the chief part of it, to embrace the gospel, the Apostles did not there so much *form* a Christian church (or congregation: Ecclesia,) as *make an existing congregation Christian,*" (the italics are his own,) "by introducing the Christian sacraments and worship, and establishing whatever regulations were requisite for the newly adopted faith, leaving the machinery (if I may so speak,) of government unchanged; the rulers of synagogues, elders and other officers, (whether spiritual or ecclesiastical, or

both,) being already provided in the existing institutions." "And," he continues, "it is likely that several of the earliest Christian churches did originate in this way; that is, that they were *converted synagogues*, which *became* Christian churches as soon as the members, or the main part of the members, acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah. * * * And when they founded a church in any of those cities in which (and such were probably a very large majority,) there was no Jewish synagogue that received the gospel, it is likely that they would conform, in a great measure, to the same model."

Here, then, is a statement from one of the highest functionaries, and most learned writers of the Episcopal Church, that the primitive Church was built upon the model of the Jewish synagogue, the government of which, as we have already seen, was distinctively Presbyterian. A careful study of the Acts and Epistles will lead us also to the conclusion that the Church of the Apostles was essentially Presbyterian. On their missionary voyages they

“ordained Elders in every city.” As in many of these cities there was only a small congregation of believers, the Elders ordained in them must have been Ruling Elders, as the language implies that there were several in one city. These Elders ruled in councils, or courts, that were distinctly Presbyterian. Timothy was ordained by “the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery.” The Synod which met at Jerusalem, (Acts, chap. 15,) was a Synod composed of the Apostles and Elders.

Even the Apostles sat in these councils as Elders. They constantly recognize themselves as such. “The Elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an Elder.” (1 Pet. 5: 1.) “The Elder unto the well beloved Gaius.” (3 John 1.) The office of Apostle was extraordinary and temporary. The office of Elder was essential and permanent. Hence, they speak of themselves as Elders; partakers of that sacred office and authority which ever abide in the Church.

The only officers of the New Testament Church who had authority to rule, were the

Elders. Under this generic title all the spiritual rulers of the church are arranged. Apostles, Evangelists, Bishops : all are Elders. An Elder who, like Peter, is also a divinely commissioned "witness of the sufferings of Christ," is an Apostle. An Elder who, like Titus, is sent forth with a divine commission to organize churches and ordain Elders, in every city, is an Evangelist. An Elder to whom is committed the oversight of a particular congregation, is a Bishop. Those Elders who are ordained simply to take part in the government of the Church, are Ruling Elders. Those Elders who, in addition to this function of ruling, have the high duty devolved upon them to preach the gospel, are Ministers of the Gospel. Thus it is that, in the New Testament, as in the Old, the *Presbyter* or *Elder* appears as the essential officer in the church ; and the two classes of Elders, "Elders that rule," and "Elders that both rule and labour in the word and doctrine." come clearly into view. As in the Jewish Church, so in the Apostolic Church we have *Minister-Elders*, and *People-Elders* : Elders

consecrated to the ministry, and Elders engaged in secular callings; these two kinds of Elders, meeting together in church courts, and by their joint authority, ruling and governing the Church.

It would be easy, if there were time, to show that the Elders were the highest permanent officers in the Apostolic Church; that the ministers of the gospel were all of the same rank, and that the Bishops spoken of in the New Testament were only the pastors of individual congregations, as in the Presbyterian Church at the present day; but I must pass over these points, and hasten forward to show that this Presbyterian form of government has continued in the purer branches of the Church from the days of the Apostles to the present time. It was not a great while after the death of the Apostles, until many innovations began to be introduced into the Church, and amongst others the form of government known as Diocesan Episcopacy, in which one minister exercises authority over a large number of ministers and churches. At first the pastor, or Bishop, of a

city church, assumed authority over the country churches around him. Then several cities came under the control of one Bishop, and at length these Bishops assumed a rank and authority greater than that of their brethren.

It was a long time, however, before these changes in the government of the Church became general. In the days of Augustine, who flourished during the latter part of the fourth century, and the first part of the fifth, there were, in that part of North Africa, which was subject to the Romans, five hundred orthodox Bishops, and four hundred Donatist Bishops, making nine hundred Bishops in all, or more than there are diocesan Bishops in the whole Roman Catholic Church at the present day. Now, if you will examine any map of the Roman Empire, and see what a narrow belt of territory in North Africa was subject to the Romans, you will see at once that these nine hundred Bishops were not Bishops of dioceses, but of congregations—Presbyterian Bishops, like the pastors of our churches now.

So also, in Ireland, in the days of St. Pat-

rick, (about the middle of the fifth century,) there were three hundred and sixty-five Bishops. Now, it is not probable that at that time Ireland was half as populous as it is now, and yet, though four-fifths of its population is now Roman Catholic, it has only four Archbishops, and twenty-four Bishops. These three hundred and sixty-five bishops, therefore, in the days of St. Patrick, were Presbyterian Bishops. They were pastors of churches, and St. Patrick himself was nothing more than a Presbyterian Evangelist, when he came into Ireland.

When, after the lapse of centuries, the great mass of the visible church had become corrupt in doctrine and in practice, and had substituted the inventions of man for the sure testimony of the Word of God, there were still two distinct branches of the visible church, in which the truth was preserved in its purity, and in which the simple principles of Presbyterianism were never abandoned for the more imposing forms of Prelacy.

The first of these two branches of the church which preserved the primitive form of Presby-

terian Church government, were the Waldenses, in the valleys of the Piedmont, in France. It is a historical fact, that admits of no question, that from a very remote period, earlier a great deal than the date of the establishment of the Romish Church, there dwelt in these valleys of the Alps and Pyrennees, a body of Christian people, who never submitted to the authority of the Church of Rome; who maintained the purity of primitive doctrine, and the simplicity of primitive worship; and who claimed that their doctrines and discipline had been transmitted in the direct line of their churches, from the days of the Apostles. They were called *Vallenses*, or *Wallenses*, inhabitants of the valleys; and down to the period of the Reformation, amidst all the fires of persecution kindled for them by the Romish Church, they remained unshaken in their faith, a band of godly men, protesting against the corruptions of the Church of Rome, claiming to be the true successors, in doctrine and polity, of the Apostles and early martyrs. To their early origin, their general orthodoxy, their simplicity of

worship, and their blameless lives, even their persecutors bear repeated and unequivocal testimony.

Now, all the records of these Waldensian Christians show that their church government was distinctly Presbyterian. If any of my young readers are in doubt upon this point, they have only to refer to Wharey's Church History, with the appendix by Dr. Samuel Miller, or to Smyth's Lectures on Presbytery and Prelacy, to find the evidences upon which this statement is based. Here, then, through all the dark ages, was one Church, at least, that continued to be Presbyterian in its government and order; a Church that sealed its testimony through centuries with the blood of its martyrs, and whose light was still burning in the valleys of the Piedmont, when Farel and Luther and Calvin kindled on the mountain tops the watch-fires of the Reformation.

There was still another witness for pure Presbyterianism through all these dark ages. I refer to the church of the ancient Culdees, in Scotland. To trace the origin of Christianity

in Scotland, we must go back almost to the very days of the Apostles; for Tertullian, who lived in the second century, tells us that those portions of Britain, which were inaccessible to the Romans, (by which he refers to the mountainous districts of Scotland,) had already submitted to Christ. The Culdee Church, however, owes its establishment to Columba, a native of Ireland, who, about the middle of the sixth century, went as an evangelist into the midst of the Picts of Scotland; and having converted great multitudes of them to Christianity, established upon the island of Iona a seminary of learning, for the purpose of training pastors for the churches which he had founded, and evangelists to carry the gospel into the benighted regions which he had not yet visited. These ministers were called *Culdees*, and the churches which they formed *Culdee churches*, the word Culdee being probably a corruption of the term *Cultor Dei*, a worshipper of the true God. This church of the Culdees, or worshippers of the true God, existed for many centuries without any connec-

tion with the Church of Rome. They refused to submit to the authority of the Romish clergy, and for many centuries, almost until the very dawn of the Reformation, maintained their ground against the encroachments of the Romish See. They opposed bitterly the doctrines of the Church of Rome concerning auricular confession, the celibacy of the clergy, the worship of saints, the real presence, &c. Their form of government was essentially Presbyterian. They had a Synod, or Assembly, to the members of which they gave the name of *Seniores* or *Elders*. These Elders, in their collective capacity, appointed and ordained to the ministry. Their ministers were all of equal rank. Those who had permanent charge of churches were called Bishops, but their office and authority were simply those of Pastors of churches, and they held no higher rank and exercised no greater authority than those of their brethren who sat with them in council.

It is scarcely necessary to say to the readers of this little volume that these principles of Presbyterianism, preserved by the Waldenses

and Culdees, until the time of the Reformation, and adopted by most of the Reformers, continue until the present day to lie at the basis of the government of the great body of the Reformed Churches. All those churches, on the continent of Europe, which, in distinction to the Lutheran, are known as the Reformed Churches, are distinctly Presbyterian in government. These large bodies of Christians, including the Reformed Churches of France, Switzerland, Germany and Holland, &c., are of the same order and discipline with our own Presbyterian Church; and when to these Presbyterian Churches on the continent we add the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales, and the various branches of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in this country, we have a collective body of Presbyterians in the world, amounting to 34,000,000 persons, embracing one half of the Evangelical Christians in the world, and outnumbering at least tenfold the members of those branches of the Evangelical

Church which deny the validity of Presbyterian ordination.

I have thus passed rapidly over the history of Presbyterianism, not in any controversial spirit, but to show to my young readers that there is every reason why they should cherish an intelligent love of the church of their fathers. It is pre-eminently the church of the Covenant. From the days when its foundations were laid in the covenant with Abraham, on behalf of himself and his seed, until the present time, its history has been the history of a solemn league and covenant with God against heresy and innovation in doctrine and discipline. Its covenants have been covenants sealed, like the first one, with blood. Those primitive martyrs, who were stoned, were sawn asunder, were slain with the sword, "of whom," as the apostle declares, "the world was not worthy," were witnesses for the pure principles of Presbyterianism. Those heroic Vallenses, who were hunted, like harts, from crag to crag of their native mountains, and were dashed in pieces by scores, as their persecutors hurled

them over the steep mountain precipice—those men who, for ten centuries, defied the malice and cunning of their persecutors, were Presbyterians. And those grand old Covenanters of Scotland, who loved not their lives to the death “for Christ, and for His crown,” were Presbyterians. The old church has come down through the ages, with her garments, like those of her glorious Lord, dyed in blood. The most illustrious Martyrs, the most renowned Confessors, the most valiant Reformers, are hers. Let us love her for what she is, and venerate her for what she has been. Peace be within her walls, and prosperity within her palaces. For our brethren and companions’ sakes let us now say, peace be within her. Because of the House of the Lord our God, let us ever seek her good.

My young friends, I take my leave of you at the close of this little volume, with feelings of deep and tender interest. It will not be a great while until we, who are now the workers in the vineyard, will be sleeping under the sod. This dear old church, with its covenants and sym-

bols, we must leave under God to you. Your spiritual character must leave its impression upon all the ordering and discipline of its courts. Oh, that the Lord may bless you, and enrich you with His grace, and prepare you to stand up like men under the responsibilities that are to devolve upon you, so that when, in a green old age, you transmit to others the legacy of Presbyterianism which you have received from us, you may transmit it in its purity, having your names honourably associated with the increase of its prosperity, and the extension of its influence throughout the world!

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”