

favour of proper Prelacy. These superintendents are not regarded as holding a distinct higher office, superior to that of presbyters, and investing them simply as holding that office with jurisdiction over ordinary pastors, but merely as presbyters raised by the common consent of their brethren to a certain very limited control for the sake of order. This institution is no proof that the Lutheran churches hold the *doctrine* of Prelacy, but merely that they hold the *lawfulness* of a certain limited pre-eminence or superiority being conferred by presbyters upon one of themselves. Indeed, the doctrine of Presbytery, as opposed to Prelacy, was not only held, as we have seen, by Luther and his associates, but was distinctly declared in the articles of Smalcald, which is one of the symbolical books of the Lutheran church. There it is set forth, that all the functions of church government belong equally of right to all who preside over the churches, whether called pastors, presbyters, or bishops; and this general principle is expressly applied to ordination, as proving that ordination by ordinary pastors is valid.*

The whole doctrine of the Lutheran church upon this subject is thus laid down by Buddæus,—and there cannot be a doubt that his statement fairly embodies what has always been held by the generality of Lutheran divines: “Si jus divinum spectes, ministri ecclesiæ omnes inter se, intuitu dignitatis et officii, sunt æquales. Discrimen enim, quod deinceps inter episcopos et presbyteros intercessit, tempore apostolorum ignotum fuit. Interim nihil obstat, quo minus ecclesia muneris et dignitatis quandam inæqualitatem introducat, modo non ex docentibus imperantes fiant, et, quod humana auctoritate factum est, jure divino constitutum credatur.”†

It has always been one of the leading general arguments which Romanists have adduced against the Reformers and their successors in the Protestant churches, that, though mere presbyters, they assumed functions which belonged only to bishops,—and especially that, as mere presbyters, they were incapable of preserving a succession of pastors in the church, since bishops alone had the power of ordaining to the ministerial office. And this, of course, is the same objection which is commonly adduced against us by Prelatists. The substance of the answer which has always been given by

* Tittmann, Lib. Symb. Eccles. | † Instit. Theol. Dogm., p. 1336;
Evangel., p. 271. | Vide p. 1340. Ed. 1724.

Presbyterians to this objection, whether adduced by Romanists or by Prelatists, is this,—that, according to the standard of God's word, there is no higher permanent office in the church of Christ than the presbyterate, and that presbyters are fully competent to the execution of all necessary ecclesiastical functions. These two positions confirm and strengthen each other. If Christ has not appointed any higher permanent office in the church than the presbyterate, then presbyters *must* be competent to the execution of all necessary ecclesiastical functions; and, on the other hand, if they are competent to the execution of all necessary ecclesiastical functions, this is, at least, a very strong presumption that no higher office, with peculiar and exclusive functions, has been established. The functions which are assigned exclusively to the episcopate by the Council of Trent, and by Prelatists in general, and represented as at once its distinguishing characteristics, and the proofs of its necessity, are *confirmation* and *ordination*; and with respect to these two functions, the Reformers, and Protestants in general, have maintained and established these two positions: first, that confirmation is not a necessary ecclesiastical function,—not a process which there is any reason to believe that Christ intended to be carried on wherever He has a church, in the ordinary administration of affairs; and, secondly, that though ordination, or the solemn setting apart of men to the pastoral office, is necessary, and forms an indispensable part of the ordinary permanent business of the church, there is nothing in Scripture which throws any doubt upon the perfect competency of presbyters to ordain,—nay, that there is quite enough to establish positively, not only the validity, but the regularity, of the ordination which is performed, as Timothy's was, by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

These were the leading doctrines deduced from the sacred Scriptures by the whole body of the Reformers upon the subject of the government of the church; and their most unequivocal and decided testimony in favour of Presbyterian principles may well enable us to regard with perfect indifference the anathemas of the Council of Trent, and the denunciations of high church Prelatists, who stigmatize Presbyterian ministers as unwarranted and profane intruders into sacred offices and functions, and who consign the members of Presbyterian churches to what they call “uncovenanted mercies.”

Sec. III.—*Popular Election of Office-bearers.*

While the Papists contended that the government of the church was monarchical, in this sense, that it had permanently a visible head upon earth, vested *jure divino* with a right to govern it in all its affairs,—namely, the Bishop of Rome as the successor of Peter,—the Reformers maintained that it was monarchical only in this sense, that Christ was its head and ruler,—its only head and ruler,—and contended that it had no visible head upon earth. And with reference to the administration of the affairs of the church as a visible organized society existing upon earth, the Reformers were accustomed to contend, in opposition to the Romanists, that the government which Christ had appointed for His church was a combination of aristocracy and democracy.* The aristocratic principle in the government of the church—taking the word, of course, not in the popular sense in which it is commonly employed among us, but in its proper philological meaning, as denoting the exercise of the power of government, by a comparatively small and select body of those who are regarded as best fitted for the discharge of the duty—is based upon the clear distinction made in Scripture between the rulers or office-bearers and the ordinary members of the church,—the warrant given to the former to exercise a certain kind and degree of authority, and the obligation imposed upon the latter to render a certain measure of obedience and submission to those who are set over them. The nature and extent of this authority, and of the correlative submission,—the principles by which they are regulated, and the classes or orders of persons in whom the authority is vested,—we have already considered. We have now to advert to the views maintained by the Reformers, in opposition to the Church of Rome, with respect to the democratic element, as embodied to some extent in the constitution of the church of Christ.

The position maintained by the Reformers,—that the democratic principle was exhibited in the constitution of the Christian church as well as the aristocratic,—involved this general idea, that the ordinary members of the church had some standing or influence, greater or less, direct or indirect, in the regulation of its affairs; and this general position they thought fully warranted by

* Rutherford's "Plea for Paul's Presbytery," p. 63.

what is said in Scripture concerning the church of Christ. The church, in its strict and proper sense, they were unanimous in defining to be the *coetus fidelium*,—the company of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ; and the visible church they regarded as comprehending all these, though containing also usually many who, while professing to believe in Christ, were believers only in name. The church, most strictly and properly so called, consisted of converted men,—of men, every one of whom had been elected from eternity to everlasting life, and every one of whom had been born again by the mighty power of God,—created again in Christ Jesus unto good works; and the catholic visible church comprehended in its embrace all the persons to whom this description applied existing at any one time upon earth. Now, this church is represented in Scripture as the spouse of Christ, the bride, the Lamb's wife; and glorious things are spoken of her. The great object of Christ's assuming human nature, and suffering and dying, was, that He might purchase to Himself this company as His peculiar property, and that He might make full and effectual provision for gathering them out of the world, and preparing them for sitting down with Him on His throne in heaven. It was for the purpose of calling these persons out from among the mass of men, and fitting them for the enjoyment of eternal blessedness, that He established a visible church upon earth,—appointed ordinances,—and made all the other arrangements of an external kind, by which His visible church is characterized. These arrangements were all directed to the welfare of His church,—they may be all regarded as privileges which He has conferred upon it; and they are so regulated, that the manner in which the visible church—including the various sections and divisions of which it may consist—discharges its duties and executes its functions, exercises the powers and improves the privileges He has conferred upon it, affects materially the great end of His coming, and suffering, and dying.

Papists are accustomed to identify the church on earth with Christ, its head, in the sense of its being not merely His representative, but clothed with all His power and authority, and entitled to act—especially through its visible head—as He might and would have acted had He been present. Protestants see no warrant in Scripture for this mode of representing the church, and are always careful to distinguish between the head and the body. The church is not Christ, but only the Lamb's wife, invested with no discretion-

ary power over the house, but bound to be guided in all things by the commands and directions of her Lord. Still the company of believers, and the catholic visible society, which contains or includes them, is invested with great dignity, and with exalted privileges. Even the ministry was appointed and established for its sake, and with a view to its welfare; and is, therefore, to be regarded as, in a certain sense, occupying a place subordinate to the church. The whole Popish system of doctrine, upon the subject of the government of the church, is based upon the opposite idea, as if the establishment of a church was intended for the object of providing subjects for ecclesiastical rulers; while Protestants have always regarded the ministry but as a means to an end, appointed and established for the sake of the church.

It is this great principle of the Reformation that is indicated, as I formerly mentioned, in the statement of our Confession of Faith,—namely, that to this catholic visible church Christ hath *given* the ministry, the ordinances, and the oracles of God. Christ has *given* these things to the visible church, and, therefore, they belong to it,—occupying thus, according to their respective natures and objects, a place, in some sense subordinate, as property is to its possessor. It was upon this general idea of the church, as represented to us in Scripture,—the place it occupies, and the powers and privileges conferred upon it,—that the Reformers pleaded the general sentiment of there being something democratic in its constitution,—that is, of the great body of the members composing it being entitled to exert some influence in the regulation of its affairs. They held, indeed, that the church was bound, by a regard to Christ's authority, to *have* office-bearers, and could not lawfully or beneficially continue without them, if it was possible to get them; and they held, also, that the ordinary exercise of the power of the keys—the right of ordinarily administering the necessary business of the church—was vested in these office-bearers. Still they also held, in general, that all the power and authority necessary for the church executing its functions and attaining its objects, lay radically and fundamentally in the church itself,—in the company of believers; so that, when necessity required, churches might provide and establish office-bearers for themselves, and do whatever might be needful for securing all the objects connected with their own welfare, which they were bound to aim at, and the enjoyment of all the ordinances which Christ had appointed. It

was upon this ground that the Lutherans laid down, in the Articles of Smalcald,—one of their symbolical books,—the following positions: “Ubicunque est Ecclesia, ibi est jus administrandi Evangelii. Quare necesse, est Ecclesiam retinere jus vocandi, eligendi, et ordinandi ministros. Et hoc jus est donum proprie datum Ecclesiæ, quod nulla humana auctoritas Ecclesiæ eripere potest. Ubi est vera Ecclesia, ibi necesse est esse jus eligendi et ordinandi ministros.”*

These are positions which Calvin and the other Reformers would not have disputed in the abstract, though Calvin, with his usual comprehensive wisdom, was more careful, in expounding this subject, to lay down, at the same time, the doctrine which he believed to be also taught in Scripture as to the necessity of ministers and other office-bearers, *ex necessitate præcepti*, though not *ex necessitate medii*,—the *obligation* of every church to have ministers and office-bearers, to leave to them the ordinary administration of all divine ordinances, and to submit, with the limitations formerly explained, to the exercise of their authority in the execution of the functions of their office. The great general principle taught by the Reformers upon this subject, and generally held by Presbyterian divines, is thus expressed by Turretine: † “Ecclesiis data est potestas clavium. . . . Christus dat Ecclesiæ potestatem ligandi et solvendi. . . . Fateor Ecclesiam hoc jus exercere per Rectores suos. Sed in eo Pastores exercent jus quod competit corpori, tanquam illud repræsentantes, ita ut jus illud radicaliter pertineat semper ad corpus, et illi proprium sit; ad Pastores verò quoad *usum* et *exercitium*, quod nomine corporis fieri debet.” Notwithstanding the general admission of this principle, there are indications among the Reformers of differences of opinion as to the way in which the practical application of it ought to be followed out,—some applying it more democratically than others,—just as men have differed, and may honestly differ, in some of their views upon this subject, who concur in holding the general principle laid down in our Confession, that Christ has given the ministry, ordinances, and oracles to the catholic visible church.

But there was one point on which the Reformers were of one mind, and on this mainly they usually rested their general position, that the government of the church exhibited a combination of the democratic principle with the aristocratic; and it was this,—

* Tittmann, pp. 271, 272.

† Turretin. Loc. xviii., Qu. xxiv., sec. vii.

that the ordinary members of the church, or Christian congregations, had a right to choose their own pastors and other office-bearers; and that, of course, *a fortiori*, they were fully entitled to prevent any pastor from being intruded upon them,—that is, placed over them without their consent, or against their will. This doctrine was taught by all the Reformers; and it was based by them, not only upon those portions of the New Testament which bear directly upon the election of ecclesiastical office-bearers, but also upon all the general views taught there concerning the functions and privileges of the church, and the rights and duties of individual Christians. This position, as to the views of the Reformers, has been disputed; but I have no hesitation in saying, as I said in regard to the subject formerly discussed, that this is not a question where there is room for an *honest* difference of opinion among competent judges, and that those who deny the position may, without injustice, be regarded either as asserting what they do not believe, or as being, on some ground or other,—whether it be ignorance, or want of sense or sobriety of judgment,—incompetent to form an opinion upon the point. I do not mean to enter into a detailed exposition of the evidence which might be adduced upon the subject; but I must make a few observations upon the import of the doctrine, and the general grounds on which we ascribe the maintenance of it to the Reformers, and regard the denial of it as Popish.

The Reformers were Presbyterians, and, of course, understood the position in a Presbyterian, and not in an Independent or Congregational, sense,—that is, they understood it with a due regard to the scriptural distinction between the position, powers, and functions of the rulers, and of the ordinary members of the church,—in other words, they did not exempt the people, in exercising the power of election, from the ordinary control and censure of the church courts; they ascribed to the ordinary office-bearers the right of presiding and moderating in elections, with full power to prevent faction, confusion, and tumult; and they ascribed also to those in whom the right of ordaining was vested ordinarily the right of judging for themselves whether or not the person chosen by the people should be ordained, and, of course, of refusing to ordain when they thought the choice a bad one. All this their principles as Presbyterians required of them to maintain; and all this they openly asserted; and when these considerations

are kept in remembrance, no person of ordinary intelligence and discernment will find any difficulty in disposing of the evidence that has sometimes been produced to show, that some of the Reformers denied the right of the Christian people to the election of their own office-bearers, and sanctioned the right of their ecclesiastical rulers to intrude pastors upon them against their will.

There is one other consideration to be kept in view in judging of the meaning of their statements,—namely, that they often used the word *election* in the wider sense of *vocation*, as comprehending the whole process by which men were made ministers, and became qualified and authorized to execute the functions of the ministry; and, accordingly, they sometimes ascribed the election of pastors to the office-bearers, and sometimes to the ordinary members, since both had a share in it; and as the most important departments of the general subject of the vocation of pastors,—including the process we commonly call licensing, the whole judgment on qualifications, and the ultimate ordination,—belonged, upon Presbyterian principles, to the office-bearers, it was not unusual to ascribe the election to them, and to speak of the place and function of the congregation in the matter—though it really comprehended the whole of what we commonly understand by election in the more limited sense—under the names of their consenting or approving. All this is conclusively established by an examination of the First Book of Discipline of our own church, and it is in full accordance with the sentiments and language of the Reformers in general.

It is also to be remembered, that the question is not, What was the mode of appointing ministers that actually prevailed in the Reformed churches? but, *What were the doctrines and opinions* of the Reformers as to the way and manner in which they *ought* to be appointed? It is not to be assumed that the Reformers always succeeded in getting their views on these points fully carried into effect. The Church of Scotland, though from the beginning decidedly opposed to lay patronage, never succeeded—except during the few years between 1649 and the Restoration—in getting it entirely abolished; and we have complaints from some of the Continental Reformers of the civil authorities interfering unwarrantably in this matter, and depriving congregations of their just and scriptural rights. To ascertain the doctrines of the Reformers on this point, we have to examine their confessions,

and those portions of their writings in which they formally expound and discuss the subject,—especially their commentaries upon those passages of Scripture which have been usually regarded as bearing upon it; and a careful and deliberate examination of these establishes beyond all reasonable or honest doubt, that the Reformers maintained, as a scriptural principle, in opposition to the Church of Rome, the right of the Christian people to the choice of their own pastors and office-bearers. The doctrine of the Lutheran churches is explicitly declared in the extract we have quoted from the Articles of Smalcald. That of the Reformed churches is set forth with equal clearness in the following extract from the Second Helvetic Confession, which was formally approved by most of them: “*Vocentur et eliguntur electione ecclesiastica et legitima ministri ecclesiæ: id est, eliguntur religiose ab ecclesia, vel ad hoc deputatis ab ecclesia, ordine justo, et absque turba, seditionibus et contentione.*”* These are statements which *can* have but one meaning, which by no process of trickery can be evaded or explained away. Calvin’s views upon the subject are embodied in the following explicit and emphatic declaration: “*Est inopia ecclesiæ spoliatio, quoties alicui populo ingeritur episcopus, quem non petierit, vel saltem libera voce approbarit.*”† It is utterly impossible to explain away this statement, and it is in full accordance with the uniform and consistent teaching of Calvin upon the subject in all his works. Not a single sentence has ever been produced from him which contradicts, or seems to contradict, the principle which is here so explicitly and emphatically declared; and no evidence has ever been produced, that on this, or on any other, occasion he has used, or seemed to use, the principal words which occur in this sentence in any other sense than that which they naturally and universally bear.

The sum and substance of all that has been alleged in order to prove that the Reformers did not teach, as a scriptural principle, the right of the Christian people to choose their own office-bearers, just amounts to this,—that by election and consent they did not mean election and consent, but something totally different; and that, in discussing this subject, they used these words in a sense in which they never were used by any other writers, or

* Confess. Helvetic., cap. xviii. (Corp. Lib. Symbol., Augusti, 1827, pp. 58, 59.)

† Iustit., Lib. iv., c. v., sec. 3.

upon any other occasion. As this is really the sum and substance of the only artifice by which it has been attempted to evade the testimony of the Reformers upon this subject, it ought, in common fairness, to be laid down as a distinct and definite proposition, and proved by suitable and appropriate evidence. If this were attempted,—as it ought to be, but as it never has been,—the deplorable deficiency of the proof would become palpable to every one; and no man of ordinary intelligence and integrity would be able to resist the conclusion, that, if it be possible to embody in words an unequivocal assertion that the Christian people are entitled, upon scriptural grounds, to choose their own pastors, the Reformers have done so, and have held up this as an important truth, in opposition to the doctrines and practices of the Church of Rome.

This is, in substance, the same artifice by which Popish writers have attempted to evade the evidence adduced to prove that the early church adopted and acted upon the principles of popular election and non-intrusion; but the artifice is less discreditable when attempted in the case of the early church than in that of the Reformers. The evidence that the early church held the same views upon this subject as the Reformers did, is satisfactory and conclusive; and the Reformers were accustomed to appeal to this evidence in opposing the Romanists upon this point, just as we do. But the evidence of the doctrine of the early church, at least upon the point of election,—for the proof that, even so late as the fifth and sixth centuries, the principles of non-intrusion in the natural, legitimate, and honest sense of it was the law of the church, is altogether beyond the reach of cavil, and has accordingly been admitted both by Papists and Episcopalians,—is less explicit than that of the Reformers; and the reason is, that in the early church the subject was not discussed, just because no controversy had arisen regarding it; whereas the Reformers had to oppose and refute the doctrine and practice of the Church of Rome upon the subject, and were thus led to be more full and explicit in their statements. Indeed, even if their particular statements had been much less explicit than they are, no one who has an intelligent acquaintance with the *status questionis* in the controversy between them and the Romanists on the subject, can have any doubt that they maintained the principle of popular election and non-intrusion. It is perfectly certain, and does not

admit of any dispute, that the Church of Rome conceded then, and concedes still, in doctrine and argument, as large an amount of influence to the people in the appointment of their pastors as is at present enjoyed by congregations in the Established Churches of this country; and that the grounds taken in argument by the defenders of the state of things which prevails in these institutions, are precisely, in all respects, those which have been taken by Popish writers, at least in defending intrusion. This being the case, it is plain, that if the Reformers had held the views which have been sometimes ascribed to them, there would not, and could not, have been any controversy between them and the Church of Rome upon this point. It is utterly impossible for the defenders of these views to point out any material distinction between them, and those which are held by the Church of Rome, and have been defended by all Popish writers. And yet we not only know that there was a controversy between the Reformers and the Romanists; but we can easily prove that the views which we hold were those maintained by the Reformers in this controversy, and that the views of the Romanists were precisely, and in all respects, those held by our opponents.

It is true of this subject of election and consent, as of the identity of bishop and presbyter formerly discussed, and perhaps still more fully in this case than the former, that traces and evidences of the scriptural primitive practice continued to subsist, and subsist still, in the Church of Rome, very much in the same way as the form of a call subsists in the Established Church, where the reality is gone. The doctrine of the necessity of the election or consent of the people in the appointment of ministers, as a doctrine unquestionably taught by the Reformers, was taken up in the Council of Trent, and discussed, and condemned there; and F. Paul has recorded* a very curious speech made there on that occasion by a canon of Valentia, in which—after admitting that popular election prevailed in the early church, but alleging that this was merely a special indulgence granted for a time, and afterwards very properly taken away by the Popes; and after denouncing the audacity of the modern heretics,—that is, the Reformers,—in reviving this most dangerous heresy, which was fitted to ruin the church—he not only urged that the council

* Liv. vii., sec. vii.

should condemn it, but, further, that they should erase from their liturgical books a number of passages which had been handed down from ancient times, and which plainly suggested and proved the ancient practice of the election and consent of the people, and thus afforded a strong handle to heretics. The council adopted the first part of his proposal, and anathematized the Protestant heresy of the necessity of the people's consent; but they did not venture to adopt the second. They would, no doubt, have been very glad to have got quit of the passages which the worthy canon quoted from the Pontificale, and which afforded clear indications of the ancient practice, and plainly condemned their own; but they thought it more prudent to let the passages stand, and to leave to the heretical defenders of the necessity of the people's consent, the handle of having these passages to quote, than the handle of their having been erased.

The only thing possessed of plausibility that has been produced in opposition to the assertion, that the Reformers held the doctrine of popular election, is a letter of Beza's, which has been subjected of late to a good deal of discussion; and I refer to it at present, not because I can discuss its meaning,—this I have done fully in another form,*—but because it is connected with the important historical fact, that in 1562, and again in 1572, these views of church government, which have since been called Independent or Congregational, having been broached by Morellius, or Morely, were brought under the cognisance of the Protestant Church of France, and were condemned by its supreme judicatory, with the general concurrence of the Reformed churches. Beza, like Calvin, has most unequivocally and explicitly asserted the right of the Christian people to choose their own pastors; but one or two vague and ambiguous expressions occur in this letter, and in another passage of his works, which have been eagerly laid hold of as grounds for evading his express declarations, and ascribing to him the doctrine of the Church of Rome, as opposed by Calvin and himself and the other Reformers. Some importance has been justly attached, in examining the statements produced from this letter of Beza, to the question, Whether the direct and primary subject of the letter was the election of office-bearers, or the whole power and authority ascribed to the people in the regulation of

* In reply to Sir Wm. Hamilton's "Be not Martyrs by mistake." See Discussions on Church Principles, p. 470. (Edrs.)

ecclesiastical affairs by Morellius and the Independents. It is only upon the supposition that the proper primary subject of the letter is popular election, and not the whole power ascribed to the people by the Independents,—including, of course, popular election,—that the arguments of those who would represent Beza as sanctioning the Popish principle of intrusion, are possessed of anything like plausibility. Now, the evidence is perfectly conclusive, and cannot fail to be seen and felt by any one who is at all acquainted with the nature of the controversy which Morellius excited in the Reformed Church of France, that Beza's letter was directed not against the principle of popular election, in the sense in which it has been generally held by Presbyterians, but against the whole power ascribed by the Independents to the people in the regulation of *all* ecclesiastical affairs,—including, of course, the election of office-bearers, but comprehending a great deal more. And this affords a satisfactory explanation of one or two vague and ambiguous expressions in the letter, which might otherwise have had the appearance of being scarcely reconcilable with the clear and explicit declarations made by Beza, when treating of the subject of election, formally and of set purpose. The assertion which has been recently made, that “the problem there mooted is limited exclusively to the share which the congregation at large ought to have in the election of pastors,” and that “all has reference to this single point alone,” is one of those astounding declarations of which one does not know well what to say, and which almost compel us, whether we will or not, to doubt either the common sense or the common honesty of the men who make them.*

But the important point to which I wish to direct attention, is, that the Protestant Church of France—and the Church of Geneva and the other Reformed churches cordially concurred with them in the matter—did, while condemning the Independent views of Morellius, as involving an extension of the democratic principle beyond what the Scripture warranted, continue to assert and maintain, as a scriptural doctrine, the principle of popular election, and the necessity of the people's consent. The principle of non-intrusion, in the natural and legitimate sense of it, was set forth in the discipline of the Reformed Church of France, both before and after their condemnation of Morellius, so clearly and

* See Discussions on Church Principles. (Edrs.)

explicitly as to preclude the possibility of an honest attempt to dispute it. And, what is peculiarly important, the right of the people to choose their own pastors is openly maintained in a work written for the express purpose of refuting Morellius, at the command of the National Synod, and published in their name by Sadeel or Chandieu. This fact is perfectly conclusive upon the question, and lies altogether beyond the reach of cavil or evasion. And this important general consideration holds true equally of the Scottish Presbyterians at the time of the Westminster Assembly,—namely, that while strenuously opposing the views of the Independents in regard to the general subject of church government, they continued to assert the great Reformation principle of the scriptural right of the people to the election of their own office-bearers. Some of the English Presbyterians, indeed, of that period yielded to the perverting influence of their controversy with the Independents, and of the circumstances of their country, and gave some indications of sacrificing or compromising this doctrine of the Reformation. But the Scotch Commissioners in the Westminster Assembly, and the Church of Scotland in general, acted a steadier and more consistent part,—adhering faithfully to the scriptural views of the Reformers, and transmitting them to us, to be asserted and maintained, as a portion of God's revealed truth, and intimately connected—as experience has abundantly proved—with the best interests and the real welfare of the church of Christ.

Sec. IV.—Congregationalism, or Independency.

In discussing the subject of the Council at Jerusalem, I entered with some detail into the leading points of difference between Presbyterians and Congregationalists on the subject of church government. For this reason, I do not intend now to dwell upon this topic at any length, but merely to put together a few observations regarding it.

Presbytery occupies the golden mean between Prelacy on the one hand, and Congregationalism on the other; holding some principles in regard to the government of the church in common with Prelatists against the Congregationalists, and others in common with Congregationalists against the Prelatists. The chief points in which Presbyterians agree with Prelatists, in opposition

to Congregationalists, are these: in denying that each congregation possesses ordinarily a right, and a divine right, to entire and absolute independence in the regulation of all its affairs; in ascribing the ordinary power of government in each congregation to the office-bearers, as distinguished from the ordinary members; and in maintaining the lawfulness and propriety of such a union or organization of different congregations together, as affords warrant and ground for the exercise of a certain measure of authoritative control by ecclesiastical office-bearers over a number of associated congregations.

Prelatists and Presbyterians concur in maintaining, in opposition to Congregationalists, these great general principles. They do not consider themselves called upon to concede to the whole body of the ordinary members of a congregation the right of ultimately deciding all questions relating to its affairs, and entire sufficiency for the regular performance of every function needful for the preservation of the church, and the administration of all necessary ecclesiastical business; and they refuse to concede to each congregation, regarded collectively and as one body, entire independence of all authority or control, exercised by any but its own members. They hold that the right, or rather, the ordinary exercise of the right, of administering the necessary business of each congregation, is vested, not in the whole members of the congregation, but in its office-bearers (though Presbyterians—not Episcopalians—have generally held, that each congregation has the right of choosing these office-bearers); and that a wider association of office-bearers is entitled to exercise jurisdiction over each and every one of the congregations which may be directly or indirectly represented in it. These general views may be said to be held both by Prelatists and Presbyterians, in opposition to Congregationalists; and are regarded by them as sanctioned by scriptural statements and apostolic practice, and as much more accordant than the opposite views with the scriptural representations of the character and constitution of the church of Christ,—and especially with the representations given us there of the church as a united, combined, organized body, whose different parts or sections should be closely and intimately linked together.

Presbyterians and Congregationalists concur in holding, in opposition to Episcopalians, that the apostles established only two

orders of office-bearers in the church,—namely, presbyters and deacons; while modern Congregationalists usually regard as unwarranted the distinction which Presbyterians make among presbyters or elders, by dividing them into two classes, one of whom only rule, and the other both teach and rule. Presbyterians may thus be said to have the concurrence of Episcopalians in the leading points in which they differ from the Congregationalists, and the concurrence of the Congregationalists in the leading points in which they differ from the Episcopalians. The only subject of any material importance affecting the government of the church on which Episcopalians and Congregationalists generally concur in opposition to Presbyterians, is with respect to the scriptural warrant for the office of what we commonly call *ruling*, as distinguished from *teaching*, elders; and the weight due to this concurrence, in opposition to our views,—looking at it simply as a question of authority,—is very greatly diminished by the fact that the most eminent of the early defenders of Congregational principles,—such as Thomas Goodwin, John Cotton, and the great Dr John Owen,—were decidedly in favour of the scriptural authority for this office; and that Owen has declared of the principal passage on which the Presbyterian doctrine on this subject is founded,* that it is a text “of uncontrollable evidence” (in support of the office of ruling elder), “if it had anything to conflict withal but prejudices and interest.” †

The two leading points in which Congregationalists differ from Presbyterians and Episcopalians upon the subject of church government, are sometimes represented as expressed or indicated by

* 1 Tim. v. 17.

† Owen's True Nature of a Gospel Church, c. vii., p. 484, of the 20th vol. of Russell's edition. See Brown's Vindication of the Presbyterian Form of Church Government, Letter ix., p. 149, and Letter xi., pp. 189, 190. Similar admissions from some of the old divines of the Church of England, especially Whitgift and Whittaker, given in Voëtius and Jameson, as cited below. Treatise of New England Churches as to Ruling Elders, in Punchard's View of Congregationalism, p. 78. Full discussion of the subject of Ruling Elders in Voëtii Politica

Ecclesiastica, Pars ii., Lib. ii.; Tract. iii., c. iv., v., vi. Reference to authorities, c. iv. as above, tom. iii., pp. 457–462. Jameson's Cyprianus Isonianus, p. 540. Bucer, De Gubernatione Ecclesiæ. Miller on the Office of the Ruling Elder. King on do., and his Exposition and Defence of Presbyterian Church Government. Smyth (of Charleston) on the Name, Nature, and Function of Ruling Elders.—His object is to prove that they are not presbyters, and that, as representatives of the people, their office should be temporary. This view is also held by Dr Hodge of Princeton.

the two principal designations by which they are usually known,—namely, “Congregationalists” and “Independents.” The word Congregationalist, under this idea, indicates more immediately that they hold that the body of the ordinary members of the church possesses the right of regulating all the affairs of the congregation, as distinguished from the office-bearers, to whom this right is ascribed by the Presbyterians; while the word “Independents” indicates more immediately their other leading principle,—namely, that each congregation, viewed collectively as one body, including the office-bearers, is independent of all external authority or control,—fully adequate of itself for preserving and perpetuating all church offices, and executing all church functions, and subject to no control from any other body whatever. This distinction is at least useful and convenient, as assisting us in conceiving rightly, and in remembering readily, the leading points in which, as Presbyterians, we differ in opinion from this section of the church of Christ.

These peculiar and distinctive principles of modern Independents or Congregationalists were not explicitly professed, and, of course, were neither formally defended nor assailed in the early church. As a subject of controversial discussion, they are wholly of modern origin. They seem to have been first publicly and distinctly broached, as exhibiting the scriptural views of the constitution and government of the church, by J. B. Morellius or Morely, who was connected with the Reformed Church of France, and whose work on the subject, entitled “*Traicté de la Discipline et Police Chretienne*,” was published at Lyons in 1561, and was soon thereafter condemned by the National Synod at Orleans in 1562, and again at Nismes in 1572. They were embraced also by Ramus, the celebrated philosopher, who was killed in the massacre of St Bartholomew; but they made no permanent impression upon the French Protestants. It was not till about twenty or thirty years later, near the end of the sixteenth century, that these views were brought out and practically acted upon in this country, by some persons who might be considered as offshoots of the true original English Puritans, and who were known for a time under the name of Brownists. These views have not been embraced to any considerable extent among the churches of Christ, and indeed scarcely by any except the descendants of those who first broached them in this country, and who are a

more numerous body now in the United States than in Great Britain.*

It is true, indeed, also, that we have not much controversial discussion in regard to Episcopacy and Presbytery before the Reformation; but we have at least a pretty full and formal statement of the argument in favour of these two systems as early as the fourth century,—of the scriptural argument in favour of Presbytery by Jerome, usually regarded as the most learned of the fathers,—and of the argument in favour of Prelacy by Epiphanius in reply to *Ærius*. And it may be worth while to observe, in passing, that Jerome’s scriptural argument for Presbytery is still generally regarded by Presbyterians as a conclusive and unanswerable defence of their cause; while the earliest defence of Prelacy, by Epiphanius, has been admitted by some of the ablest defenders of Prelacy—such as Cardinal Bellarmine, De Dominis, Archbishop of Spalatro, and Hooker—to be weak and unsatisfactory, though they have not, I think, been able to devise anything that was greatly superior to it.

There is not much connected with the history of the original publication and maintenance of Independent views of church government to commend them to a favourable reception. They were, however, taken up in substance in the seventeenth century by some men who are entitled to the highest respect, and they were embraced and defended very ably in their leading principles, as we have stated them, by Dr Owen,—certainly one of the very weightiest names in the history of the church,—though he did not carry them out so far as most modern Independents have done. It is true, likewise, that, in the history of modern ecclesiastical literature, there is a good deal to which Independents may not unreasonably refer, as affording pretty strong presumptions, so far as mere authority goes, in favour of their peculiar views. I allude here particularly to the fact, that several very eminent investigators of the history of the church, who did not themselves make a profession of Congregational principles, have conceded that the

* On the history of these views, see Punchard’s *History of Congregationalism*, 1841, and Hanbury’s *Historical Memorials relating to the Independents*, vol. i., 1839. On Morely, see Haag’s “*La France Protestante*,” Aymon, “*Tous les Synodes Nation-* aux,” tome i., pp. 29, 122–124. On Ramus, Haag, “*La Ramée*,” Beza, *Epistolæ*, Epist. lxvii., lxviii. Bayle, tome iii., Art. Ramus. Waddington’s “*Ramus, Sa vie, ses écrits et ses opinions*,” 1855, pp. 239–248, 434.

practice of the early church, from the time immediately succeeding that of the apostles, was either wholly or in a great measure in accordance with that of Congregationalists. Instances of this are Sir Peter King, afterwards Lord Chancellor, Mosheim, Dr Campbell of Aberdeen, and Neander.* These men have all made statements in regard to the constitution and government of the primitive church, which Independents are fairly entitled to plead, as affording some countenance to the peculiar views which they hold in opposition to Presbyterians, though, at the same time, it should be noted, as holding true of *all* these men, that they did not regard even apostolic practice upon this subject as binding upon the church in succeeding ages. Still, the opinion they expressed as to the general practice of the church in the first and second centuries, must be admitted to lend some countenance to the views commonly held upon this subject by Congregationalists, and to be well fitted, at once from the general eminence of the men, and their ecclesiastical relations, to prepossess men's minds in favour of Independency. These eminent men have, more or less fully and explicitly, asserted, that, for the first century at least, each congregation—that is, the whole members of it, and not merely its office-bearers—transacted in common the whole of the ordinary necessary ecclesiastical business, including the exercise of discipline, and that each congregation was wholly independent of every other, and subject to no control from any party beyond or without itself.

The fundamental argument in favour of Congregational principles is the position, that the only two senses of the word church in the New Testament,—the only two ideas which it warrants us in attaching to that word,—are either a single congregation, or the whole collective body of Christ's people, real or professed; and Dr Campbell, though he continued all his days a minister of the Church of Scotland, and was a most assiduous and ostentatious proclaimer of his own integrity and candour, has distinctly con-

* King, in his *Inquiry into the Constitution of the Primitive Church*,—Mosheim, in his *Church History and Commentaries*,—Campbell, in his *Lectures on Ecclesiastical History*,—and Neander, in his *Planting and Training of the Christian Church*. See the testimonies of these men, and of others,

collected in Punchard's *View of "Congregationalism,"* Part iii.; Andover, 1844. See also Coleman's "Church without a Bishop;" or, "The Apostolical and Primitive Church, Popular in its Government, and Simple in its Worship," c. iii.

ceded this to them. I had formerly occasion to explain this point, in discussing the general subject of the Scripture doctrine concerning the church, and to illustrate the grounds on which Presbyterians generally deny this position, and maintain that, while no doubt these are the most usual and ordinary meanings in Scripture, there is also sufficient scriptural warrant for applying the word *ἐκκλησία*, in the singular number, to a plurality of congregations associated together and represented as a church,—that is, as one church, because subject to one Presbyterial government. It must be remembered, that if this proposition be established, which is laid down in our Form of Church Government,—namely, "That the Scripture doth hold forth that many particular congregations may be under one Presbyterial government,"—the chief medium of its probation being this, that the Christians at Jerusalem, who must have consisted of many congregations, are still called "a church" in the singular, and as a church had elders and rulers in common,—then the question between Presbyterians and Congregationalists is settled, in so far as concerns that leading principle of the latter, which has given origin to the name Independents. Another case of the application of *ἐκκλησία*, in the singular, to a number of churches collectively, is to be found in the reading adopted in Acts ix. 31, by Lachmann, Tischendorf, and Tregelles.* The Congregationalists do not deny that the Christians at Jerusalem and Ephesus are spoken of as a church,—that is, as one church; but they deny that they consisted of several distinct congregations. The evidence of this, however, is, we think, in the case of Jerusalem, overwhelmingly conclusive, and in the case of Ephesus, sufficient and satisfactory; and, on this particular point of the existence of a plurality of congregations in Jerusalem, Mosheim is, as I formerly mentioned, very decided in favour of the common Presbyterian view.†

I have likewise had occasion to show, in examining the Council of Jerusalem, recorded in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts, and illustrating the lessons it teaches us in regard to the government of the church and the administration of ecclesiastical affairs, that there is there a marked distinction exhibited between the position and functions of office-bearers and of ordinary members in decid-

* *Vide* Tregelles' Account of the printed text of the Greek N. T., p. 269.

† *Commentarii*, p. 116.

ing upon ecclesiastical questions, and a clear sanction given to two important principles vitally affecting the subject we are now considering,—namely, first, that the proper judicial power of determining questions which arise in the church is vested in the office-bearers, and not in the ordinary members; and, secondly, that an assembly of office-bearers may lawfully possess and exercise authoritative control over particular congregations, and may authoritatively determine questions which may have arisen in any of the congregations over whom they have jurisdiction. I need not now go back upon these points; but would merely remark, that Presbyterians contend that these principles are in accordance with all that is taught us in the New Testament, concerning the general character of the functions of the church, and the principles by which its affairs ought to be regulated,—concerning the rights, functions, and duties of office-bearers, and the relation between them and the ordinary members of the church,—and are not contradicted by anything taught there upon these subjects. Presbyterians have generally held that there is not sufficient scriptural warrant for ascribing to the members, as distinguished from the office-bearers of the church, any proper judicial authority in deciding the questions that may arise in the ordinary administration of ecclesiastical affairs. But they have also generally held, and, as they think, in perfect accordance with this principle, first, that congregations have a right to choose their own office-bearers; and, secondly, that they ought to be consulted in regard to the more important acts of ecclesiastical discipline by which they are affected; and that their consent and concurrence in them should be laboured for in the exercise of all appropriate means, and should, if possible, be obtained. Both Papists and Congregationalists have accused them of inconsistency, in denying to the people all judicial authority, on the one hand, and conceding to them the election of their own office-bearers on the other,—Papists saying, that since Presbyterians reject the one, they ought, in consistency, to reject both; and Congregationalists—using the same medium of probation—arguing that, since they concede one, they ought to concede both. But it is easy enough to show, in opposition to these two different classes of adversaries, that these two things are by no means identical, and that the one which is conceded does not by any means infer the one which is denied, in the nature of the case. And in regard to the scriptural evi-

dence bearing upon these two subjects respectively, Presbyterians have always contended that there is sufficient evidence of the one and not of the other,—that the Scripture assigns to the ordinary members of the church a definite and influential place in the appointment of their own office-bearers, which it does not assign to them in any other department of ecclesiastical affairs.

We likewise contend, in opposition to Congregationalists, and to the high authorities formerly referred to, that there is nothing, in what has come down to us of the history and documents of the primitive church, which assigns to congregations a higher or wider power or influence in the regulation of the affairs of the church, than Presbyterians, as above stated, concede to them on scriptural grounds. So far as the Congregational principle is concerned, as distinguished from the Independent, according to the explanation formerly given, there is nothing in primitive antiquity which shows that the people had at that time any greater standing or influence in the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs than what is fully provided for, and exhausted by, the Presbyterian principles,—that they have a right to choose their own office-bearers, and that their consent and concurrence were sought, and usually obtained, in all the decisions and important acts of discipline which affected them. It is plain enough, that the actual amount of prominence and influence which the fair application of these Presbyterian principles, without the Congregational one, would give to congregations in the ordinary regulation of ecclesiastical affairs, might vary considerably in its outward manifestations, according to the general condition and circumstances of the church; and it is also plain, that the whole condition and circumstances of the primitive church were such as tended powerfully to give to congregations a larger amount of prominence and influence than what might be theoretically or doctrinally assigned to them. Keeping this consideration in view, it becomes, we think, very plain, that there is nothing in the records of primitive antiquity which affords any proof that the people generally had more influence or authority in the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs than is consistent with Presbyterian principles.

Mosheim says, on this subject,* “It was the assembly of the people, which chose their own rulers and teachers, or received them

* Cent. i., P. ii., c. ii., s. vi. (Maclaine's Translation).

by a free and authoritative consent, when recommended by others." This is true; Clement's Epistle proves it, and Presbyterians concede it. "But," Mosheim goes on to say, "the same people rejected or confirmed by their suffrages, the laws that were proposed by their rulers to the assembly; excommunicated profligate and unworthy members of the church, restored the penitent to their forfeited privileges, passed judgment upon the different subjects of controversy and dissension that arose in their community; examined and decided the disputes which happened between the elders and deacons; and, in a word, exercised all that authority which belongs to such as are invested with the sovereign power." Now, I have never seen anything like evidence of this statement produced. As the statement is applied to the first century, the only source from which evidence of it could be derived is the writings of the apostolic fathers; and there is certainly nothing in their works from which conclusions so strong and sweeping can be legitimately deduced. The truth is, that we have no evidence of any such disputes or dissensions arising during this period as were likely to produce or to indicate anything precise or definite as to the rightful limits of competing jurisdictions; and no amount or extent of mere *de facto* concurrence between office-bearers and congregations in the regulation of ecclesiastical matters, can afford any valid objection to our Presbyterian principles.

As to the other peculiar principle held by Congregationalists,—that which is more immediately indicated by the name Independents,—it is commonly put in this form: that in the primitive church all the churches or congregations were independent of each other; that they all possessed equal rights; and that no one congregation possessed any jurisdiction or control over any other. This statement is undoubtedly true; but there is nothing in it inconsistent with Presbyterian principles, though many Congregationalists seem to regard it as virtually identical with their peculiar view upon this subject. Presbyterians maintain, that as all pastors are equal, so all congregations are equal; that as no one pastor has any jurisdiction over any other, so this holds equally true of congregations; that they are all possessed of equal rights and authority. The party to whom they ascribe a certain measure of control over a congregation, is not another congregation or its representatives, but a body which comprehends in it, virtually and representatively, *many* congregations, including the

particular congregation whose affairs may be the immediate subject of consideration. The Council of Jerusalem is not supposed by Presbyterians to exhibit the *Church of Jerusalem* as exercising jurisdiction over the church at Antioch, but as being a body met at Jerusalem, which, in virtue of the elements of which it was composed, represented, and was entitled to exercise jurisdiction equally over, the particular churches of Jerusalem and Antioch, and indeed, as many believe, over other churches represented by it. This general principle pervades all Presbyterian arrangements. Each pastor, each congregation, each classical assembly, and each synodical assembly, is equal to, and independent of, any other one of the same species or degree. They all possess equal rights. A classical assembly, or presbytery, possesses jurisdiction over a number of pastors, and a number of congregations, just because it comprehends or includes, virtually or representatively, all these pastors and all these congregations; and the same principle applies to synods, or other superior church courts, in relation to presbyteries. It is not to the purpose, then, to allege and to prove, that in the primitive church all congregations were equal to, and independent of, each other,—possessed of equal authority or jurisdiction. There is nothing in this which is in the least inconsistent with the principles and the practice of Presbyterians, or which furnishes any countenance to the views of the Independents. And yet we believe that this is all that has been, or can be, proved, in regard to the general state or condition of the primitive churches.

Mosheim, after asserting the independence and equality of all the congregations in the first century, goes on to say, what is more relevant to the subject we are now considering,*—"Nor does there even appear in this first century, the smallest trace of that association of provincial churches, from which councils and metropolitans derive their origin." Now, the extent and the regularity to which congregations may be associated under presbyterial government and arrangements, must of course depend, to some extent, upon the condition of the church in general, in the particular age and country, and on the general condition of the community. The condition of the church and of the world, in the apostolic age, and in that immediately following it, was certainly

* Cent. i., P. ii., c. ii., s. xiv.

not favourable to the general diffusion of the detailed development of Presbyterian organization and arrangements. We have no doubt, that a congregation of professing Christians may be so placed in providence, as to be warranted, upon the ground of the general principles taught in Scripture concerning the rights and prerogatives of the church, to organize itself in Independency, without actual subjection to Presbyterial government, and to provide within itself for the execution of all ecclesiastical functions, and for its own perpetuation; and we do not dispute that such churches or congregations existed in early times; but if the general principle of such association and organization is sanctioned by Scripture, and if some specimens of it are set before us there, in apostolic practice,—and this, we think, Presbyterians have satisfactorily established,—then we are entitled to say, that this associated and organized condition is the complete, normal, and perfect state of the church, which ought ever to be aimed at, and, as far as circumstances and opportunities admit of it, carried out and exhibited in practice. And there is nothing in the records of primitive antiquity, which affords any ground for denying that this scriptural and Presbyterian principle was exhibited and acted upon as far as the general condition of the church and the world rendered this practicable; and, on the contrary, there is not a little which favours the idea that this was aimed at, and was to some extent accomplished. It is not, of course, contended, that Presbyterian organization and arrangements, in their complete and detailed development, were universally diffused in the primitive church; but there is good ground to believe that our fundamental principles, as indicated in Scripture, were acted upon as far as circumstances admitted of it,—and that *very soon*, as the natural and appropriate result of scriptural sentiment and feeling prevailing among Christians as to the general character and constitution of the church, as to the right relation of particular churches to each other, and as to the consequence of filling up and following out arrangements which the apostles had sanctioned, the church in general *became*, in its leading features and arrangements, and continued to be, until the original government of the church was changed by the gradual growth of Prelacy, substantially Presbyterian.*

* The books on this subject are just those we mentioned when treating of the Council of Jerusalem.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ERASTIAN CONTROVERSY.

Sec. I.—The Civil Magistrate and Religion.

THE general subject of the relation that ought to subsist between the state and the church, or between the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, had been discussed before the Reformation, usually under the designation of the controversy *inter imperium et sacerdotium*; and I have had occasion to give some account of the very defective and imperfect manner in which the topic was then commonly treated: the one party defending the Popish extreme of the subjection of the civil to the ecclesiastical, and the other the opposite extreme of the subjection of the ecclesiastical to the civil,—which came afterwards to be commonly called among Protestants by the name of Erastianism; while scarcely any had a clear perception of the true scriptural Presbyterian doctrine of the mutual independence of the civil and the ecclesiastical authorities,—of the supremacy of each in its own province,—or of the true principle of connection between them, as described by the expressions, *a co-ordination of powers*, and *a mutual subordination of persons*.

I have already pointed out the clear and definite line of demarcation between Popish principles upon this subject, and those which have been usually maintained by Presbyterians as scriptural; and exposed the weakness and unfairness of the common Episcopalian and Erastian plan of dealing with the arguments in support of the only points in which Papists and Presbyterians agree,—namely, the unlawfulness of the civil authorities assuming and exercising jurisdiction or authoritative control in ecclesiastical matters,—the plan just consisting in evading the arguments upon the merits, and attempting, as a substitute, to make something, as a means of exciting prejudice, of the mere fact, that thus far, and