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CONTENTS.

	PAGE.
LECTURE I.—Introductory.	1
LECTURE II.—Formation and Leading Characteristics of the Church as founded on the Day of Pentecost . . .	11
LECTURE III.—The Objects, Responsibilities, and Privileges of Church Fellowship.	31
LECTURE IV.—Gift and Office in the Church.	47
LECTURE V.—The Authority and Importance of the In- stitution of the Lord's Day.	65
APPENDIX :—Extracts from Ancient Authorities illustrative of the Condition of the Christian Church in the Early Ages.	85

New Testament Church Order.

"And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, - and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."—Acts ii. 42, &c.

LECTURE I.

EVERY thoughtful Christian must have observed the very marked difference between the mode in which the regulations of the Legal economy were given, and the manner in which matters of Church order are set before us in the New Testament. In the Legal economy every thing is laid down as matter of systematic arrangement. Stringent rules are prescribed for external observances of the minutest character, and the official dignity of the Levitical Priesthood is hedged about with a scrupulous and jealous care. No similar code of laws has been given for the guidance of the Christian Church. The old economy was emphatically a dispensation of the letter. Its services, its offices, its requirements, were mainly of an outward character. It was designed for one particular people, and intended for a temporary purpose. Limited to one locality and only introductory to a more perfect Economy, it resembled the mere scaffolding employed in a building, and destined to be entirely removed when the structure should be completed. Christianity, again, is, in its own nature, essentially heavenly and spiritual and universal. It is adapted to people of

every nation, kindred and tongue. It can never be superseded or set aside. It lays stress upon the external only in so far as that which is outward may be related to that which is an inward reality. It ignores all claims arising from natural descent, or from merely human appointment in the church of God. Hence the instructions contained in the New Testament, respecting matters of Church regulation, are not given in the form of an express code of ecclesiastical polity, but are to be gathered from historic facts, Apostolic examples, and leading principles. The assertions I have just made may seem to many of you so obvious as hardly to have needed to be thus formally enunciated. They are, indeed, in themselves, sufficiently obvious, and, it may be, familiar to most of us. And yet the whole history of Christianity, from the earliest ages down even to our own day, gives evidence of their having been, through all past periods, woefully overlooked, or even positively rejected. Does not every reader of Church-history well know what wasting controversies have been maintained, between the upholders of opposite systems of Church-government? Has not Romanism claimed to be the only true system? Has there not been volume upon volume written in defence of the Divine right of Episcopacy, and as many, on the other hand, devoted to the maintenance of the Divine right of Presbyterianism? Has not the Congregational system been attacked with equal bitterness by the champions of semi-Popish Canons, and by the advocates of the Westminster Confession? Mid such unseemly conflicts, how often has the truth itself been in danger of being torn in pieces? Let us hope that good men are at length

beginning to learn, that the essentials of the Christian faith do not depend upon our sentiments respecting the subjects of controversy to which I have been referring, but upon the one great mark of discipleship, the possession of the Spirit of Christ.

Still I do not mean to allow for a moment, that the New Testament contains no information respecting matters of Church order ; neither can I admit that we do right in neglecting reverent and prayerful enquiry into that which it teaches relative to any thing bearing on the external organization of Christian Societies. While we watch against dogmatism and all uncharitableness ; while we admit the difficulties connected with particular points of the enquiry ; while we heartily maintain the superior importance of that on which the very existence of personal Christianity depends ; yet, it most assuredly becomes us to gather up the scattered intimations which are given us, in the writings of Evangelists and Apostles, in relation to the order and discipline of the House of God. I may be regarded as advocating very latitudinarian opinions, but I am disposed readily to admit that there are passages in the inspired writings that seem, to some extent, to favour a species of Episcopacy ; others that may appear to support Presbyterianism ; very many, again, that uphold Congregationalism, and others, as clearly teaching what may be described as less systematic than any of the above organizations. My meaning may be rendered plain by a familiar illustration. Suppose three schoolboys were found by their teacher engaged in earnest controversy on the subject of the Political Constitution of Ancient Greece.

One of them maintains that Greece was a monarchy; another that it was governed by an aristocracy; and the third that it was a downright democracy, like that of America in modern times. Each of them could allege certain facts in the history of different states favourable to his own view of the subject, but, instructed by a patient and intelligent teacher, they would be led to see that no one of the three was entirely wrong, and yet none of them entirely correct. The mode of government in ancient Greece was different in different states, and even the same state at one period was under a regal, at another under a democratic form of rule. It appears to me that the early Churches were not, in all places, similarly constituted. The epistle to the Church at Corinth contains no reference to official persons bearing the name of Bishops or Elders, while the epistle to the Philippians expressly makes mention of the Bishops and Deacons as distinguished from the other members of the Church. I believe, in short, that, as time went on, even during the Apostolic age, the orderly organization of gathered believers became increasingly the rule, and that only in the very infancy of Christianity do we find evidence of the absence of Presidents or Overseers. By the help of God, I purpose, in this and some following Lectures, to trace this progress, and to consider the lessons which we are warranted to derive from it. My desire is, by Divine permission and enabling grace, to lay before you the origin of the Church—its component elements—the objects subserved by its high calling—and the mutual obligations involved by becoming connected with it. This course of exposition

will necessitate the sifting of a variety of interesting and important subjects of enquiry. The possession and employment of gifts for service ; the origin and end of office in the Church ; the authority of Church rulers, on what basis resting ; the claims advanced on behalf of the leading systems of ecclesiastical polity ; the observation of the first day of the week, and the celebration of the Lord's supper ; the exercise of Church discipline ; and, in fine, all other points bearing on the subject of New Testament Church Order.

It may be needful, in referring to the origin of the Church, to explain in what sense I employ the expression. I use it in relation to its formation and manifestation, as the constituted witness unto our Risen Saviour, on the day of the Pentecostal effusion of the Holy Spirit. The real origin of the Church reaches back to the Divine counsel and purpose before all worlds. It originated in the mind of the Eternal. The creation of man, and every successive step in the great scheme of Providence, as well as in the history of Redemption, may be regarded as bearing on that Divine purpose. From the period of Adam's restoration, through faith in the Promised Deliverer, God has never left Himself without worshippers on earth. In one sense there was a Patriarchal Church before the Flood. Noah's family constituted a Church in the Ark. All who, in every age, called upon God as the self-existent Jehovah, from the days of Noah to the call of Abraham, and from the call of Abraham to the deliverance out of Egypt, may be regarded as composing, in one sense, the Assembly of God. There was a Church, under Moses, in the Wilderness. This

Church continued throughout the whole history of the chosen people until the appearing of the promised Christ. But the nearest specimen, or earnest, of the Church, that was to be fully formed on the day of Pentecost, was exhibited in the little company gathered by the Lord Himself during the days of His sojourning on earth. Still my present purpose requires me to restrict the notice of the term to the Church as described in this second chapter of the Acts, and as, from that time down to the present day, amidst all the variations of its outward history, still substantially existing among men. For this great event, the previous dealings of God with man, as recorded in the inspired history, constituted a consistent course of preparation. Even a Heathen Poet could say of the traditionary legends, respecting the ancient heroes of his nation,—“Thus was the counsel of the Supreme God fulfilled :” thereby implying, and that by the very form of the expression, that even those circumstances, that were apparently in favour of the enemies of Greece, were all, in the hands of the Supreme object of worship, over-ruled for the accomplishment of the contrary design. But there were also other Divine preparatives. The very constitution of humanity,—the instincts and tendencies—the aspirations and necessities of man, all are in essential conformity with the principle of Church association. “It is not good that man should be alone.” “Two are better than one.” “Woe unto him who is alone when he falleth.” These Divine sayings, and thousands of similar utterances, find an echo in the inmost Spirit of every child of Adam. The yearning after fellowship with kindred hearts, if under the dominion of ignorance and

sinful passion, may lead astray from happiness and God ; but the blessed Spirit operating in believers sanctifies that yearning, and gratifies, while it elevates, the instinctive tendency. Christianity, in the first instance, takes up each sinful child of humanity, and deals with him alone. In this respect religion is pre-eminently a matter between God and each individual conscience. Our union to Him, in the person of His beloved Son, is the nearest, the most essential, the most fundamental of all conceivable relationships. On this our salvation rests. Were a shipwrecked mariner, on some desert island, to be converted by the reading of a Bible or a Tract, and then to depart without any connexion with his fellow Christians, or any reception of Christian ordinances, who would, for a moment, think of his ultimate salvation being thereby any-wise interfered with? Still, under ordinary circumstances, it is evidently in accordance with God's revealed will, and in admirable correspondence with man's felt necessity, that true believers in Christ should have fellowship together. For this the Church has been provided, as the fold for the little flock to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom. The third and immediate preparative for the Church's manifestation consisted in the circumstances and spiritual condition of those who had, previously to the day of Pentecost, become the disciples of the Saviour. They had listened to His parting words of comfort, instruction, and promise ; they had seen Him, after His resurrection, during the period elapsing between that event and His ascension into Heaven ; they had gazed upwards as He rose from the earth and soared on His

heavenly journey, till the cloud received Him out of their sight ; they had attended to His directions not to depart from Jerusalem until they should be endued with power from on high ; they had devoted the interval of expectancy to waiting upon God in believing prayer ; and now that the day had come on which they evidently anticipated the fulfilment of His promise, and the answer to their prayers,—they were all assembled together with one accord, in one place. Mark what a variety of announcements heralded the coming of the Comforter, and the consequent formation of the Church of God. Let the consideration of such a long course of divinely ordered preparations enhance our appreciation of the dignity connected with having a name and a place among His people. Let no position of earthly distinction be so highly prized by us as that of a Christian ; and no association regarded as of higher value than that fellowship of which Jesus is the Head.

I should now go on to lay before you the instrumentality employed in the formation of the Church ; the agency by which that instrumentality was made effectual, and the actual result as exhibited in the spiritual characteristics of those who composed the earliest Christian assembly, as described in the Acts of the Apostles. But I judge it well to defer the entering upon those important topics till another opportunity. Meanwhile let me remind you of some of the benefits which we may hope to derive from examining afresh the whole subject of Church Order, in the light of the New Testament. Should any of us have received our views on the subject merely on the authority of others, without ever having given ourselves to the

investigation of Scripture testimony concerning it, surely it is high time that we should have our minds directed to those passages of the Word of God, bearing on the enquiry, and which we have hitherto either entirely neglected, or read without any real interest. Even those of us who may have sought to make up our minds respecting points of Church Order, by reference to the teaching of the inspired writers, may find that further enquiry may serve, to some extent, to modify the conclusions to which we formerly arrived. It will be a still more satisfactory result, if we find that convictions already held become more confirmed by fuller examination. There can no evil arise from an honest and reverential appeal to the testimony of Evangelists and Apostles. As we review the scattered hints and brief intimations, or the recorded facts and authoritative directions, contained in the sacred narratives or the Apostolic epistles, we may hope to find some help in the right use of the privileges, and some guidance in the discharge of the responsibilities connected with Church-fellowship. We may be aided in the clearer apprehension of our own place in the body, and in the more effective exertion of our capacities of service, both towards our fellow believers and towards those who are yet indifferent to the truth.

New Testament Church Order.

LECTURE II.

IN my former lecture, after some introductory observations, I explained the restricted sense in which I intended, in these discourses, to employ the term "Church," and also pointed out some of the preparations and earnestness leading onwards to its full manifestation, as the witness unto the Risen Saviour, on the day of Pentecost.

I now go on to consider its origin or formation as recorded in this second of the Acts. Three enquiries are suggested by this part of our subject.

I. By what outward instrumentality was this formation effected?

II. By what internal energy was that instrumentality accompanied?

III. What were the leading characteristics of the Church immediately after its formation?

These enquiries are important not merely as leading to a fuller appreciation of the power of Divine grace exhibited in those early days, but as fitted to instruct us in the means suitable to be employed, in all ages, for planting the Gospel in localities which it has not yet reached, and in promoting its prosperity and diffusion where it is already known. Amidst certain diversities in matters of a circum-

stantial nature, there must be an essential correspondency in the Divine modes of operation. Hence the interest attaching to the more prominent features of the earliest condition of the Church.

(1.) First, then, I remark that those who were employed as the instruments of effecting so memorable a result on the day of Pentecost, were men of like infirmities with ourselves, and the one who took the foremost place was very far from having exhibited any thing like marked superiority over his fellow-believers in the course of his previous history. We may say of the chosen disciples,—to whom the term Apostle was specially applied,—that they appear to have been men of ordinary mental power,—distinguished for honesty and good sense, and qualified to fill the position of witnesses to facts, rather than to invent theories, or to gather a crowd of followers after them. That which mainly distinguished them from the mass of their countrymen consisted in their having had their eyes opened to discover in Jesus of Nazareth the Christ of God, and in their having had grace to cling to Him at the risk of losing every thing for His sake. A well grounded conviction of the validity of His claims, and hearts to devote themselves to His service, may be regarded as constituting their primary qualifications for that place of distinction which the Saviour had assigned them. In tracing their history, as recorded by the Evangelists—two of whom were themselves apostles—we find that, during our Lord's sojourn on earth, they had given repeated proofs of their natural infirmities, their ignorance of Divine truth, their slowness of Spiritual apprehension, and their tendency to desire great things

for themselves. No thoughtful reader can fail to perceive the marked contrast between the Master and those who enjoyed, in the most especial sense, the benefit of His instructions and example; and none can help being struck by the sudden elevation of character by which they were distinguished immediately after their Lord had been taken from them. Very soon after He had been removed out of their sight, their faith in His person and in His promises seemed to become far more than a substitute for their enjoyment of His bodily presence; it penetrated, with a more piercing glance, into the unseen heavenly realities, and took in a more enlarged sphere of Divine contemplation. Ease, reputation, comfort, life itself—all were deliberately hazarded so that they might enter upon, and ultimately complete the fulfilment of that mission which had been entrusted to them by Him whom they saw by faith seated at the right hand of God, and of whom they delighted to testify that God had made Him both Lord and Christ.

That men of ordinary mental power, and no wise naturally distinguished by their freedom from human infirmity, were selected for being, instrumentally, the founders of the Christian Church, is a fact full of significance, and pregnant with instruction and encouragement to all who desire to be engaged in serving God in the gospel of His Son. We may be conscious of only average ability; we may have often detected in ourselves the proofs of liability to error, misapprehension, frailty and sin; yet, if we truly trust in the Saviour, if we have turned to Him with our hearts, if we are striving, by His grace, to watch and pray continually

against yielding to the tempter, if we honestly seek to be used in the accomplishment of His gracious purposes, surely we may expect help from on high. Every man's offering is accepted "according to what he hath, and not according to what he hath not." The wisdom, goodness and gracious condescension of God, are all illustrated by the fact to which we have been led, by our subject, to direct your thoughts.

(2.) Although the instrumentality thus employed was that of ordinary and erring men, yet their whole history, from the time of their connexion with Jesus, assisted in fitting them for the place they were called to fill. They were, both by their sincerity and by their opportunities, eminently qualified for that position. Their faults were not of such a character as, in any-wise, to impair their competency as witnesses. Christianity is not founded on theory and speculation, but on substantial facts. To these facts it was the calling of the Apostles, to bear testimony before all men. They testified "that which they had heard, which they had seen with their eyes, which they had looked upon and their hands had handled, of the Word of life." By the teachings of their Risen Lord, and by the help of the Divine Spirit, they were enabled to deduce, from those facts, great leading truths concerning "things which eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, but which God had revealed unto them by His Spirit." Still the basis was one of actual fact. The birth, life, teaching, miracles, death, resurrection and ascension of Him of whom they testified, were all matters of history. Either the first preachers and ministers of the Word were competent and

trustworthy, or they were not. If they were, then Christianity must be of God; if they were not, then Christianity must have originated either in fanaticism or imposture. There is no intermediate ground between receiving the facts to which the Apostles testified, and regarding the Gospel as a cunningly devised fable. All this is obvious enough, and yet, in our own day, men of ingenious minds and professedly Christian character are diligently seeking to explain away the testimony of Apostles and the Divine authority of Scripture, and yet would have us to give them credit for their profession of faith in Christianity. A Bishop of the Church of England—and still retaining possession of his office,—has, as many of you are aware, recently published a volume attempting to prove that the history of the Exodus, as professedly written by Moses, is utterly untrustworthy, and that the reason why our Lord and His Apostles sanctioned that account as being of Divine authority was because they knew no better. Certainly of all inconsistent theories this is one of the most monstrous. Is it possible to believe that Christ verily knew what was in man; that he was able to unveil the secrets of the unseen world; to describe the solemnities of the judgment and the hidden things of eternity; and yet that, as a Teacher sent from God, and as one filled with the Spirit of truth,—yea, as One who came forth from His own proper place, in the bosom of the Father, to reveal that Father unto the hearts of men—He was incapable of distinguishing between writings of Divine authority and fictitious legends, as destitute of historic truth as the fables of Hesiod or Homer?

I have no sympathy with those who would stigmatize the writer of that most singular production by terms of opprobrium. I believe him to be an able, and, very probably, an amiable man. I do not believe that he is consciously guilty of any thing of a treacherous or dishonourable character; I leave him to be judged by his own Master. My prayer to God is that he may be delivered from what I hold to be most dangerous error, and I am thankful that the position he has taken is so utterly untenable, and that his professed allegiance to Christ is so utterly inconsistent with his total want of reverence for Christ's authority as a teacher, that it is hardly possible for any man of sound mind and average information to give in his adherence to the views I have thus briefly referred to. Of this much one may be fully assured, that the language of the Apostolic Witnesses was uttered in tones of confidence and authority. They never once refer to the Old Testament, as if they had any doubt respecting the validity of its testimony; nor, in proclaiming the great fact of their Master's resurrection, do they ever, for one moment, allow that they themselves might have been the subjects of imposition or mistake.

II. Having thus noticed the nature of the instrumentality employed in the formation of the Pentecostal Church, I go on to remind you of the Divine power by which that instrumentality was accompanied, and by which it was rendered effective. The accompanying power of the Blessed Spirit was manifested both by outward signs, and inward energy. The rushing wind; the tongues of flame; the spiritual utterances, in languages which the speakers had never learned; were evidently intended, besides other

designs, as constituting a call upon the attention of those who might otherwise have been utterly disinclined even to listen to the apostolic testimony. But so stupendous and undeniable a miracle was naturally adapted to summon multitudes together, and thus, to Peter and his fellow-labourers, there was afforded the opportunity of addressing a large body of their countrymen under circumstances which almost ensured earnest and attentive listeners. The greater part of those thus brought together seemed to be deeply impressed by what their ears heard, while some resented the impression and expressed themselves in words of bitter mockery and scorn. Simon Peter embraced the opportunity; he had got an audience naturally stirred up to enquiry, and most willing to hear any credible explanation of the extraordinary scene before them, and, as he spoke, the Divine Spirit opened the hearts of thousands to receive his statements of fact, and his expositions of prophecy. But we are not to infer that the miraculous manifestations were the immediate means of effecting the conversion of the hearers. Those manifestations aroused attention, but do not seem to have directly led to the great result. The truth itself, uttered by one fully alive to its importance, and impressed upon the hearts of the hearers by the inward energy of the Divine Spirit, led to the exclamation of convicted souls, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Such, in all ages, has been the general mode of God's dealing in the accomplishment of the purposes of His grace. He makes use of external circumstances, Gospel testimony, and Divine operation. Sometimes by arousing curiosity, at other times by the

stroke of affliction, or by the pressure of inward distress, he imparts a disposition to attend to the testimony concerning Christ. The attention having been gained, the heart is then opened to receive that testimony, and the sinner accepts the offered Saviour. The 36th verse of this second chapter contains the comprehensive summary of that truth which the Apostle had expounded.

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made both Lord and Christ that same Jesus whom ye crucified." The reception of such a declaration must necessarily have produced conviction of sin. The estimate which God had of Jesus was thus put in direct antagonism to the estimate which they had formed of Him. They had dealt with Jesus as a malefactor and impostor; God had raised that same Jesus to His own right hand. They had awarded Him a cross; God had awarded Him a throne. It followed, by necessary consequence, that their wills, their thoughts, their whole course of action, had been entirely opposed to the mind of that God whom they professed to worship. The term crucified, with which Peter's address concluded, reminded them of the nails which had pierced the hands and the feet of Him whom God had received up into glory; and as they thought of what their innocent victim had endured, they could not fail to dread the consequences of their crime.

Thus far the address had been fitted to alarm rather than to encourage; adapted to produce conviction rather than conversion. There was much in the statements of the Apostle calculated to excite fears of coming judgment, rather than to call forth hopes of immediate forgiveness.

But, after the expression of a sense of sin had manifested the effect of the testimony upon the hearts of the hearers, the proclamation of Divine grace immediately followed. It is not easy to convey, by one English term, the exact force of the word with which the exhortation of the Apostle commences. "Repent," in this passage at least, evidently includes faith. It is well defined by Dean Alford, thus :-- "The word imports change of mind. Here, change, from thinking Jesus an impostor, and scorning Him as one crucified, to being baptized in His name, and looking to Him for remission of sins, and the gift of the Spirit." He then goes on to express, in the strougest language, his condemnation of the Rhemish Translation in this important passage. The term is there translated "do penance," a rendering which conveys a sense entirely at variance with the meaning of the original, and utterly obscures the internal character of that change which the Greek term is employed to describe. The exhortations which followed are only referred to in the briefest manner, and the historian seems to hasten onward to describe the result,—the glad reception of the Word, the corresponding profession, and the characteristic features of the collective believers consequent upon their faith in the crucified Saviour.

We have thus sought rapidly to trace the instrumentality employed in the formation of the Christian church, and the power by which that instrumentality was made efficacious. Surely it is intended that we should regard all this not merely as an historical record, but as "written for our example." The ministers of Christ, in later times, cannot

possess the authority or qualifications of apostles. Since the last of those chosen witnesses was removed from earth, none can claim the high distinction of having seen the risen Saviour. None can say with the great Apostle of the Gentiles, "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" But still we may, though at a far off distance, seek to follow in their footsteps. No Christian is debarred from seeking to resemble them in the possession of those inward graces of the Spirit whereby they were rendered fit for the Master's use. In spiritual knowledge, in believing prayer, in earnest zeal, in practical conviction, we may resemble Peter and the rest of those early ministers of the Word, to whom was granted the lofty privilege of being used by Divine grace in laying the foundation of the Church. Those thus distinguished by the great Head of the whole spiritual body were not only endowed with knowledge of the facts to which they were called to bear witness, but, in connexion with that knowledge, their whole souls were elevated, enlarged, and sanctified by the power of Divine grace. They were witnesses, but not merely witnesses. Their whole hearts embraced the truth which they were charged to proclaim to their fellow men. They were evidently empowered to speak with the authority of men who had not merely received a commission to execute a certain work, but as those who had themselves been brought into sympathy with the mind of God in reference to its accomplishment. They who would seek in modern days to carry on, in any measure, the cause to which the Apostles were devoted, must cultivate an habitual sense of dependence leading to persevering prayer. They must, above all things, honour

the Divine Spirit, and trust to His effectual agency for the success of their labours. No knowledge, even of Scripture, no natural capabilities, no acquired attainments, must be allowed to supersede the necessity of constant waiting upon God for the supply of power from on High. The training of a university, or the humbler aid of a Dissenting college, will be found miserable substitutes for the teaching of the Spirit, and the energy of His inward operations. Discourses may be prepared with assiduous care, and delivered with propriety and animation ; crowds of interested listeners may be attracted by the natural endowments of the preacher, and yet he may be unto his hearers “as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument, for they hear his words but they do them not.”

By suited instrumentality, and by the energy of the blessed Spirit, was the foundation of the Spiritual building laid at first, and by similar means must the building be carried on. On the one hand, there is a danger lest men of ardent feelings, but defective knowledge, should so act as to lead away their hearers, under the influence of excited feelings, into paths of extravagance and folly ; on the other hand, there has ever been the still commoner danger lest men should enter upon the work of the Christian ministry on the strength of a course of education, supposed to be a necessary preparation for so high a service. Every thing is beautiful in its season. Let its own order be assigned to each. First let there be the higher qualifications of simple faith, and conscious dependence upon the strength that cometh from above ; and then let all the helps, connected

with mental attainments and diligent study of the Scriptures, be rendered available for the furtherance of the Gospel.

III. I would now, in conclusion, briefly direct your minds to the description of the Church immediately after its formation on the day of Pentecost.

And first let me observe how much in the condition of the Church, in the earliest period of its history, was the result rather of *Spiritual instinct* than of *legal regulation*. They believed—they confessed the Saviour in whom they trusted—they felt themselves drawn together by the impulse of a Divine relationship, and the power of new and heavenly affections. Every step seemed to follow as the natural consequence of the one act by which they received Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God.

We read nothing, in the commencement of the earliest Church history, of any others holding an official position, except the Apostles. Far less can we discover any trace of those rival systems of ecclesiastical polity which have occasioned so much controversy, for many centuries, throughout nominal Christendom. In that time of genuine faith and true prosperity, the internal regulated the external. The manifested results all sprung from unseen workings in the hearts of individual believers. True faith naturally led to confession, and a common confession legitimately called forth mutual sympathy. Affection led to association. Church-fellowship was not the fruit of obedience to a rule so much as the gratification of a heaven-born instinct. This manifested union must have wrought very effectually upon those by whom they were surrounded. The warmth of holy affection which knit together those

who were one in Jesus, irradiated their countenances with the glow of a heavenly gladness which the men of the world had never experienced, and which earth had never witnessed before.

Well has the poet of Methodism entered into the spirit of the inspired record, in his description of the early Church :—

Happy the souls that first believed,
To Jesus, and each other cleaved ;
Join'd by the unction from above,
In mystic fellowship of love.

Meek, simple followers of the Lamb,
They lived and spake and thought the same ;
They joyfully conspired to raise
Their ceaseless sacrifice of praise.

With grace abundantly endued,
A pure, believing multitude ;
They all were of one heart and soul,
And only love inspired the whole.

O what an age of golden days !
O what a choice, peculiar race !
Washed in the Lamb's all-cleansing blood,
Anointed kings and priests to God !

Thus far the description ; let us unite in the prayer that follows :—

The gates of hell cannot prevail ;
The church on earth can never fail ;
Ah ! join me to thy secret ones !
Ah ! gather all thy living stones !

Scattered o'er all the earth they lie,
 Till Thou collect them with Thine eye !
 Draw by the music of Thy name,
 And charm into a beauteous frame.

For this the pleading Spirit groans,
 And cries in all Thy banished ones ;
 Greatest of gifts, Thy love impart,
 And make us of one mind and heart.

Join every soul that looks to Thee,
 In bonds of perfect charity;
 Now, Lord, the glorious fulness give,
 And all in all for ever live.

A more fully developed church-organization and official position were introduced as occasion called for them. Common life in Christ was the one essential requisite for fellowship. Organization, ministry, discipline, derived all their importance from their relation to that life and its healthy manifestation. Order was secondary to spiritual vitality; legitimate and desirable, if it aided that, but worse than worthless if permitted to hinder its vigour or its growth. We hear nothing at first of Presbyters or Overseers, and the office of the Deaconship appears to have been suggested by the pressure of urgent necessity. I do not mean to insinuate that such a necessity is to be regarded as a reason for regret. That which apostolic wisdom instituted, and which all experience proves to be needful, must be in accordance with the mind of Christ. Just as the possession of spiritual graces led to corresponding developments of conduct and character, so the possession of spiritual gifts led to the development of rulers, teachers and evangelists,

during the apostolic period. But let us ever remember that personal reception of Christ is the foundation of every thing. On this depends the very existence of church-communion, and on church-communion is founded scriptural Church Order.

Should I be permitted to continue these Lectures I purpose, by Divine help, to lay before you what I have been able to gather, from many years study of the New Testament Scriptures, respecting the several questions bearing on church organization. Meanwhile, let me recommend you to study the subject for yourselves, that you may be the better qualified for testing all that I may advance by the only standard from which, among all Protestant Christians, there is no appeal.

Hitherto I have been seeking to lay a good foundation for that which is to follow. Thus far I have been able, almost entirely, to keep clear of matters likely to lead to subjects of controversy. I trust that most Christians,—to whatever external section of our common Christianity they may belong,—would accord, in the main, with the sentiments I have expressed. Diversity of judgment on points of ecclesiastical polity must not be allowed to interfere with this substantial agreement on matters of essential moment. I believe that there are instructions in reference to church-order to be found in the New Testament, and that Scriptural views on such subjects have an important bearing on edification and progress ; but I do not believe that they are essentially connected with spiritual life. I may be unable to find in the example or in the teaching of the apostles any evidence of the Divine right either of Episcopacy or

Presbyterianism, but, surely, this is no reason why the adherents of either form of church government should exclude me, or any other Christian differing from themselves, from the privilege of Christian association. Even during the Apostolic period there were differences of judgment respecting "days and meats"—differences which Paul himself did not authoritatively determine, but, in regard to which, he exhorted his readers to the exercise of mutual forbearance. It were, indeed, a goodly and gladdening sight once more to look upon an undivided church, but some of the greatest obstacles to the realization of such a hope arise from the tendency of every dominant system to impose its own organization upon all other Christian communities. Ruskin, one of the most eloquent writers of modern times, and a man of distinguished genius, in a work on Church Order, published some years ago, although writing with a view to bring about unity among the several bodies of Christians, hazards the assertion that, inasmuch as the Scripture evidently sanctions the appointment of bishops, and Presbyterianism rejects such officials, in this particular the Scotch Presbyterianism should adapt itself to the English Episcopacy. Had the writer been acquainted with the New Testament use of the term, rendered "Bishop," he would have seen the utter fallacy of such a mode of reasoning. A very slight acquaintance with the writings of our best critics would have shewed him how entirely distinct is the meaning of the Greek word from the sense in which our word bishop is understood by a mere English reader. The testimony of the learned Dean of Canterbury, on such a subject, will hardly be objected to by

any well-informed student of Scriptura. In reference to the rendering, "overseers," (Acts xx., v. 28.), the Dean makes the following pertinent and candid statement :—

"The English Version has hardly dealt fairly in this case with the sacred Text, in rendering *ἐπίσκοποι* "overseers," whereas it ought there, as in all other places, to have been bishops, that the fact of *elders and bishops having been originally and apostolically synonymous* might be apparent to the ordinary English reader." *

In his commentary on the Pastoral Epistles he expresses himself still more strongly, and proposes a still more thorough alteration in our common translation. He would render I. Tim., iii., 1., "if any man seeks the

* The language of the learned Dean of Canterbury, in his note on Acts xx., 28, seems to imply a measure of censure on our translators, as if they had deliberately intended to obscure the fact "that *Elders and Bishops were originally and Apostolically synonymous*." It is just possible that he may not have observed that the rendering "overseers" originated with Tyndale. In all the other instances, Philip. i., 1; 1 Tim. iii., 2; Tit. i., 7; and 1 Pet. ii., 27, Tyndale employs the term "bishop." In this he has been followed by the Geneva, 1557, and also in that of 1560. The Bishops' Bible of 1568 followed the example of the previous translations, and our last translators are only responsible for leaving uncorrected the unintentional misrepresentation of the earlier versions. Nobody could for a moment suppose that Tyndale had any purpose to serve by giving "overseers" instead of bishops. He probably meant to call the attention of the reader to the correspondency between the force of the term and the exhortation of the Apostle. I believe that the study of the early English versions has been by far too much neglected even by some of our most accomplished students of the Greek Testament. I would recommend, to all who are familiar with the Original Scriptures, to combine, with the study of them, repeated examinations of the versions of Tyndale and his successors.

overseership," and adds, in conformation of the amendment, the following statement: "It is merely laying a trap for misunderstanding to render the word, at this time of the church's history, 'the office of a bishop.' The *ἐπίσκοποι* (bishops) of the New Testament have officially nothing in common with our bishops. In my note on Acts xx., 17, I have stated that the English Version ought to have been consistent with itself, and to have rendered *ἐπίσκοποι* every where bishops, not bishops and overseers, as suited ecclesiastical prejudices. But it would be better to adopt the other alternative, and always to render *ἐπίσκοποι* "overseers." Thus we should avoid any chance of identifying it with a present and different office, and take refuge in the meaning of the word itself, which, at the same time, bears an important testimony to the duties of the post."

I may say, without boasting, that, after some forty years acquaintance with the Greek Testament, I did not need for myself to have been taught by the Dean the misrepresentation in our English Version, but I quote his criticism, partly, because of his very high reputation as a scholar, and, partly, because his position, as an eminent dignitary of the Church of England, serves to give weight to his testimony. Those who might refuse to yield attention to any statements emanating from scholars outside the pale of the Establishment, may have their minds stirred up to enquiry when they find that the most learned and distinguished critics, in their own communion, are at one with all other qualified scholars in maintaining that the office of the eldership was identical with that of those to whom the term bishop is applied in our English Bible. The term "elder" probably

originated in a reference to their *seniority*; the term "overseer" more exactly designated the *duties* which were involved in their position. The most accomplished Greek scholar in Europe could not point out any single word in the Greek language which, at the time when the New Testament was written, could have been employed, with accuracy, to represent the meaning of the term bishop, as understood in England. Just as that copious language, although richly furnished with a vocabulary of sixty or seventy thousand words, contains no pure Greek term for "a candle," because candles were not in use among the Greeks, so the office of a bishop, as that office exists in the Church of England, could not have had at that time an appropriate designation in Greek, simply because the office itself, in New Testament times, was unknown.

This apparent digression may be forgiven, inasmuch as it may serve to illustrate the importance of accurate acquaintance with the very words of Scripture. If a man of such mental powers as Mr. Ruskin could make such a palpable mistake, simply from inattention to the exact meaning of one single term,—how many thousands of inferior minds may have been misled in the same way?

I believe that the leading systems of Church government which have prevailed throughout Christendom since the period of the Reformation, all need to be re-examined in the light of Scripture.

In all such systems there is a constant danger lest human arrangements supersede or even repress spiritual qualifications. Some of the greatest helps towards the promotion of Christian unity, would be found in an increased earnest-

ness of desire to bring every thing to the test of Scripture ; a careful, diligent and reverential study of its contents, and a wide spread resolution, and deep seated purpose, to hold fast the fundamental truths of revelation, and to bear with one another in every point of difference concerning which forbearance would be lawful. Only when matters of essential truth are in peril, ought forbearance to give way to the imperative obligation of faithfulness to Christ.

All who are born of God are essentially one. That oneness may never be fully manifested on earth, but we may be always approximating to its manifestation. Meanwhile by patiently waiting upon God,—by carefully attending to the principles, instructions, and examples, set before us in His word,—we may help on a condition of things in which all that is of God may have free scope for its exercise, and that which is of a contrary character may be restrained and kept under. Meanwhile let us watch against a self-conceited and superficial dogmatism, and let us ever firmly protest against the assumption of those who, by reason of what they regard as a more Scriptural mode of meeting than that adopted by other Christians, are disposed to arrogate to themselves the high prerogative of being the only true Church upon earth. Let us rather cherish the far more comforting and exhilarating conviction that all who truly love the Saviour compose His church, and that all such, being united to Him now, shall continue to be united to Him, and to each other, throughout the ages of eternity.

New Testament Church Order.

LECTURE III.

IN my last lecture I endeavoured to illustrate and apply the deeply interesting narrative contained in the early part of the Acts of the Apostles, respecting the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Through that Divine agency was the Apostolic Church formed at first, and, by the same agency and guidance, was it afterwards more fully constituted. To that more fully developed constitution, as set before us in the New Testament, I purpose now to direct your attention.

In order to the exact investigation of any subject of enquiry, it is requisite that it should be regarded in separation from that which is merely of an adventitious character. The attention must be fixed upon that which is essential. If, therefore, we would rightly enquire into the constitution of the church, as that constitution may be gathered from the New Testament, it will be well, for the time, to keep our minds free from being distracted by reference to those controversies which derive their origin from conditions and modes of church polity introduced at a later period, and grounded merely on fallible authority. Brevity, simplicity, and clearness, will be greatly subserved by our limiting ourselves, for the present, to those princi-

ples, examples, or direct instructions, supplied by the pages of the New Testament. This mode of conducting the enquiry will also, I am persuaded, be helpful in leading to satisfactory results.

It will be of importance, in relation to this part of our subject, to ascertain, in the first place, to what class of persons the privileges of church communion legitimately belong. It appears to me that the answer to this enquiry may be gathered from the language employed by the sacred historian in the passage of the Acts to which I have had occasion so repeatedly to refer*—"They that gladly received the Word were baptized." Those who truly received the Apostolic testimony concerning Christ acted in accordance with the directions given by Peter, and on the ground of their professing faith in Jesus, were received into the fellowship of His Church.

I do not assert that, even in the earliest period, none but genuine believers were received into the Christian community. Self-deceivers or hypocrites, bearing the outward semblance of disciples, have, from the very beginning, crept into the professing church. The normal idea of the Church is one thing; the actual carrying out of that idea is another. It cannot be right, in the sight of God, that any who are still in a state of enmity against Christ should

* I am quite aware that the adverb "ἀσμένως" (gladly) found in the Received Text from which our translation was made, is of no authority, inasmuch as the best MSS. do not contain it. Still the verb ἀποδέχομαι without any addition, does of itself convey the idea of "welcoming," "embracing," "accepting with gladness." I therefore retain the rendering of our common version as expressing the sense of the critical texts.

profess to receive Him as their Saviour and Lord; but except Christians were endowed with the power of infallibly determining the spiritual condition of their fellow-men, it would be impossible to secure the fellowship of believers against such as appear to the eye of man to be possessors of genuine faith. Still this fact nowise interferes with the exercise of godly disciplina. It is plain, from the directions of Paul, (I. Corinthians v.) and other passages, that those who, after having entered into fellowship, were convicted of acting in manifest inconsistency with their profession, were to be excluded. This seems to me the simple and Scriptural solution of a difficulty suggested by those who maintain that all who call themselves by the name of Christ have a right to be regarded as members of His Church, on the ground that you cannot secure absolute purity of communion. We do not assert that we can secure absolute purity of communion; but we do assert that we are bound to separate from our fellowship all who, in their habitual practice, deny the authority of Him whom they profess to honour. Were our Queen to be attacked by a usurper, and driven from the throne of these realms, so as to be compelled for a time to take shelter in some foreign land, she would still reign as sovereign in the hearts of all her loyal subjects. Were all those who retained their allegiance to combine together in seeking the restoration of their rightful sovereign, and the expulsion of the usurper, what class of persons would legitimately belong to such a combination? Assuredly none but those whose hearts beat true to their absent queen. It might happen that some secret adherents of the usurper might, for their own evil purposes, obtain

admission among those who were united by the tie of a common loyalty and a common interest; but, although such persons, through means of a feigned loyalty, might obtain a temporary admission into outward association with loyal subjects, when their true character was discovered, they would, as a matter of course, be disowned. Surely, in reference to the case supposed, no one would argue against disloyal persons being compelled to withdraw, on the ground that you cannot, by ever so much strictness, secure yourselves against them. Yet such is the mode of reasoning adopted by those who maintain the impracticability of carrying out Scriptural discipline in the Church of God.

If what has been stated be admitted to be in accordance with the principles laid down in the New Testament, there are certain important inferences involved in the admission, of which I would briefly remind you.

Fellowship with the Church depends upon individual responsibility, and must, therefore, of necessity, be entirely voluntary. No human being can be loyal by proxy. No man, woman, or child can be introduced into the Church simply by the act of another. Such as are the rightful claimants for fellowship with the saints must be born, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." No community of professed Christians, acting on the principle of birth-membership, can be based on the Word of God. Neither can any mere outward rite entitle one to a place among believers. The natural tendency of such practices is to mingle together the earthly and the heavenly elements, and to obliterate all distinction between those who belong to Christ and those who belong

to the world. Such as have no true faith in Christ are neither capable of enjoying the privileges nor of discharging the responsibilities connected with Church fellowship. The broad line of demarcation between such as have been born again and such as are in an unregenerate state ought ever to be maintained. Mutual distrust, spiritual weakness, and relaxation of Godly discipline, must result from a society of Christians being constituted on any wider basis than that which is presented to us in the Scriptures. Let us ever keep in mind that fellowship with the Church, in order to be a reality, implies previous fellowship with Christ Himself. We do not become Christians by being enrolled among those who are associated as such ; but, having been ourselves brought to believe in Jesus, we unite in fellowship with those who confess Him as their Saviour.

I notice, in the next place, the objects for which the Church is thus constituted, and the power whereby those objects may be successfully sought. Every society is formed with reference to the accomplishment of certain purposes, and everyone belonging to a society is expected to render some aid in their accomplishment. The association of believers is designed to promote the mutual benefit of those so associated, and the diffusion of the Gospel amongst those who are without ; the ultimate end of both objects being the glory of the Lord Jesus.

“Come thou with us, and we will do thee good,” should be the loving exhortation of the Church to those who are seeking to walk in the way of truth. “We will go with you, for the Lord is with you,” ought to be the response of all who have been enabled to embrace Christ for

salvation. It is the privilege of believers, while walking together in Christian communion, to be instrumental in advancing one-another's spiritual good. Their calling is to edify, comfort, instruct, reprove, encourage, help, and uphold one-another in the ways of Godliness. This calling implies the diligent use of the appointed means whereby we may be aided in cultivating our own personal Christianity. The reverential reading of Holy Scripture, incessant prayer for the teaching of the Divine Spirit, watchfulness over our own hearts, maintaining a course of life correspondent with our profession, tend not only to our own individual blessing, but are calculated to render us meet to be used of God in ministering to the blessing of others. The well-being of the whole body is to be promoted by that which every joint supplieth. Happy, indeed, will be that community of Christians among which every several member is alive to his high privilege of seeking to be "a vessel meet for the Master's use." Instead of looking merely to receive from others, each ought to be ready to bestow, according to that wherewith he has been intrusted. "See that ye excel to the edifying of the Church," is the exhortation addressed to all. How various are the modes in which Christians may aid the well-being of one-another. The more instructed may lead on those who are deficient in knowledge. Those who have had long experience in the Divine life may counsel those who are as yet but babes in Christ. Those who, having passed through trial and found that God has manifested Himself as their deliverer, may encourage the hearts of afflicted ones to put their trust in Him, even when outward things look dark and gloomy. Those who are

themselves favoured with a season of outward tranquility can intercede for those who are under the sore pressure of some heavy affliction. Those to whom may have been granted an abundance of the things of this life, or even, for a time, a larger measure of such things than many around them, may express their sympathy for their poorer brethren by liberally contributing to their temporal necessities. Those who have had their own children brought to know the truth may help, by their intercessions, those who are often bowed down with heaviness on account of the spiritual condition of those who lie very near their hearts. Every spiritual endowment, every mental power, every capacity of service may be brought into vigorous and healthful action, in seeking to promote the spiritual prosperity of those with whom, as disciples of the Lord Jesus, we may find ourselves associated. Reader, let me ask you whether, if you have united yourself in fellowship with the followers of the Saviour, you have reflected upon the responsibilities involved in your profession. Have you considered in what way you may subserve the interests of those for whom Christ died? Are the interests of the whole Church dear to your heart? Do you realize that you are a citizen of no mean city, and a subject of a kingdom which can never be moved? Or, are you contented with regularly filling up your place on each returning day of rest, contributing of your means to defraying necessary expenses, giving a mere fraction of your substance for the relief of your poorer brethren, and then devolving upon others the discharge of all higher responsibilities?

About thirty-six years ago I met with a remarkable

document—the oath of the Greeks while struggling against the dominion of their Turkish oppressors. I find a translation of it in the blank page of a copy of the Greek Testament which I was then in the habit of using. I find also, from a note appended to the translation, that I, at that time, regarded the words as capable of being applied to the Christian, in relation to that body of which Christ is the head. They may assist you in apprehending what I have been attempting to enforce. “I swear by thee, O miserable yet sacred father-land, I swear by thy lengthened sorrows, by the bitter tears, which, for so many years, thy wretched sons have shed, by my own tears which I have poured out on account of our state of degradation, by the future freedom of my children, that I will be altogether consecrated to thee, that, in future, thou shalt be the object of my thoughts, thy interest the guide of my actions, and thy prosperity the requital of my labours.” What the victims of Turkish oppression felt respecting their country, the great apostle of the Gentiles felt respecting the church.

Having endeavoured to point out the design of church-fellowship, and the aims set before those who belong to the Christian community, I would ask you to allow your minds to dwell upon the illustration thus afforded of the Divine wisdom and goodness in the appointment of such an Institution. Often have experimental theologians delighted to exhibit the varied instances of correspondency between the necessities of man, and the manner in which those necessities are met in the great plan of redeeming love. There is, unquestionably, a marvellous accordance between the spiritual ruin on the one hand, and the revealed remedy

on the other ; between the condition of man as fallen and far off from God, and the provision furnished in Christ for restoring the lost and bringing near those who have wandered. But surely, in the church-constitution exhibited in the New Testament, there is an equally admirable accordance with the requirements of humanity. The pursuit of personal improvement, the exercise of our mental faculties, the enjoyment of suitable society, are fundamental conditions of human happiness. Let any man be satisfied with a mere animal existence, let him habitually neglect the cultivation of his mind, let him become entirely absorbed in selfishness ; and no power, nor wealth, nor outward place of distinction can save him from wretchedness. Even those who are as yet unacquainted with the higher life, which can only be enjoyed through faith in Jesus, may attain to a certain kind of satisfaction in the exercise of those natural powers and susceptibilities wherewith God has endowed them, although ignorant of holier and more enduring sources of happiness ; but the man who lives without aim, and in whom all generous emotions and internal energies have been checked, by the brutalizing effects of sensuality and selfishness, must be doubly miserable. The mere votary of fashion who has inherited some splendid possessions, and has devoted himself to the pursuit of pleasure as his only object, must sooner or later become the victim of his own folly, and experience that weariness of life which God has appointed to be the self-inflicted penalty consequent upon the abuse of His providential bestowments.

The disciples of Christ have set before them such aims as legitimately tend to elevate and satisfy the heart.

Delivered from the burden of guilt, and aided by the strength of omnipotence, they are called to pursue a course of unlimited progress in the life divine. Every mental faculty, purified and directed by light from on high, finds full scope for habitual exercise. Every affection of the heart, every emotion of the soul meets with correspondent objects. The Blessed God, as revealed in the person of the Beloved Son, becomes to such the supreme object of adoration, gratitude and love. In hallowed intercourse with Him, to whom all conceivable excellence belongs, the worshipper experiences a consolation and sustainment which the worldling or the formalist cannot know. Serving not as a slave but as a child, the Christian is free from the hard service of a task-master. Always cherishing worthy aims, he finds himself, by God's grace, delivered from the exposure to that utter vacuity and tedium which no word in our copious language can adequately express, and for which the fashionable victims of the malady have had to borrow a term from the French. Would you, my readers, live as becomes immortal beings? Would you enjoy that happiness for which God hath formed you? Would you enter upon a course of successful conflict against the powers of darkness, and help to aid others in the heavenly warfare? Would you find employment for every faculty, and work for every day, then be Christians not in name but in reality. Cultivate lofty and purifying aims. Watch over your own hearts. Beware of letting your hours run to waste. Let the consciousness of deficiency and shortcoming impel you to exertion, and the confidence in Divine aid encourage you to expect that your efforts will be crowned with success. If the name Christian be "the

highest style of man," then the fellowship of regenerated hearts is the most elevated kind of association.

I add one word of admonition in connexion with part of the subject before us. Let it be clearly apprehended that to each believer belongs the privilege of helping on the benefit of the whole body, but the modes in which that object is to be sought, must vary in each individual case. Self-knowledge, humility, rectitude of purpose, and believing prayer are requisite for enabling the several members to discover and to maintain their true position in the body of Christ. In the xii. Rom., and xii. of I. Cor., this most important subject is fully expounded by the apostle Paul. Those two chapters, and other passages more or less bearing on the same theme, ought to be prayerfully and diligently studied by every Christian. On the one hand, there is a danger of shrinking back from the responsibilities incumbent on the followers of the Saviour. On the other hand, there is great risk lest the young and inexperienced should thrust themselves into positions for which God hath not given them the suited qualifications. It will generally be allowed that those who, in the earliest ages of the church, were set in the place of rulers or overseers, were selected from those members of the community who had been for some length of time acquainted with the Gospel and walking in the truth. Nature itself seems to teach that the younger, in grace and in years, should, under ordinary circumstances, take the place of subjection; while those whose minds have been more exercised in the things of God, should be expected to act as leaders and advisers. Again, there may be some who are qualified for conversing with others in

private, and helping on those who are very little instructed, who would be quite incompetent for exhortation or exposition of Scripture in the public assembly. Some again who may be very useful as teachers in the church, may be evidently deficient in those gifts which are required in those on whom rests the responsibility of rule. The directions of the Word of God, on all such matters, are clear and simple ; the difficulty in the way of their application to particular instances must be overcome by the use of those means to which I have just adverted. He who has bestowed upon any of us a gift for service, will not withhold the guidance needful for its legitimate and profitable exercise. Let there be first an honest purpose, a right intention and a willing mind, and, in waiting upon God, the true-hearted disciple will find that the light of Scripture principles will illuminate his path, and that obstacles and hinderances will be removed out of the way. The modes in which the spiritual prosperity and wider extension of the church may be promoted, are exceedingly diversified. Any thing whereby the benefit of the body of Christ is either directly or indirectly furthered may be rightfully the object of steadfast aim and habitual effort.

But in whatever line of service we may be called to engage, whether we be qualified for a position of prominence, or for one of a more retired character, it is well that we should have our minds practically impressed with the conviction that the power for real service in the Church is that of the Spirit of all grace. The memorable saying of the Lord Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, furnishes, at once, the best definition of a Christian assembly,

and the clearest instruction in relation to the source of blessing for those who may compose it. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." The essential requisites for spiritual profit are that we should be gathered around that one name, and that we should enjoy the presence of Christ by His Spirit. Meeting thus, not in profession but in reality, we anticipate the period when "to Him every knee shall bow." Every such meeting may be regarded as a foretaste of that time when all the redeemed multitude shall unite in the ascription of adoration heard by the beloved disciple in the solitude of Patmos—"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing," when every creature in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea shall re-echo the responsive song of praise, "Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." Rev. v., 12-13.

In connexion with this part of my subject it seems well to add a few words of caution to the young and inexperienced who may have been led to form somewhat extravagant expectations respecting the benefits to be derived from fellowship with the people of God. Let me remind those who expect to enjoy personal intercourse with a large number of those with whom they habitually meet around the Lord's table, that, under our present circumstances, such intercourse cannot possibly be maintained. The demands upon all Christians, especially in this country, are so urgent and so various, that few can find leisure for

spending much time in society. Every Christian must see to it that he secure some portion of every day for secret retirement and thoughtful reading of Holy Scripture. Most have duties to discharge, in their external position, which occupy the far larger portion of their waking hours. Very many have relative duties, as husbands or wives, parents or children, which have a prior claim upon the leisure which can be secured from the constant demands of secular-employment; and, therefore, frequent private intercourse, between several hundreds of believers, is altogether out of the question. Even those who are exempt from the calls of business, and who give themselves to the spiritual instruction and oversight of their brethren in Christ, have pressing upon them, in many cases, manifold engagements which often interfere with their mingling in Christian society. There is, in the present day, a measure of mental activity, not only in the world but in the Church, which urgently requires that those who undertake to fill the position of teachers in the Word should be well-fitted for their work. It is not necessary that they should be possessed of high attainments in science, or that they should be distinguished for accomplished scholarship, but it is surely most desirable that they should be well acquainted with their Bibles, that they may be able both to exhort, by sound teaching, and also to convict the gain-sayers. (Tit. i. 9.)

It is expedient that some of those who minister in the Word should give themselves more fully than others to those studies which relate to the defence and exposition of the truth of God. It is but reasonable to require from those on whom devolves more especially the responsibility of

publicly unfolding the meaning of the oracles of God, some acquaintance with the languages in which those oracles were originally delivered, and some knowledge of the modes in which, in doubtful cases, the exact meaning of the inspired writings may be satisfactorily determined. Not one Christian in a thousand has any conception of the incessant labour which such moderate attainments require. I have been a student of Scripture for nearly forty years, and for more than thirty years have I been, with hardly any interruption, occupied in publicly expounding it. Yet I feel myself pained at the deficiency of my acquaintance with its contents, and am constantly goaded on by the consciousness of my ignorance of much that it would be for my own profit and the profit of others, that I should have fully mastered. But let us remember that God is graciously pleased to employ feeble and imperfect instrumentality, and even those who can read only their English Bible with a measure of intelligence and faith, are very frequently made the means of abundant blessing, not only in the conversion of the ungodly, but in building up believers in their most holy faith. Still it were devoutly to be wished that a far larger number of those who stand before the Church and the world as the ostensible standard-bearers in the one army of the living God, should, in these days of infidel assaults upon the truth on which we are resting our eternal all, be more adequately furnished with the exact knowledge of that Word which the great Apostle declares is the sword of the Spirit. It becomes all of us to remember, that while the Master we serve expects each of us to improve the talents committed to our trust, yet even the one talent laid out for

His glory, will receive from His gracious lips the meed of commendation, and that the meanest service rendered in His name, shall in no wise lose its reward. When large numbers are united together in visible communion, private intercourse must, for the most part, be limited to those who through providential circumstances or mutual adaptation, find themselves brought into personal contact. Thus every one should have association with a few, although none can expect to be familiarly acquainted with all. Everything, even in the Church of God, must be imperfect till the Lord return. While we remain on earth we are exhorted not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together but to exhort one another for the strengthening of our hope and joy. Still, only in that assembling of ourselves together with all the company of the redeemed, shall we fully understand the blessedness of fellowship with Christ, and fellowship with His people.*

* It is worthy of remark that the Greek term ἐπισυναγωγή II. Thessalonians ii. 1, there rendered "gathering together," is the same which is employed in Hebrews x. 25, to express our "assembling together," as believers, while we continue in this world. The latter is evidently designed to be the earnest of the former. The term occurs nowhere else in the Greek Testament, and is not found in the Greek Version of the Old Testament.

New Testament Church Order.

LECTURE IV.

HAVING, in my last lecture, laid before you the objects of church communion, and the responsibilities and privileges connected with church fellowship, I now propose to enter upon those enquiries which relate to oversight and teaching. This part of my subject will naturally include distinct references to the varied ministry employed in connexion with the edification and extension of the Christian community. It may also serve as a fitting introduction to the consideration of Christian ordinances and Scriptural discipline.

Inasmuch as considerable misapprehension has arisen from the misapplication of Scripture language by the adherents of post-Apostolic systems of church polity, I must request your attention to some brief expositions of the force of certain New Testament terms used by the inspired writers in meanings sometimes very different from those which they bear in modern English. The term "Church" is very generally applied, in conversation and in writing, to a building set apart for the worship of God. There is no evidence that the corresponding Greek term, so rendered in our English Bible, is ever so employed in the New

Testament.* Such expressions as Church of Rome, Church of England, Church of Scotland, are not in accordance with the Scriptural signification of the term. The generic meaning of the word corresponds to the English words—"assembly," or "congregation." It is distinctively applied in the New Testament to an assembly of Christians meeting together in some particular locality, as the Church in Jerusalem, in Antioch, in Corinth, or at Cenchrea. Thus in Matthew xviii. 17, the term church is clearly employed to designate the particular Christian assembly with which the parties may happen to be connected. When a particular locality is spoken of, the term is used in the singular; but when the reference is to an extensive district, including many Christian assemblies, we find it almost invariably used in the plural. Thus we find the Church of the Thessalonians, but the Churches of Galatia—the Churches of Macedonia—the Churches of Asia. The gathered believers in any given town or village constituted the Church in that place; such several communities, distinct yet united, constituted the Churches throughout any given province, district, or kingdom. It appears to me that the simplicity of the New Testament Church order most admirably contrasts with the cumbrous and complex arrangements of post-Apostolic organizations, and that its very simplicity rendered it adapted alike for edification and enlargement. The early missionaries of the Cross went forth, and, by

* Such expressions as "entering the church" or being "educated for the church," common enough in modern English, if literally translated into Greek would convey meanings entirely different from that which they bear in our language.

proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation, gathered together as many as received their testimony. The gathering of such together, in any place, was equivalent to the planting of a church. The larger or smaller number, meeting in the name of Jesus, were helped by Divine grace, in unitedly waiting upon God, and in edifying one another. Some of them, or perhaps all of them, endeavoured to spread amongst those around them the savour of the name of Jesus. God gave testimony to the word of His grace; and thus the company of believers, in many instances, multiplied greatly.

In reading the history of the early churches, as recorded in the Acts, we find that, very soon after their formation, leading brethren, named elders or overseers, were appointed to preside over them. Thus we find in Acts xiv. 23, that Paul and Barnabas, before returning to Antioch, whence they had been sent forth on their mission, ordained elders over the newly gathered communities which had been founded by their labours. I have already pointed out, what no attentive reader of the New Testament can fail to discover for himself, that the terms elder and bishop are applied indiscriminately to the same persons, and indicate the same office, the former being a term familiar to the Jewish Church, and originally implying seniority; the latter being suggestive of the duties which those who presided over the churches were expected to discharge. The term elder is used in several distinct but closely related senses in the New Testament. In its primary meaning it denotes a person somewhat advanced in life, and would therefore naturally be applied to those of the community

more advanced than the others in years or in grace. It is used also as descriptive of the ancient worthies in Hebrews xi. 2. In Acts xi. 30, it is employed to designate the heads or office-bearers in the church at Jerusalem. The first passage in which we have an account of the manner of their appointment is Acts xiv. 23, to which I have just referred. The term there rendered "ordained," has been the ground of a long and still unsettled controversy. There is no difficulty in determining its primary signification. It signifies literally, "to stretch out the hand," hence, "to vote for," or, "to elect by votes." In the only other passage in which it occurs in its uncompounded form (II. Cor. viii. 19) it is applied to a choice made by the church, and is obviously to be taken in its ordinary meaning.

Thus far the question would seem to be exceedingly simple, and many would be disposed to agree with the opinion of Dr. Alford, who, although by his very position not likely to be prejudiced in favour of popular election, says, in his note on Acts xiv. 23., that there is "no reason here for departing from the usual meaning of electing by show of hands. The Apostles may have admitted by ordination those Presbyters whom the churches elected."

Still, there is something to be urged on the other side. The primary meaning of the word, which is also the usual one, undoubtedly would require us to understand that the appointment was by voting or popular election. But the term was also applied to any kind of appointment, and in Acts x. 41. we find it, in its compounded form, applied to a choice or appointment derived immediately from God Himself. How can we be certain that the sacred

historian does not use it in this secondary sense in the passage before us? Again, had it been said that those who composed each particular church appointed or ordained elders over them, there would have been no room for doubt. But the statement is restricted to Paul and Barnabas. If, therefore, we will keep strictly to the force of the words actually used, and insist upon interpreting the verb as describing election by votes, we must render thus: "And having elected, by votes, elders for them (*i.e.*, for the disciples) in every church, and prayed, with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they had believed." But, thus translated, the construction of the language seems to me to require that the election by vote must be restricted to the votes of Paul and Barnabas, which is evidently unsuitable. The verb *χειροτονέω* so far as I am aware, is nowhere else employed in the sense of electing or appointing by the votes of others. Had the historian told us that the members of the Christian communities chose their elders by vote, we should have necessarily understood him to mean that they themselves voted for his appointment. No such statement is made in the passage under review. I cannot, therefore, rest upon this passage as evidence for popular election. I submit the difficulty to more qualified scholars, and I wait for further light. Meantime, as so much depends upon the rendering of this brief clause, it may be interesting to enquire how it is found given in the two most valuable of the ancient versions. These are, unquestionably, the Latin and the Syriac, both of them reaching back, in the judgment of the best critics, to the second century. In neither of these versions is there the slightest reference to

popular election ; the term in Latin being *constituissent* (appointed), and the verb used in the Syriac being exactly of the same import. The distinguished scholar, Erasmus was one of the earliest of the modern Latin translators. His rendering, "*cum suffragiis creassent*," ("when they had appointed by votes") is found in many of the versions executed since his time. Beza and his followers, Diodati, the French Translation, and the English Geneva Version, all adopt the rendering of Erasmus. The Geneva of 1857 adds the following note : "*The worde signifieth to elect by putting up the hands, which declareth that ministers were not made without the consent of the people.*" Our own Tyndale and the Bishop's Bible give the rendering maintained by Erasmus, so that if a majority of Versions were to be allowed to decide the question, the rendering given in the Vulgate, Syriac, and Authorised English Translation might appear to be erroneous. Nevertheless, although I cannot approve of the very sweeping assertion made by Dr. Bloomfield, in his note on the passage, that no man of real learning, now-a-days, would uphold the rendering given by Beza, still, I do not think that there is sufficient ground to depart from the rendering of the more ancient authorities. Apart altogether from ecclesiastical bias, on one side or the other, were I to decide in accordance with the evidence before me, I should say that there is no proof, either in the use of the word itself or in the construction of the passage, to warrant the statement that the elders, there referred to, were appointed to their office by the votes of the people.

I have dwelt the more fully on this particular instance because of certain important inferences which may be de-

duced even from the apparent difficulty and uncertainty of the case. Surely such a diversity of judgment among the most competent scholars ought to serve as a warning against that tendency to dogmatism which is so often manifested by Christian teachers. How many among those who maintain what is called the right of the people to choose their own ministers, have been taught that the passage before us unquestionably supports such a mode of election. How many, on the other hand, whose likings are opposed to such an interpretation, will be found averse to any such correction of the common translation as is to be found in the versions of Tyndale and the Geneva. The passage itself does not necessarily imply any more than an appointment originating with Paul and Barnabas, but, on the other hand, the very nature of the case, and the testimony of the earliest ecclesiastical authorities, agree in the obvious inference that the elders were chosen in accordance with the consent of the several churches. The words of Clemens Romanus, in his 1st Ep. ad Cor. p. 57, furnish competent testimony to the fact that the elders ordained by the apostles were appointed with the full approval of the church over which they were placed. I honestly believe that neither high-handed secular patronage nor pure democratic election can find any foundation in the New Testament. When any assembly of Christians had been gathered together in any particular place—this result of missionary labours furnished opportunity for the exercise of whatever gifts for service any member of the community might have received; and thus, from the very beginning, the principle laid down by the Apostle Peter (I. Peter, iv. 10), had free

scope in the churches. It was expedient that some of those endowed with the requisite qualifications should be recognised as set in the position of overseers, but the fact of positive appointment was evidently regarded as secondary to the possession of gifts for service. Barnabas, for example, took a leading place among his fellow-believers at Jerusalem and Antioch long before his being set apart for a special missionary service as recorded in xiii. Acts. There is no reason, from the narrative given in the Acts, to suppose that Apollos received any special appointment corresponding to the modern notions suggested by the term "ordination," and yet Paul, the most distinguished of all the apostles, classes the eloquent teacher from Alexandria as one of his most distinguished fellow-labourers. On the one hand, manifested gifts and corresponding character, always secured, by God's gracious ordering, opportunity for service, and, on the other hand, acknowledgment on the part of the church appears to have been followed by a recognition more or less formal on the part of those whom Christ Himself had invested with apostolic authority. It never seems to have occurred to the early Christians that any external appointment was of necessity required in order to the legitimate exercise of those capacities of service wherewith the Lord, by His Spirit, had graciously endowed them, and so we find that the church at Antioch was founded, not by apostles or by any ordained and commissioned by them, but by the instrumentality of those, who, being scattered abroad on the persecution which had arisen in connexion with Stephen, went everywhere preaching the Gospel.

It seems to me that the view which I have just advanced

will be found, on examination, admirably calculated to remove scruples and difficulties, and to promote mutual forbearance. The two opposite systems of apostolic succession and popular election, constitute two extremes, between which there is, at least, a *prima facie* probability that the truth may lie. If it could be demonstrated that Dr. Alford's suggestion, already given, correctly corresponds with the mode of acting in apostolic times ; if the members of any given Christian community, under apostolic direction, selected those of their brethren, whom, from actual knowledge, they believed to be qualified for filling the office of presbyter, or overseer, and then the apostles, on the ground of such election, solemnly set apart such by prayer and fasting and thereby gave a public recognition to those so appointed, this would, in all probability, regulate for a time the general usage in cases of ordination. Those who find, in the directions given to Timothy and Titus, the early germs of the Hierarchical system, and maintain that those two eminent companions of Paul must have been set in the office of the Episcopate, inasmuch as to them alone belonged the authority to ordain, seem to me to forget that the directions given to them must be understood in conformity with other New Testament statements. That both of them were placed in a position of high authority is undeniable. That they were both of them honoured with the full confidence of the great apostle, and entrusted by him with a commission of the most important character, appears manifest from the manner in which they are exhorted in the epistles addressed to them ; but they had no absolute authority in regard to ecclesiastical appointments. The qualifications for the

overseership (I. Tim. iii. 1., &c.), are clearly laid down, and there can be no reasonable doubt but that they honestly sought to ascertain, by enquiry from the brethren generally, the character of those who might express a desire for the position. If, as Clement tells us, the approval of the church went along with the Apostolic appointment, there can be no reason given why Timothy and Titus, who appear to have acted as the deputies of Paul, should not have respected the testimony of the brethren to the fitness of the candidate, or even the selection made by them out of their own number.

Such a mode of appointment appears, from the evidence of church history, to have been the usage during the earliest post-Apostolic period ; and it may have practically worked well for a time. But it never could have answered the revealed end for which the Church was instituted, if it had been permitted to restrain the exercise of any gifts which God had bestowed upon any for the benefit of the body of Christ ; and after that the nominal church had departed from the simplicity of the faith once delivered to the saints, and had embraced unscriptural doctrines, and introduced superstitious practices, the true followers of Christ were, of necessity, called upon to fall back upon two great leading principles of action, the sufficiency of Holy Scriptures, and the all-predominating authority of God. Those who, by God's grace, found themselves stirred up to seek to serve Him in the public ministry of His word, and in their own consciousness, confirmed by the judgment of their fellow believers, qualified, in some measure, for such a service, were bound not to yield to the unscriptural requirements of those who filled places of pre-

eminence in the nominal church, but, without any appointment from such, were not only authorised but constrained to go and work in the vineyard of their Lord.

The service of godly and gifted men has never been confined within the narrow channel of post-Apostolic systems. The new wine has, again and again, burst the bottles, and the Spirit of God has, in every age of the church, manifestly blessed the labours of those who, in sincerity of heart, lowliness of mind, and devoted attachment to the cause of the Saviour, have laboured in seeking to spread the glad tidings of salvation amongst the ignorant and ungodly, or who have devoted themselves to the edification of those who have already believed. Let any man who values the Gospel and has experienced its power only reflect on the consequences which would have resulted from yielding to the irresponsible rule of a dominant priesthood, and on the overwhelming evils which would have resulted from yielding compliance with their restrictions, or implicitly bowing to their requirements, and he will be instinctively led to praise the God of all grace that the stream of Divine truth was never restricted, by Divine authority, to ecclesiastical channels. No one has a right to require from any professed believer, as essential to fellowship with the church, that which God has not made essential to fellowship with Himself; and no ecclesiastical authority has a right to require from those who give satisfactory evidence of possessing the requisite qualifications for oversight or teaching in the church, anything beyond that which Christ, the only law-giver, has declared to be needful.

The mode in which Bishops (or overseers) and Deacons

are referred to in Scripture, particularly, for example, Philip. i. 1., seems to imply that those two distinct offices held the most prominent place, next to the Apostolic, in the primitive church. Everything connected with rule, presidency, and teaching, might be included under the former; everything connected with the duties described in Acts vi. specially belonged to the latter. But various other terms, descriptive of ministry in the church, and of service to those who are without, are of more or less frequent occurrence in the New Testament. To some of those designations I now proceed to direct your attention. Before entering upon the others it may be useful to collect together the chief information furnished in Scripture respecting the office of the apostleship. The name apostle was conferred by our Lord on those chosen by Himself, as recorded in Luke vi. 13. They were then invested with power to heal all manner of diseases (Mat. x. 2). After having exercised their miraculous endowments, they felt themselves constrained to ask for an increase of faith (Luke xvii. 5). Although they had been set in so distinguished a place, they esteemed as idle tales the first accounts, brought by the women, of their Lord's resurrection. During the interval elapsing between the resurrection and ascension, they were instructed by Him in the things of His kingdom (Acts i. 3). To them, as Christ's authorized messengers, penitent sinners applied for direction and comfort (Acts ii. 37). They continued to perform mighty works in connection with the preaching of the Gospel (Acts ii. 43), and specially acted as witnesses to the fact that their Master had been raised from the dead, (Acts iv. 33). Having been promised no better treatment

than their Lord had experienced in the days of His flesh, they firmly endured the persecutions inflicted on them by rulers and subjects, Gentiles and Jews, (Acts v. 18, 40; I. Cor. iv. 9, 10, &c.); still resolutely preferring to obey God rather than man, (Acts v. 29). When at the first every man sold his possessions, for the benefit of the community, the disposal of the money was entrusted to them (Acts iv. 35, 37). They were, instrumentally, the dispensers of the gifts of the Spirit (Acts viii. 18), and their authority was referred to, when difficult questions required to be decided (Acts xv. 2); but, in giving judgment on the points which came before them, they associated with themselves the elders and the brethren (Acts xv. 22, 23). The conversion of sinners through his instrumentality was referred to by Paul as one seal of his ministry. Although they held the highest place in spiritual dignity (I. Cor. xii. 28), this did not render it unsuitable that they should enter into the married state (I. Cor. ix. 5). The signs of their apostleship were, in addition to more ordinary qualifications, steadfast endurance, accompanied with signs and wonders and mighty works (II. Cor. xii. 12); and they, in union with the prophets, constituted the foundation of the church (Eph. ii. 20, Rev. xxi. 14, II. Peter iii. 2). In spiritual knowledge they excelled the most favoured of ancient kings and prophets (Ephesians iii. 5). Their chief employment consisted in proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ (Ephesians iii. 8), and in building up the church by unfolding the whole counsel of God, (Acts xx. 27). After all their toils and sufferings, they shall ultimately rejoice in the total overthrow of the kingdom of the wicked one

(Rev. xviii. 20). The term apostle is once applied to the Saviour Himself (Heb. iii. 1). We read (in Rev. ii. 2) of false pretenders to the Apostolic office, and the act of trying and rejecting such is there mentioned with approval. Although the term is, in the first instance, applied to those who were appointed by our Lord when on earth, yet it equally belonged to the Apostle Paul. In one or two instances, by an extension of its meaning, it is applied to others. Thus, it is applied to Barnabas in Acts xiv. 4, 14, and to Andronicus and Junia, in Rom. xvi. 7 ; but it seems in the strictest sense only applicable to those who had seen the Lord Jesus after He had been raised from the dead. The office ceased about the close of the first century, when John, who outlived all the others, had been removed.

The term Evangelist seems to describe such as (like Philip, one of the seven,) went about, publishing the glad tidings of salvation. It is referred to in Acts xxi. 8, and Eph. iv. 11., as if it applied to a distinct office. In II. Tim. iv. 5., it is used in reference to the general work of the ministry devolving on Timothy. The term preacher, used by Paul respecting himself (I. Tim. ii. 7, 11.), originally denotes a Herald—one who boldly, clearly, publicly proclaims matters of universal interest. The office of teacher is evidently included in that of elder or overseer, inasmuch as an overseer is required to be apt to teach. Nevertheless, those who did not occupy any official position, might be teachers in a more general sense. The word is, throughout the Gospels, constantly applied to our Lord Himself, as in Matt. viii. 19., ix. 11., x. 24., xii. 38., xvii. 24., &c., &c., and very frequently in A. V., it is translated “master.” In

Acts xiii. 1., teachers are distinguished from prophets, and placed after them in I. Cor. xii. 28., where we find, "And God hath set some in the church, first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers." In Eph. iv. 11., we read of apostles, prophets, evangelists, as distinct, and then pastors and teachers linked together, so as in the original to suggest that the two offices were discharged by the same person. At the same time, it is well to remember that the office of teachers belonged, in the highest sense, to the apostles (I. Tim. ii. 7.—II. Tim. i. 11). From the epistle of James (iii. 1.), we find that the condition of the church may be such as to render it needful to caution believers against rashly assuming the office to themselves.

In the instance just referred to, the rendering, "master," tends very greatly to obscure the sense of the passage. The word for teacher never ought to have been so translated. For the sake of those who can read only their English Bible, I give below a list of the passages in which "teacher" ought to be substituted for "master," in the Authorised Version,* according to the received text of the Greek. It is worthy of notice that our translators have given the rendering "master," in every instance in which the word occurs in the Gospels, with the exception of Luke ii. 46., where the word is translated "doctors," and John iii. 2., where they rightly give "teacher." Throughout the Acts

* Matt. viii. 19., ix. 11., x. 24, 25., xii. 38., xvii. 24., xix. 16., xxii. 16, 24, 36., xxvi., 18. Mark iv. 38., v. 35., ix. 17, 38., x. 17, 20, 35., xii. 14, 19, 32., xiii. 1., xiv. 14. Luke iii. 12., vi. 40., vii. 40., viii. 49., ix. 38., x. 25., xi. 45., xii. 13., xviii. 18., xix. 39., xx. 21, 28, 39., xxi. 7., xxii. 11. John i. 38., iii. 40., viii. 4., xi. 28., xiii. 13, 14., xx. 16. James iii. 1.

of the Apostles and the Epistles, the word is uniformly rendered "teacher," except in the one passage in the Epistle of James (iii. 1.)

The office of prophet evidently existed in the primitive church. This designation is, in the Gospels and Acts, repeatedly applied to those holy men of God, who, under the Jewish dispensation, spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (Matt. i. 22.), but it is also employed in the New Testament to describe those gifted believers, who, in the early church, unfolded future events by the same Divine power (Acts xi. 27., and xxi. 10.). The name is also given to those who were distinguished for the possession of the gift of exhortation (Acts xv. 32); perhaps, because all exhortation to Christian diligence has, more or less, reference to the things of a future eternity. Such held the second rank in the Apostolic church (I. Cor. xii. 28), and appear to have spoken by immediate revelation (I. Cor. xiv. 29-37). The terms "governments and helps" seem to refer to those who were gifted with qualifications fitting them for assisting the overseers of the church, or aiding other office-bearers in the discharge of their ordinary duties, or in cases of pressing emergency (I. Cor. xii. 28).

There are other terms which may be briefly noticed—as, all of them, furnishing matter for spiritual instruction. Christ's ministers are described as householders, called to distribute provision to the household of God; as labourers, making the service in which they are engaged their chief business; as master builders, laying a good foundation and building thereupon, in harmonious regularity, the several truths of the Gospel; as pastors, (*i. e.* shepherds) leading,

defending, guiding, and feeding their flock ; as ambassadors, seeking to reconcile men to God ; as soldiers, called to a warfare against the powers of darkness, resisting the encroachments of error, and enduring the hottest charge of the enemies of the Saviour ; as stars, reflecting the light of the Sun of Righteousness, and called to shine amidst the surrounding darkness ; as stewards, responsible for the trust reposed in them, and dispensing to their fellow servants not that which is their own, but that which belongs to their common Lord ; as witnesses for God and Christ, called to bear testimony unto the truth of all that which the Great Teacher hath revealed ; and, finally, as watchmen, whose responsibility it is to sound the note of alarm, and thus to deliver souls from urgent peril, and to aid in securing the safety of their fellow-citizens.

Who that believes himself called, even to the lowest place in such a service, can fail to be conscious of his own utter insufficiency? Who can attempt to fill any position in the Church of God without being sensible of his inability and exposure to danger, and without being compelled to address his fellow-believers in the language of the great apostle—"Brethren, pray for us?" Yes, my Christian reader, in the name of all those who are seeking to serve God in the ministry of his truth, let me remind you to pray for such, that they may be ready, on the one hand, to rebuke error, and, on the other, to reject those subjects of controversy which minister questions, rather than godly edifying. That they may hold faith and a good conscience. That they may offer supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanks-

givings, for all men. That they may furnish an example to believers in word, course of life, charity, spirit, faith, and purity. That they may devote themselves to reading, exhortation, teaching. That they may be "apt to teach." That they may stir up the gifts that have been bestowed on them, and cultivate, according to their position, opportunities, and capacity, every attainment which, directly or indirectly, may aid in the elucidation of the Scripture, in the edification of the saints, or in the conversion of the ungodly. That their own souls may feed by meditation on spiritual realities. That they may so minister the Word that their profiting may appear unto all men. That they may watch against that covetousness which is idolatry, and that, renouncing the pursuit of worldly honour, transitory wealth, and seducing pleasures, they may habitually cultivate and pursue after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness, and temperance. That they may indeed "take heed unto themselves and unto their teaching, so that, in so doing, they may both save themselves and them that hear them."

New Testament Church Order.

LECTURE V.

IN my last Lecture I endeavoured to lay before you some of the leading points of information, furnished by the New Testament, bearing on questions respecting gift and office in the church. The apostles and some of their earliest converts went everywhere preaching the Word. Those who received their testimony united themselves together in holy fellowship. They sought, in their assemblies, to edify one another in love. The Holy Spirit was given to enable them to be helpers of each other's joy. As gifts for rule or for teaching were developed, so were they recognized by express apostolic appointment, or by thankful acceptance and submission on the part of those amongst whom such gifted brethren were led, in the ordering of God, to labour. The capacities for service and the corresponding spiritual qualifications were essential; the fact of recognition depended not upon mere authority but upon ascertained gifts and character; the latter constituted the foundation of the former. If I were asked how such facts may be applied, in the way of guidance, to the present divided condition of the church of Christ, I would refer the enquirer to the following principles: When any number of true believers

find themselves thrown together in any given locality, it is their duty and privilege to associate themselves together as disciples of Christ, in distinction from those who are living in practical denial of Him in whom all His people trust. Let there be among those, thus associated, the freest scope for the exercise of every gift for service, and the most thankful recognition of such gift by those who find themselves spiritually helped and advanced in the Divine life through God's blessing upon its exercise. Let simple faith in Jesus, evidenced by a corresponding course of life, be the one common ground of visible fellowship, and let all secondary diversities of sentiment be dealt with in a spirit of mutual forbearance and earnest desire for the maintenance of Godly union. If one or two Christians should, in the Providence of God, be led to visit a locality where they find no community of professed believers, meeting exactly on what they may believe to be in accordance with the state of things in the apostolic churches, let them associate themselves with those who appear, to their spiritual consciousness, acting most in accordance with the directions of Scripture, and among whom they have reason to believe that they will find refreshment, instruction, and help in the Divine life. The two dangers against which we have all to be on our guard may be described as excessive narrowness and scrupulosity on the one hand, and undue laxity and latitudinarianism on the other. Where I find an assembly of believers walking together as Christians; ready to exercise, in all faithfulness, Scriptural strictness of discipline, cleaving to the Word of Truth as the only standard of doctrine and practice; seeking to act habitually as those

who acknowledge Christ as their Saviour and Lord ; maintaining and proclaiming the great truths of redemption and grace ; gladly welcoming into their fellowship all who give evidence of belonging to Jesus ; even although I might, in some things, differ from such a body of Christians in their views respecting certain secondary matters, I should consider it better to unite myself in fellowship with them, rather than to disturb their harmony by drawing away two or three who might be in fuller sympathy with me respecting the secondary matters above referred to. The questions as to how far such forbearance ought to be carried, and what may be regarded as just cause of separation, are matters of detail upon which I do not think it requisite to enter. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. Every believer must determine for himself how he ought to act under such difficult circumstances, but one thing I may add, that those seem to me to incur a very great responsibility who, on going to any place as visitors, gather together from other bodies a few uninstructed believers, mostly, perhaps, of the other sex, and then, after a few weeks or months, leave those whom they have gathered together to fulfil the various duties connected with rule, teaching, and discipline, without their being a single brother among them possessed of the requisite qualifications for matters of such grave importance. Where such a course has been pursued manifest evils have resulted from it. Were the few thus met content to wait upon God, in secret and united prayer, and in earnest reading of His Word, their souls would get real blessing. But in the total lack of any qualified instructors, there will be, in all probability, some who think themselves

able to edify the others. Too ignorant to be aware of their own incompetency, and mistaking the impulses of self-confidence and self-conceit for the leadings of the Blessed Spirit, such persons assume to themselves a position for which every intelligent Christian perceives them to be entirely destitute of qualification, and thus the strange spectacle is exhibited of a meeting of believers, professedly depending upon the Spirit of all truth and holiness, being compelled to tolerate such a character of teaching or address as would not be accepted by any other Christians, or be recognized as at all adapted to spiritual profit. Such gatherings have furnished, in some instances, a gross caricature of that which those connected with them profess to maintain; and the contrast between the high profession and the lamentable exhibitions of those who make it, has caused sorrow to the hearts of those who value Scripture principles, and afforded cause of stumbling to enquiring Christians, and of triumph to opposers.

I come now to the consideration of certain particulars connected with the social worship of the early church.

The New Testament contains many express precepts and directions, but it is at the same time emphatically a Book of principles. Neither in the records of our Lord's personal ministry, nor in the writings of His apostles, do we find every matter of minute detail expressly provided for. This must be ever kept in mind as one of the characteristic features of the new dispensation. One of the most obvious illustrations of this remark will be found in the examination of the grounds on which most Christians maintain the obligation to observe the first day of the week, in com-

memoration of our Lord's resurrection. We do not find any direct precept for its observance, but we are warranted to believe that, from the very earliest ages of the church, the day was regarded as one set apart for the purpose of united waiting upon God. On that day of the week our Lord not only rose from the tomb, but showed himself again and again to His chosen witnesses. (John xx. 14, Luke xxiv. 31, 36). On the second Lord's day—eight days after His resurrection—He again manifested Himself to the twelve. (John xx. 26). In Acts xx. 7, we find an apparently incidental reference to the disciples assembling together on the first day of the week for the breaking of bread, leading us to infer that it was at that early period their usual practice. This brief reference is confirmed by a similar notice in I. Cor. xvi. 2. But the strongest confirmation of the habitual observance of the first day of the week amongst Christians of the apostolic age, is to be found in the language employed by the beloved disciple in the first chapter of the Apocalypse, "I was in the spirit on the Lord's day." There can be no reasonable ground to doubt but that the expression "Lord's day," in this passage, is to be understood as referring to the first day of the week. One or two writers on prophecy, probably from the obvious meaning of the terms not suiting some preconceived system of interpretation, have considered the language as descriptive of the "day of the Lord." Serious objections to this singular fancy may be gathered even by the English reader from the immediate context. The "day of the Lord" is never so designated in the Septuagint nor in the Greek Testament. There is the same distinction

in Greek as we have in English between the mode of expressing the day set apart for Christian worship, and the day of His actual manifestation. Our translators have rightly kept the distinction, and nothing but a perverted criticism would ever have led to the confounding of the two expressions, conveying—as they evidently do convey—altogether distinct ideas. Referring to such critics, Dean Alford says, in his cautious and scholarly commentary on the passage in question,—“It really is astonishing how any, even moderate Greek scholars, can persuade themselves that the words can mean that which these commentators maintain,” . . . and again, “No such rendering would ever have been thought of, nor would it now be worth even a passing mention, were it not that an apocalyptic system has been built upon it.” However easily refuted such an interpretation may be, however manifestly erroneous in the judgment of all unprejudiced readers of the Greek Testament, it is to be regretted that many who are unable to understand the grounds upon which its rejection rests, having once received the idea, are unwilling to give it up. They thus deprive themselves of one of the most important testimonies to the apostolic observance of the Lord’s day. Things precede words. Established institutions require to be described by corresponding and definite designations. Hence, while “the first day” of the week, during the very earliest period of the church, was regarded as sufficiently distinctive, the more definite designation was afterwards employed, and had probably become common about the first century of our era, the date usually assigned to the writing of the Apocalypse.

The scriptural evidence in favour of the institution of the Lord's day and of the apostolic sanction having been given to its observance, is further confirmed by the testimony of the early Christian fathers. Justin Martyr, who was brought to receive the Gospel in the first half of the second century, gives us a very interesting account of the manner in which the followers of Christ conducted their social worship on the first day of the week. In his Apology, addressed to the Roman emperor, he asserts that, on that day, all, both of the country and city, assemble together; and that, after reading, singing, and prayer, the celebration of the Lord's supper we attended to.

The mode of celebration is thus described :—"The presiding brother, having taken the bread, and the cup of wine mixed with water, pours forth praise and adoration to the Father of all, in the name of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and specially offers thanksgiving for the gifts which He has vouchsafed to bestow upon His people. When the president has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all those present express their approval of what has been uttered, by adding their amen with a loud voice. (This word amen, he adds, is a Hebrew term signifying "so be it.") Then, after thanksgiving having been offered by the president, and joyful approval having been expressed by the people, those whom we call deacons or servants, distribute the bread, and wine mingled with water, to every one in the assembly, and then carry the same to those of the members who may have been prevented from being present."

He also informs us that "those who belong to the more

wealthy class of the community, and are so disposed, contribute, each one of them, according to their own free will, and that the amount thus collected is entrusted to the president. Out of the fund thus contributed, he assists orphans and widows, and those who, on account of illness, or from any other cause, happen to be in need of help. Out of the same fund assistance is also given to those who may be in bonds, or at a distance from their ordinary place of abode." He gives, as one of the reasons for observing the Sunday, that "on that day Jesus Christ our Saviour arose from the dead."

The early Christians seem to have regarded the day as one of high festivity. Clement of Alexandria—in the latter part of the same century—calls the first day of the week "the chief of days, our rest indeed." Tertullian, about the same date, says respecting it, "On Sunday we give ourselves up to joy." And again, Origen says in reference to its observance, that "the resurrection of Christ is not celebrated once a year, but every seventh day."

I may just add that Sunday seems to have been the designation employed by the early Christians, in addressing those who did not belong to their own body, but that we also find the expression "Lord's Day," in frequent use among the fathers of the early Church. I am not aware that a single example of the term Sabbath being applied to the first day of the week can be found in any of the writings of the first, second, or third centuries. This term is certainly never so applied in Scripture. In the face of such a weight of authority, I submit that the expression "Christian Sabbath," by which the Lord's Day is desig-

nated in the Assembly's Catechism must be regarded as an unwarrantable departure from the mode of speaking sanctioned by the New Testament, or even by the earliest remains of Christian antiquity.

The uniform testimony of the early Church writers shews that the day was regarded as a joyous festival. To the character of the Lord's Day fasting was reckoned altogether unsuited, and, while on other days kneeling at public prayer was the recognised form, on the first day of the week the practice of standing at prayer was all but universal. In the recent discussions on such points, both in the Established and Free Churches of Scotland, I have not noticed any reference, on either side, or in either house of Assembly, to the practice of primitive antiquity.

The tendency of Episcopalianism may be to defer too much to the authority of the early Church; may not the tendency of Presbyterianism be to neglect the study of patristic literature altogether?

I do not, by thus speaking, mean to imply that the writings of the ancient church teachers are to be regarded as possessing any such authority as belongs exclusively to the inspired Scriptures. The worthies of the early post-Apostolic Church possess no claim whatever to be regarded in the light of authoritative instructors, any more than any other ordinary Christian writers in any age of the Church. But still we may lawfully avail ourselves of their testimony to facts respecting such matters as the observance of certain acts of outward worship. If, in reference to that which was constantly going on among those who professed Christianity, we find that the uniform

testimony furnished by Justin, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, &c., is substantially accordant, it were most unreasonable to question the general accuracy of such accounts. We cannot rely upon the leading church teachers as high authorities in points of Scripture criticism, nor can we trust to their expositions of holy Scripture. Their explanations of the Word of God are often far-fetched and fanciful, and their doctrinal views defective in clearness and simplicity. Some of them were remarkably wanting in sound judgment, and most of them prone to over-estimate the place and importance of mere external rites. Others, again, delighted in unwarrantable speculations, and in those of the fourth and fifth centuries may be detected the very germs of Papal errors. Let no one, therefore, betake himself to their writings with the same reverential deference with which every Christian peruses the inspired Word of God. Let no young and inexperienced believer sit at the feet of such mere fallible instructors, as if all their decisions were to be implicitly received. First, let the prayerful study of the Divine testimonies be diligently prosecuted, and, if leisure and other circumstances permit, let the occasional reading of some of the best specimens of ecclesiastical antiquity be adopted as a means of mental enlargement and spiritual refreshment. Those grievously err who would hold the patristic writers as trustworthy expositors of Scripture, or as sound teachers of Scriptural theology. They also are in the wrong who would be disposed entirely to proscribe the use of them. Exceedingly slight as have been my opportunities of cultivating acquaintance with their productions, I am fully satisfied, from my

own experience, that, in the remains of Cyprian, Chrysostom, and Augustine, in particular, much may be found capable of stimulating, animating, humbling, and elevating the hearts of believers. In our daily conflicts against the earthly tendencies of our own hearts, everything is profitable which serves to elevate our thoughts and affections beyond that which is outward and transitory, upward towards that which is unseen and abiding. The ONE object of faith and hope is the Lord Jesus Himself. We expect to see Him. We are told that, in seeing Him, we shall be conformed to His likeness. But we are taught also to look forward to the enjoyment of full fellowship with the perfected company of His redeemed people.

We are all familiar with the spirit and character of the Old Testament believers. We regard Abraham, and Moses, and David, yea, all the leading worthies of the Old Testament, with mingled sentiments of affection and veneration, such as we cherish for those whom we have personally known and revered on earth. With still higher sentiments of reverence and admiration we recall to mind the evangelists, apostles, and martyrs of the new dispensation. Shall there be found no room in our hearts for cherishing the memoirs of the eminent saints who lived after the last of the apostles had passed away from earth? Shall the burning zeal of Cyprian, the indomitable devotedness of Origen, the uncompromising faithfulness of Chrysostom, and the rich experience of Augustine, fail to call forth our gratitude to the God of all grace, or to encourage our efforts in the way of godliness? To admit that Cyprian sometimes yielded to his besetting sin, the love of domination; that

Origen, amidst all his indefatigable toil in connection with the preservation and interpretation of Scripture, was often led, by his speculative tendencies, fearfully far away from the simplicity of Gospel truth; that the views of Chrysostom respecting the position of Christ's ministers and the nature of Christian ordinances were tinged with superstition; and that Augustine allowed his fancy to outrun the dictates of sound judgment in his expositions of Scripture—is just to admit that those eminent teachers were under no infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that they very largely partook of the infirmities common to our frail humanity. Let it be our endeavour to avoid their errors and to imitate their excellencies; to be followers of them, only in so far as they were followers of Christ.

After this digression—rendered needful in order to guard against misapprehension—let me now proceed to remind you of the important uses to which the observation of the Lord's Day may be applied.

To the great majority of Christians the rest of that day affords a pleasant and profitable relief from their ordinary labours. It brings with it a salutary interruption to that round of incessant occupation in mere earthly objects and interests, by which so many are in danger of being overburdened. That which, on other days, is honourable duty, may, on the Lord's Day, be lawfully laid aside. Opportunity is thus given to those who are engaged in manual toil to enjoy physical repose, as well as quiet leisure for spiritual improvement. The hours spent in solitary retirement may be most beneficially devoted to self-enquiry, confession, thanksgiving, prayer, and other sacred exercises.

The reading of Holy Scripture and the meditation upon its contents may be more fully attended to on that day than during the constant pressure of secular employments, and even those who do not labour with their hands, and whose time is more at their own disposal, will find both bodily and spiritual refreshment in a season set apart for religious retirement. But the opportunity of assembling ourselves together for united worship and spiritual edification is the special characteristic of the day of rest, and to neglect such privileges will be found experimentally most injurious to the prosperity of the Divine life in the soul.

These and other advantages may be regarded as specially belonging to those who have embraced the message of salvation. But even to those who are still without the pale of visible communion, to the enquiring, the unestablished, the careless and ungodly, the ignorant and untaught, very great benefits may result from the observation of the Lord's Day. The facts that on that day all ordinary labours are suspended ; that buildings, wherein people meet to worship God and to hear His truth proclaimed and expounded, are open to all ; that large numbers do assemble for such objects, such facts, I say, render the observance of the day a great national blessing. I know that no legislative enactments will secure the benefits connected with the weekly commemoration of the Lord's resurrection. But as, by the common law of England, release from labour is, in all ordinary cases, the right of our toiling millions, I regard every man who would endeavour to do away with all distinction between the Sunday and other days as engaged in an attempt alike injurious to the

temporal and spiritual well-being of men. To obliterate this distinction, were it possible, would be one of the severest blows which could be inflicted on the spiritual prosperity, and even on the civilization, of our beloved land. If any who feel desirous of destroying such a distinction should read these pages, let me ask them to reflect on the results which would necessarily ensue, and to pause before they involve themselves in the guilt of such consequences.

Are even the temporal interests of man capable of being advanced by his getting further removed from everything fitted to remind him of God, and Christ, and eternity, and heaven? Is it reasonable that beings endowed with a capacity for spiritual enjoyments should devote every hour of their existence to manual labour, and the animal gratifications arising from necessary food and bodily repose? Is it well that those who are engaged in the pursuits of literature or science should never be called away from the pleasures of mental cultivation to the more sacred delights of heavenly wisdom? Should there be no time allowed to the student of mere secular knowledge to seek after that knowledge which maketh wise unto salvation? Surely, in whatever light the subject be regarded, there can be but one opinion, among all who reverence the Divine authority and feel interested in the best interests of humanity, in regard to the importance of maintaining intact the distinction which some, on the professed ground of seeking to promote the benefit of the masses of our people, are endeavouring to obliterate.

I do not, it will be seen, ground the obligation of the

Lord's Day on the Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue. The seventh day I regard as a Jewish institution, not literally binding on Christians. The argument for observing one day in seven, based, by way of analogy, on the Mosaic ordinance, seems to me very strong, but the letter of the law cannot be pressed, except by those who would uphold the observation of the Saturday, according to the practice of the Jews.

Neither would I seek to enforce that over-strained strictness, in the keeping of the Lord's Day, which our primitive forefathers, and especially the Scotch Covenanters, endeavoured to maintain. It appears to me neither warranted by Scripture, nor in accordance with the spirit of Christianity, to forbid the refreshment of a quiet walk to those who, during their weekly toil, have scarcely any opportunity to breathe the pure air of heaven. I should shrink from putting any obstacle in the way of such a measure of needful recreation as does not interfere with the great objects for which the day has been instituted. I question whether the hour spent in the open air, whether alone or in the company of his wife and children, may not be helpful to the spiritual as well as physical enjoyment of the labouring man. The refreshment thus obtained for the body will, in many instances, be found positively beneficial to the soul. Lassitude of the bodily frame is often found to hinder our enjoyment in spiritual exercises. The mere attendance upon outward services in which the mind, overpowered by physical languor, is unable to keep up its attention is assuredly not profitable. To devote the day of sacred rest to mere worldly amusement is, indeed, a fearful

and melancholy desecration. It is a still more distressing sight to witness the gracious institution perverted to the gratifications of sensuality and unholy pleasures. But we do not wisely oppose Sunday desecration if we go beyond the requirements of Scripture, and seek to enforce a rigidity of observance not in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel dispensation.

I am fully aware that, in regard to this question, many excellent men sympathise with the views held by the Puritans, about the time of the Commonwealth, rather than with the more moderate sentiments which, in accordance with those of some of the most distinguished of the Reformers, I would be inclined to advocate. I have no desire to provoke any controversy on the subject. Throughout these discourses my aim has been to lay before you such information as I think may be deduced from the Word of God, in reference to matters bearing on New Testament church polity, rather than to attack the views of others. What I ask of my readers is that they would examine everything I have advanced by the test of Scripture, and reject whatever they find contrary to that ultimate authority. I have not attempted to take up every subject more or less remotely connected with those questions which relate to the Scriptural ordering of Christian assemblies.

I have directed your minds to the consideration of that which we find in the New Testament respecting the origin and formation of the church in its earliest and purest state of development. I have also sought to lay before you the objects of church communion, and the responsibilities and

privileges connected with Christian fellowship. The discourse on gift and office in the Church was prepared with considerable care, and is the result of long reflection and some experience, as well as exact study of Scripture. The subject of the present lecture appears to me of great practical moment. The apostolic institution of the Lord's Day and the Scriptural mode of keeping it cannot be points of indifference to any intelligent followers of Christ. I might have dwelt at greater length upon several matters which I have but slightly referred to, and, probably, some might have expected me to devote one or two lectures to the consideration of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as also to the testimony of Scripture relative to the exercise of church discipline. In regard to Baptism, without feeling the slightest wish to enter upon the subjects of controversy connected with that ordinance, I may just state that I do not find warrant in the New Testament for baptizing any but such as are able to make a credible profession of their faith in Christ, and that, in common with Neander—one of the most distinguished of all our church historians,—I regard infant Baptism as a post-apostolic ordinance founded on mere church authority, without any warrant from the practice of those who were appointed by Christ as the founders of His church on earth.

With regard to the commemorative institution of the Lord's Supper, I hold it to have been observed, from the earliest ages, every Lord's Day, and that there is no sufficient reason for the modern practice of less frequent communion. In reference to the exercise of church discipline my views are clearly, if not convincingly, given in the

third Lecture on the Constitution of the Church. On this last subject I subjoin an extract from one of the most distinguished of the early church Teachers. Addressing those about to receive the communion, Chrysostom thus warns his hearers :

“Let no Judas be present here, no one who is given to covetousness. If here there be any one who is not a disciple, I counsel him to withdraw. Such persons are not received at this table.”

Then turning to those whose office it was to administer the Lord's Supper, he solemnly charges them in the following terms :

“These admonitions I have addressed to those who receive, and I now turn to you who administer, this ordinance.

“No slight chastisement will be yours if you permit any one to participate at this table while you are aware that he is living in sin. His blood will be required at your hands. Should any military commander, whether under the authority of the Emperor, or even the Emperor himself, adorned with his diadem, approach, and approach unworthily, restrain him. Your authority is greater than his. If a spring of water were entrusted to your charge that you should preserve it pure for an unsullied flock, and you were to perceive a multitude of sheep approaching having their mouths defiled with mud, would you permit them to bend down their heads and to pollute the purity of the water?”

Again, he adds, “Be not afraid. Fear God, not man. If you fear men, by men you will be treated with contempt. But if you fear God, even by men you will be held in

honour. If you have not the requisite courage commit the matter to me. My life I am ready to lay down rather than impart the blood of our Lord to unworthy recipients."—Chrys. xxxii. Hom. on Matthew. With this quotation I desire, for the present, to bring these discourses to a close. I have finished my task. Were any to enquire what I have held and taught on points of doctrinal and experimental theology, I can refer them to my Pastoral Letters, and to my Discourse on Jehovah, our Refuge. I have given my views on matters of Biblical criticism in my work on the Characteristics of the Hebrew Language, and in that on the subject of the Proposed Revision of our English Bible. The Discourse on Languages, and an Introduction to the Study of Hebrew, just issued from the press, may also be of some use to the student of Scripture.

And now, within the compass of this course of Lectures, will be found the result of my studies in reference to New Testament Church Order. I am well aware that many Christians take but little interest in such enquiries, but I know, from my own observation, as well as from correspondence, that there are others who would gladly receive any assistance from those students of Scripture who have given their attention to the subject. To such I specially dedicate these fruits of my researches, and request that they would test them by Holy Scripture. Should I have hazarded one single unfounded suggestion, or made one erroneous statement, I shall be thankful to be corrected, and, when convinced that I have been mistaken, shall, by God's grace, be prepared to acknowledge the mistake.

APPENDIX.

EXTRACTS FROM SOME OF THE POST-APOSTOLIC CHURCH-TEACHERS RELATIVE TO THE CONDITION OF THINGS IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN THE FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD CENTURIES.

Justin Martyr appears to have been born about the year 90 A. D., and to have been converted to the faith of Christ in the year 132. He died A. D. 164. In his *Apology* for the Christians, addressed to the Emperor Antoninus Pius, we meet with the following interesting account of the mode in which the Christian assemblies were conducted :—

“After the believer has been baptized, and so incorporated or made one with us, we lead him to the congregation of the brethren (as we call them) and then fervently pour out prayers both for ourselves, for the person baptized, and for all others all over the world ; that, having embraced the truth, our conduct may be as becometh the Gospel, and that we may be found doers of the Word, and so at length be saved with an everlasting salvation. Prayers being over, we salute each other with a kiss. After this, bread and a cup of wine are brought to the President, which he takes, and offers up praise and glory to the Father of All, through the name of His Son and the Holy Spirit ; and this thanksgiving to God for bestowing upon us these His creatures is a prayer of more than ordinary length. When the President has finished the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present conclude with an audible voice, saying, Amen. (Now Amen, in the Hebrew tongue, is, so be it.) After all this, those whom we call Deacons distribute to everyone present the Eucharist—that is the bread and the wine mixed with water—and then carry it to those belonging to the assembly who are prevented from being present. This food we call the Eucharist, of which none are allowed to be partakers but such only as are true believers, &c.”

Then again, a little further on, he says :—

“Upon the day called Sunday, all that live either in city or country meet together at the same place, where the writings of the Apostles and Prophets are read, as much as time permits. When the reading is over the President delivers a discourse wherein he instructs the people and animates them to the practice of such lovely precepts ; at the conclusion of this discourse, we all rise up together and pray ; then, prayers being over, as I have already said, there is bread and wine mixed with water brought forward, and the President sends up prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people at its close utter the Amen, &c., &c., &c.”

“But those who are better off than others, and disposed to liberality, each according to their own free purpose, contribute as they think proper, and the amount contributed is entrusted to the President, who, out of this contribution, relieves the orphans and widows, and such as are reduced to want by sickness or any other cause. Out of the same fund the President assists those who are in bonds, and strangers from a distance. In a word he is looked upon as the guardian and almoner on behalf of all the indigent and necessitous.”

Tertullian was born about 160 A.D., and died about 245 A.D. His *Apology* was probably written about the year 200 A.D.

The following extracts from his *Apology* will be read with interest :—

“We Christians then are a corporation or society of men most strictly united by the same religion, by the same mode of worship, and animated by one and the same hope. When we come to the public service of God, we come in as formidable a body as if we were to storm heaven by force of prayer, and such a force is a most grateful violence to God. When this holy army of supplicants is met and disposed in goodly array, we all send up our prayers for the life of the Emperors, for their ministers, for magistrates, for the good of the state, for the peace of the Empire, and for retarding the final doom.”

“We meet together, likewise, for the reading of the Holy Scriptures and we take such lessons out of them as we judge suit best

with the condition of the times, to confirm our faith, either by forewarning us what we are to expect, or by bringing to our minds the predictions already fulfilled. And certainly our spiritual life is wonderfully nourished by reading the Holy Scriptures, our hopes are thereby elevated and our trust fixed and settled upon God. However, besides the bare reading, we continually preach and press the duties of the Gospel with all the power and argument we can, for it is in these assemblies that we exhort, reprove, and pass the Divine censure or sentence of excommunication; for the judgments in this place are delivered with all solemnity, and after the maturest deliberation possible, as being delivered by men who know that they are pronouncing God's sentence, and who act with the same caution as if God stood visibly present among them. The censures thus solemnly pronounced are regarded as an anticipation of the judgment to come. And the delinquent is looked upon as one condemned of God beforehand, seeing that he has sinned to such a degree as to be excluded by God's ministers from the fellowship of the faithful, the communion of prayers and ordinances, and from all that is involved in union with the church."

"The older members, men of approved piety, preside over our meetings, having been raised to this honourable position not by purchase but by acknowledged merit, for amongst us nothing of a sacred character is to be obtained for money. That kind of treasury we have is not filled with any dishonourable sums, as the price of a purchased religion; every one puts a little to the public stock, commonly once a month, or when he pleases, and only upon the condition that he is both willing and able; every gift here is a freewill offering, and all that which is collected is deposited in a common store for charitable uses, not for the support of merry meetings devoted to drinking and gluttony, but for the feeding the hungry, burying the dead, providing for girls and boys who have neither parents to maintain them nor any provision from other sources, for relieving old people worn out in the service of the church, or for those who have suffered by shipwreck, or for those who are condemned to the mines, or islands, or prisons, only because of their confessing Christ."

A little further on he refers to the love feasts then observed by Christians among themselves, and contrasts such pure festivities with the unholy indulgences common among the Heathen.

"Our souls ascend in prayer to God before we sit down to meat; we eat only what suffices nature, and drink no more than what is becoming for chaste and well conducted persons. When supper is ended and we have washed our hands, and the candles are lighted up, every one is invited forth to sing praises to God, either such hymns as he collects from the Holy Scriptures, or such as are of his own composing, and by this you may judge the amount of drinking at a Christian feast. And as we begin, so we conclude all in prayer, not like a parcel of heated bullies to scour the streets and kill or ravish the next we meet, but in the same temperate and modest manner in which we came together, as men who have not been engaged in drinking wine, but in drinking in refreshment from waiting upon God, and from communion with each other."

Sacred songs appear to have been sung not only in the public assemblies, but in the domestic circle.

Thus in the Second book of a work inscribed to his own wife, Tertullian, dwelling upon the evils connected with marriages between Christians and unbelievers, puts the following questions :

"Every believing woman is bound to obey the Lord, how then can she serve two masters, the Lord and a heathen husband ? "

"What can her husband sing to her ? what can she sing to her husband ? "

He afterwards refers to the happy condition of those who are married in the Lord, and describes them as engaged in stirring up one another by psalms and hymns, and in striving to excel one another in singing the praises of God.

From one of the homilies of Origen (b. 185 A.D.), we gather that the discourse or exposition generally lasted about an hour, and in his Answer to Celsus, he states that, "If the hearers were advanced in knowledge and intelligence, then the preacher ventured to discourse of the deeper mysteries of the Gospel, but if the audience was composed of such as were less advanced, and needed milk, as the apostle expresses it, then he discoursed of the more elementary truths of Scripture."

I have noticed in my Fifth Lecture that during the early ages

the custom was to make a distinction between the Lord's Day and other days, in the position of the body when engaged in prayer. Lord Chancellor King, in his valuable work "On the Worship of the Primitive Church," furnishes the following extracts in reference to the above custom, from the writings of Justin and Origen.

Justin Martyr writes that when the preacher had finished his discourse :

"We all rise up together and present our prayers to God." Apol. II.

In the conclusion of Origen's Sermons we find evidence to the same fact.

"Wherefore having stood up, let us ask help from God that we may be blessed in Christ Jesus, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen."—Hom. xix. in Jerem.

Again,

"Wherefore, rising up together, let us pray to God that we be made worthy of Christ Jesus, to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."—Hom. II. in Cant.

And again—

"Rising up, let us offer sacrifices to the Father, through Christ, for Himself is the propitiation for our sins, to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."—Hom. I. in Isaia.

The prayer which our Lord taught His disciples was in very frequent use among the early Christians. The weighty words of Tertullian relative to its excellency and fulness may be profitably pondered.

"Within this brief compendium how many declarations of Prophets, Evangelists, and Apostles, are comprehended; how many speeches, parables, examples, and precepts, are contained! how many duties towards God are enumerated! Honour in the Word Father, faith in His Holy Name; obedience in the reference to His will, hope in the petition for the coming of His kingdom, life in the request for bread, confession of sins in the asking for forgiveness, earnest desire to escape temptation in the prayer for

protection against being led astray. Why should all this be a matter of surprize or wonder? God alone could teach how he would have Himself addressed in prayer."—Tert: *De Oratioue*.

To guard, however, against the idea that the addition of any other requests would be unbecoming or unnecessary, he, at the same time, teaches that "we may add thereto and offer up our requests to God according to the variety of our circumstances and conditions.—We may add thereunto, for since the Lord, the observer of all human necessities, has, in another place, after He had taught this prayer, said, Ask and ye shall receive; and every one has particular circumstances to beg for; therefore, having premised the lawful and ordinary prayer, there is room for special requests, and opportunity of offering up other petitions, so as that they correspond in character with those commanded."

I am not aware that there is any satisfactory evidence of the imposed use of forms of prayer during the first, second, or third centuries. Tertullian, who flourished in the second and third centuries, thus expresses himself in relation to this question:—

"Looking up to Heaven, we spread abroad our hands, because free from the stain of guilt; with our heads uncovered, because we are not ashamed; and without a monitor, because we pray from the heart."—Apol: C. 30.

I have not given the above Extracts as if they were to be regarded as authoritatively decisive respecting the points to which they refer. Genuine Protestantism acknowledges no other standard of ultimate appeal besides the Word of God. Nevertheless no Christian can feel altogether indifferent to those facts which relate to the actual condition of the church in the early ages of Christianity. The account given by that very learned and laborious student of antiquity, Dr. John L. Mosheim, of the order of proceeding in the early Christian assemblies may be read with interest, although by no means to be taken as designed to exhibit a pattern for our imitation.

"The particular form or manner of proceeding in those solemn assemblies, which were held at stated intervals for the purpose of

Divine worship, does not appear, at first, to have been everywhere precisely similar. It was frequently required that much should be conceded to place, to time, and to various other circumstances. From what is left us on record, however, in the books of the New Testament, and some other very ancient documents, it appears that the course observed in most of the churches was as follows :— After certain introductory prayers, (with the offering up of which there is no doubt but that the service commenced), a select portion of Scripture was read by one or other of the deacons. The lesson being ended, some presbyter or, after the appointment of bishops, the bishop, addressed himself to the people in a grave and pious discourse, not, as it should seem, composed according to the rules of art, but recommending itself to attention and respect through the unaffected piety and fervent zeal of the preacher. In this discourse the multitudes were exhorted to frame their lives according to the Word which they had heard read, and to embrace every occasion of proving themselves worthy disciples of that Divine Master whose followers they professed themselves to be. Some general prayers (the extemporaneous effusions, as it should seem, of a mind glowing with Divine love) were then offered up aloud by the officiating minister and repeated after him by the people.” *

“If there were any present who declared themselves to be commissioned of God to make known His will to the people, I mean persons professing themselves to be prophets, they were now at liberty to address the congregation. After having heard what they had to say, it was referred to the acknowledged prophets, to determine whether they spake under a mere natural impulse, or were prompted in what they delivered by a Divine inspiration. To this first solemn act of public worship succeeded a second, which commenced with the offering of certain voluntary gifts, or oblations, which all those who were possessed of sufficient means were accustomed to bring with them and present to the elders. From what was thus offered the presiding minister selected so much as might appear to him to be necessary for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and consecrated it to that purpose in a set form of words; the people expressing their approval of his prayers by pronouncing aloud the

* From the extracts previously given it will be seen that the assent of the people was expressed by the Amen at the close, not surely by repeating the prayer clause by clause.

word Amen at the conclusion of them. After partaking of the Lord's Supper, the assembly sat down to a sober and sacred repast, denominated the feast of love. In this, however, the same order was not observed in all the churches. At the breaking up of the assembly, the brethren and sisters exchanged with each other what, from its being meant as a token of good-will, was termed the kiss of peace. How truly admirable the simplicity by which the rites of our holy religion were characterized in these its infant days!" —Vidal's Translation of Mosheim's Commentaries on the Affairs of the Christians before the time of Constantine the Great, Vol. I., p. 248, &c.

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