

of Scripture evidence for this sweeping and presumptuous claim, he put this question, "Where is it written, except perhaps at Rome, in the church of St Peter's, in the chimney with a bit of coal?"

I have still to advert to the testimony of the first three centuries upon the claim of the Bishops of Rome to supremacy over the whole Church,—a claim which, as formerly explained, implies, and is based upon, these two positions: first, that Peter was invested by Christ with authority or jurisdiction over the other apostles and over the whole church; and, secondly, that by Christ's directions he became, and died, Bishop of Rome, and transmitted to his successors in that see the jurisdiction over the whole church which he himself possessed. If such a right had been conferred upon Peter and the Bishops of Rome, this must have been well known to the church, and their knowledge of it must have appeared palpably in their statements and proceedings. This is so evident from the nature of the case, as not to require illustration. A negative argument from antiquity—if there be, indeed, materials on which to rest it—must evidently be at once legitimate and powerful in opposition to Papal claims; *i.e.*, in other words, if there be no clear traces in primitive antiquity of Peter and the Bishops of Rome claiming this supremacy, and having the exercise of it conceded to them, this must be, to say the least, a very strong presumption that no such right was ever conferred upon them.

Accordingly, the defenders of the Papal supremacy have commonly laid down this position, and have virtually admitted that it was necessary for them to prove it in order to make out their case,—*viz.*, that ever since the formation of the Christian church, the Bishops of Rome, as Peter's successors, have claimed and exercised jurisdiction over the whole flock of Christ. They have not been able to produce anything whatever in support of this position that has even the appearance of evidence, though they have certainly displayed the most extraordinary diligence and ingenuity in distorting and perverting the statements of early writers, and the facts and incidents of ancient history, in order to extract from them something in support of their claims. Every phrase or expression that has ever dropped from any ancient writer in commendation of Peter or of the Church of Rome, or of any of its bishops; every instance in which the Bishops of Rome were applied to by any

one for advice or assistance; every case in which they interfered in the discussion or arrangement of any subject, and seem to have contributed in any way, or to any extent, to its adjustment;—everything of this sort is put down as a proof, not of the possession of excellence or of influence, but of proper jurisdiction or authority over the church. But as it may be confidently asserted that not only there is nothing in Scripture which asserts or implies that Peter exercised, and was recognised as entitled to exercise, jurisdiction over the other apostles and the church at large, but much which shows that no such right was then imagined to exist, so the same assertion may be made with equal confidence in regard to the first three centuries, and for a considerable period beyond them.

We have shown that Bellarmine was forced to admit that the position, essential to the establishment of the Papal supremacy—*viz.*, that Christ, by arranging that Peter should die Bishop of Rome, *intended* to indicate His will that his successors in that see should also succeed him in the government of the whole church—could not be proved from Scripture, and therefore was not based *jure divino*; while he contended that it was founded upon what he called "the apostolic tradition of Peter." By this, of course, he meant, first, that Peter himself had made known to the church that this was his Master's will; and, secondly, that the knowledge of this important fact—*viz.*, that he had done so—rested upon tradition. He then proceeds to specify more particularly what proof there was of this tradition, on which so much depended; and therefore, in support of it, cites general councils, the decrees of Popes, and the consent of fathers; and he goes on to produce proofs from these different sources.

As to the general councils, none were held during the first three centuries; so that their authority by itself, as a proof of apostolical tradition, is of no value, while at the same time they do not come under the limits of our present subject. We may merely remark, in passing, that the first four general councils,—which were held, two in the fourth, and two in the fifth century,—whose doctrinal decisions upon points of faith are generally admitted by Protestants to have been sound and orthodox, neither said nor did anything which affords the slightest countenance to the claim of Papal supremacy; that many things in their history and proceedings afford arguments against the Papal supremacy, which its

most learned and ingenious defenders have been unable satisfactorily to answer; that, in several instances, these councils passed decrees or canons which were opposed and protested against by the Bishop of Rome or his agents, as manifestly inconsistent with claims which he then advanced, even though short of universal supremacy or headship over the whole church; and that the first general council which really asserted the Papal supremacy with anything like explicitness, though no doubt it had been practically established and exercised long before, was the fourth Lateran Council, held under Pope Innocent III., in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Of course no evidence can be derived from general councils in support of the position that Peter taught the church that his successors in the see of Rome were to possess universal supremacy: that is, no evidence which can be regarded as having any weight until *after* it has been proved that *all* these assemblies, which the Church of Rome calls general councils, were possessed of infallibility.

The second head of evidence to which Bellarmine refers in support of the apostolicity of this pretended tradition, is the decrees of Popes; and here, too, we would need a previous proof of their infallibility, before we can receive their testimony as valid, especially in their own cause,—in a matter in which their own claims and interests are so deeply involved. He does not pretend to produce anything in support of this claim from any of the Popes of the first three centuries, and this is enough to show the futility of his appeal to this source of evidence. The first Pope he produces is Julius, who held the see of Rome about the middle of the fourth century, at the time of the famous Council of Sardica, and was probably the author of the canon,—if, indeed, the Council of Sardica ever passed such a canon,—which three of his successors so unsuccessfully employed to reduce the African church to subjection to Rome in the beginning of the next century. But, in truth, he has no testimonies even from Bishops of Rome which bear explicitly upon the point of a claim to proper universal jurisdiction, derived by succession from Peter, till the time of Pope Leo I., about the middle of the fifth century; while there is no evidence that this claim was generally conceded, even in the Western Church, till a much later period.

The third source of evidence to which Bellarmine refers is the consent of the fathers; and the only fathers to whom he refers

during the period we are at present considering, are Irenæus, Origen, and Cyprian: to Irenæus, as asserting the supremacy of the Church of Rome; to Origen, as asserting the supremacy of Peter; and to Cyprian, as asserting both. We formerly had occasion to remark, that Romanists could not produce the consent of the fathers, even of the fourth and fifth centuries, in support of their interpretation of those passages of Scripture on which they found the supremacy of Peter. In regard, for instance, to the passage which affords the only support to the claim that is possessed of anything like plausibility—viz., “Thou art Peter, and on this rock will I build My church”—some of them interpret the rock to mean Christ Himself; *most* of them, to mean the faith which Peter confessed on that occasion; while the few of them who regard it as referring primarily, and in the first instance, to Peter himself personally, do not interpret it as conferring upon him any power or jurisdiction which was not either then or afterwards conferred upon the other apostles. Now, all that can be justly alleged in regard to Origen is, that he seems to have taken the last of these views of the meaning of this passage; while the fact that he was not a believer in Peter’s supremacy, in the Popish sense of it, is established beyond all fair controversy, by his having repeatedly, and most explicitly, asserted the full and perfect equality of the apostles in point of power or authority. In regard to Cyprian the case stands thus: in discussing the subject of the unity of the church—and we formerly had occasion to mention that he made considerable advances towards developing the Popish doctrine upon that subject—he makes some statements about Peter’s being appointed by Christ to be the symbol or representative of unity, and about the Bishop of Rome still continuing to serve a similar purpose. What he meant by this notion it is not easy to say; and the probability is, that if we could interrogate him upon the subject, he would himself be unable to tell us clearly what he meant. Barrow calls it “subtle and mystical,” and adds, “I can discern little solidity in this conceit, and as little harm.”* But *it is certain* that he did not mean by it to ascribe to Peter and the Bishops of Rome a right to govern the whole church; and the conclusive proof of this is to be found in these three facts: first, that he has repeatedly asserted, in the plainest and most

* Barrow on the Pope’s Supremacy, p. 560.

unequivocal terms, that all the apostles were invested with equal power and authority, no one having jurisdiction over another; secondly, that he has asserted with equal plainness, that all bishops are possessed of equal power and authority, each being entirely independent of any other bishop in his own diocese; and, thirdly, that he distinctly and boldly acted upon these principles in his controversy with Stephen, Bishop of Rome, about re-baptizing heretics,—Stephen, indeed, not demanding submission upon the ground of any supremacy which he claimed, and Cyprian making it very manifest, by the way in which he treated Stephen and his arguments, that if any such claim had been put forth, it would have been openly denied and strenuously resisted. Irenæus is the only other authority produced during this period. It is not alleged that he has asserted the supremacy of Peter, but it is alleged that he has asserted the supremacy of the Roman Church; and, in proof of this, a passage is produced from him—or rather the Latin translation, for we have not the original Greek of this part of his book against heresies—in which he ascribes to it, *potiorem principatitatem*,—a passage which, since it is the only plausible testimony which the first three centuries afford in support of the Papal supremacy, is much boasted of by Popish writers, and has given rise to a great deal of learned discussion. It would be a waste of time to give even an abstract of the arguments by which Protestant authors have proved that this passage is utterly insufficient for the purposes to which the Romanists apply it, especially as they could not be stated within any short compass. The import and bearing of the passage are fully discussed in Mosheim's Commentaries.* It cannot be denied that the statement gives some apparent countenance to the Papal claims; but even if it were much more clear and unequivocal than it is, it would be utterly insufficient, standing as it does alone, to support the weight which the Church of Rome suspends upon it. Mosheim, after investigating the meaning of the passage, and setting forth what he regards as the most probable interpretation of the *potior principatitas*, one which gives no countenance to the Papal claim of supremacy, concludes in this way: “Dedecet profecto viros eruditos et sapientes ex verbis obscuris et incertis privati hominis et unius pusillæ ac pauperis ecclesiæ episcopi, boni

* Saec. ii., cap. xxi., p. 263.

quidem et pii, verum mediocri acumine ac ingenio præditi, jus publicum totius ecclesiæ Christianæ atque formam gubernationis ejus a Christo præscriptam elicere.”

The negative argument, which is manifestly one of great power and weight in a case of this sort, stands untouched and unbroken, with nothing that can be alleged on the other side except a single obscure and ambiguous passage in a barbarous Latin translation of Irenæus, made we know not when or by whom. And the argument is not wholly negative, for there is much in the history of the church during the first three centuries which affords positive and conclusive proof that the claim of the Bishops of Rome to rule or govern the universal church was not then advanced or acknowledged, and, indeed, was utterly unknown. In surveying the history of this period, with the view of ascertaining from the events which occurred, and the course of conduct pursued, whether the Bishops of Rome were regarded and treated as the rulers of the church, the following considerations must be kept in view. The supremacy of the Pope must necessarily imply these two things: first, that the Bishops of Rome are, and have always been acknowledged to be, the highest ultimate judges in all theological and ecclesiastical controversies, at least when there were no general councils; and, secondly, that communion with the Roman Church, and subjection to the authority of its bishop, were held necessary in order to being regarded as being in the communion of the catholic or general church. All Romanists admit that the exercise and acknowledgment of the Papal supremacy imply these things. It is because Protestants, both in theory and in practice, deny them, that Papists denounce them as throwing off the authority of Christ's vicar, and as putting themselves beyond the pale of the Catholic Church, and thereby excluding themselves from salvation. Keeping these things in view, and then surveying the history of the early church, we shall meet with much that affords conclusive proof that the Papal supremacy was utterly unknown,—that the idea of any such right as supremacy implies being vested in the Bishop of Rome had not then entered into men's minds. If Clement had ever imagined that he, as the successor of Peter, was invested with supremacy over the church, he could not have written such a letter as he did to the church of Corinth, in which, when they were indulging in a spirit of

faction and turbulence, he contented himself with labouring to persuade them by scriptural considerations to respect and obey their own presbyters. The facts connected with the two discussions concerning the time of observing Easter—the one about the middle, and the other near the end, of the second century—not only afford conclusive proof, as we formerly showed, of the utter baselessness of all claims, even then, to authentic apostolical tradition, but also of the utter ignorance of the whole church of any right vested in the Bishops of Rome to rule or govern it; while the facts connected with the controversy about the re-baptizing of heretics, in the third century, and many others that might be mentioned, establish the same important position.

Indeed, it is an easy matter to trace the whole history of the rise and progress of the Papal supremacy, from its first faint dawnings till its full establishment; and it is certainly by far the most extraordinary instance of successful imposture and iniquity the world has ever witnessed. It was an object prosecuted for a succession of ages with unwearied zeal: every incident was most carefully improved for promoting it, and no scruples of conscience, no regard to truth or veracity, no respect for the laws of God or man, were ever allowed to stand in the way of extending this usurped dominion over the church. Popish writers delight to dwell upon the permanency and extensive influence of the Papacy, as contrasted with the comparatively brief duration of empires and kingdoms that have risen and passed away; and some of them have really made a striking and impressive picture of this topic, one rather fitted to touch the imagination, and to call forth feelings of solemnity and veneration; but when, instead of being satisfied with a mere fancy sketch, we examine it with care and attention,—when we consider the utter baselessness of the ground on which the Papal supremacy rests, and the way in which this power has been secured and exercised,—we cannot but be persuaded that, though in some respects beautiful outwardly, it is within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH.

WE proceed now to advert to the testimony of the first three centuries on the subject of church government, and especially of Episcopacy, or, as it should rather be called, of Prelacy. Prelatists have been usually very loud and confident in appealing to the testimony of the primitive church in support of their principles; and if the primitive church meant the church of the fourth and fifth centuries, they could, no doubt, produce a great body of testimony in their favour—testimony, however, which becomes feebler and feebler during every generation as we go backwards, until the truly primitive New Testament period, when it entirely disappears.

The substance of what we are persuaded can be fully established upon this point is this: That there was no Prelacy in the apostolic age; that there is no authentic evidence of its existence in the generation immediately succeeding that of the apostles; that the first faint traces of Prelacy, or rather of something like it, are to be seen about the middle of the second century; and that the power of Prelates continued gradually to increase and extend, until, by the end of the fourth century, it had attained a condition pretty similar to that which modern Prelatic churches exhibit, though there was not even then the same entire exclusion of presbyters from all share in the government of the church, which the practice of the Church of England presents. If there be anything approaching to accuracy in this general statement, it would seem very like as if Prelacy were a feature or part of the great apostasy from scriptural truth and order, which so early began to manifest itself in the church, and which was at length fully developed in the antichristian system of the Church of Rome; in other words, it might seem as if Prelacy were a branch

or portion of Popery. The question, whether it be so or not, is not one of great practical importance, for, perhaps, at bottom it may resolve itself very much, in one sense, into a dispute about words; and the question whether a Prelatic government ought to exist in the church, must be determined by an appeal to Scripture. But as the general question which this particular point suggests,—viz., as to the grounds on which an allegation with respect to any doctrine or practice, that it is Popish, should rest, and the weight due to such an allegation,—is one of some importance in theological discussions, it may not be unseasonable to take this opportunity of making a few remarks upon it.

It has long been a common practice among controversialists to charge their opponents with holding Popish views and sanctioning Popish practices, and to adduce this as a presumption, at least, against them. The charge has been sometimes adduced by men of very scanty intelligence and information, upon very insufficient grounds; and that, again, has afforded a sort of excuse to others who could not easily defend themselves against such a charge for scouting and ridiculing, rather than answering, it. For instance, some of the ignorant and foolish sectaries, who sprung up in such numbers in England during the period of the Commonwealth, were accustomed to allege that Presbytery was just as Popish as Prelacy was; and Episcopalian controversialists, down to the present day, are in the habit of quoting some of the statements of those persons to this effect, as if they were proofs of the folly of such a charge against *whatever* it might be directed. Some persons in our own day have asserted, that the doctrine of the obligation of civil rulers to employ their civil authority, with a view to the promotion of religion and the welfare of the church, is Popish; while others, going to the opposite extreme, have adduced the same charge against the doctrine of the entire independence of the church of all civil control; though it can be proved, I am persuaded, that both these doctrines are taught in Scripture, and though it is certain that they were maintained, but in a much purer form, by the Reformers as well as by the Church of Rome. These are specimens of the inconsiderate and reckless way in which this charge is often bandied about by ignorant and foolish men; but these, and many other specimens of a similar kind, afford no sufficient proof that the charge is universally ridiculous, or that it is impossible to discriminate between the cases in which

it does, and those in which it does not, rest upon a satisfactory foundation.

At a very early period, we see plain traces of corruption and declension in the church of Christ. This continued to increase and extend age after age, until it reached its full development in the matured system of the apostate Church of Rome. The leading features which this progress of declension and corruption assumed, and the principal results to which it tended, are sufficiently discernible: the obscuration and perversion of the doctrines of grace; the multiplication of rites and ceremonies in the worship of God, and the ascription to them, as well as to the divinely appointed sacramental ordinances, of an undue importance and efficacy; the invention of new orders and offices in the government of the church,—all tending to depress and to reduce to slavery the Christian people and the office-bearers whom Christ appointed, and terminating at length in a system which leads men to build upon a false foundation for salvation, and to submit implicitly to the tyranny of their spiritual superiors. Such is Popery fully matured; but the seeds of the system were early sown, and were very gradually developed. Everything which really enters as a component part into this great system of error and corruption, may be fairly enough called Popish; and the fact, if it can be established, that it does enter into this system, and may therefore be fairly called Popish, forms, no doubt, a very strong presumption against it.

But everything which has been and is held by the Church of Rome, must not be regarded as Popish in this obnoxious sense. She has retained a profession of some important scriptural doctrines and principles, though there are none which she has not, more or less extensively, and more or less directly, corrupted. She has retained an orthodox profession upon the subject of the Trinity, while she has corrupted the doctrine and worship of God by polytheism and idolatry. But we must not, either because of her having retained so much truth, or of her having joined so much error with it, concur with the Socinians in setting aside the doctrine of the Trinity as Popish. She has retained the truth of the entire independence of the church of Christ of civil control, though she has sometimes practically sacrificed this truth to some extent in her unprincipled prosecution of her selfish interests (as, for example, in tolerating patronage), while she has corrupted it

by claiming for the church control over the civil authorities; but we should not, either because of her holding this truth, or of her having to some extent corrupted it, concur with infidels and Erasmians in denying the independence of the church, or in subjecting it to the civil power, as if everything else were Popery. In order, then, to warrant us in calling any doctrine or practice Popish, and urging this as a presumption against its truth, it is not enough that it has been held by the Church of Rome; it should also have been rejected by the great body of the Reformers—those great men to whom the Holy Spirit so fully unfolded the mind of God as revealed in His word, and whom He raised up and qualified for restoring His truth and purifying His church. When *both* these positions can be fully established in regard to any doctrine or practice,—viz., first, that it is held by the Church of Rome; and, secondly, that it was denied or rejected by the great body of the Reformers,—we are fairly entitled to call it Popish, and we may fairly regard the proof of these two facts as establishing a strong presumption against it.

Still it must never be forgotten that there lies an appeal from all human authorities, from fathers or reformers of every age and of every church, to the only certain and unerring standard, the word of the living God; and that neither the allegation nor the proof that a doctrine or practice may be fairly called Popish exempts us from the obligation to examine whether its claims, if it put forth any, to the sanction of the sacred Scriptures be well founded or not, and to regulate our treatment of it by the result of this examination. Prelacy has been often designated by Presbyterian writers as Popish; and if it be a sufficient foundation for such a charge to prove that it is held both theoretically and practically by the Church of Rome—that it was rejected by the great body of the Reformers, as well as by those who, in the middle ages, were raised up as witnesses against antichrist—that its introduction formed a step in the process of the corruption of the early church,—and that it afforded some facilities for the growth and development of the Papal system,—then the charge is well founded, for all these positions can be established against Prelacy by satisfactory evidence. The Church of Rome has much more fully and more explicitly asserted the doctrine of Prelacy than the Church of England has done. All that the Church of England has ventured to lay down upon this point is contained in the fol-

lowing vague and ambiguous declaration in the preface to the Ordinal for ordination: "It is evident unto all men, diligently reading holy scripture and ancient authors, that from the apostles' time there have been these orders of Ministers in Christ's church; Bishops, Priests, and Deacons;" whereas the Council of Trent has set forth the doctrine much more explicitly, and has required the belief of it, because it was generally denied by the Reformers, under an anathema. The two following canons were passed in the twenty-third session of the council, and, of course, form the standard doctrine of the church: "*Si quis dixerit, in ecclesia catholica non esse hierarchiam divina ordinatione institutam, quæ constat ex episcopis, presbyteris, et ministris: anathema sit;*" and again: "*Si quis dixerit, episcopus non esse presbyteris superiores, vel non habere potestatem confirmandi et ordinandi; vel eam, quam habent, illis esse cum presbyteris communem, . . . anathema sit.*"* The adoption of these canons by the Council of Trent not only proves that Prelacy is the doctrine of the Church of Rome, but also proves indirectly what can be conclusively established by direct evidence,—that it was generally rejected by the Reformers.

It is an insufficient defence against the allegation with respect to a particular doctrine or practice that it is Popish, to prove that it existed in the church before what we commonly call the Popish system was fully developed. The germs or rudiments of that very system can be traced back to the apostolic age. There were men then in the church who loved to have the pre-eminence, who were for imposing ceremonies and establishing will-worship; and it should not be forgotten that the introduction and establishment of a new office, held by men possessed of higher rank and authority than other office-bearers (presbyters and deacons) whom the apostles appointed—and such we believe Prelacy to have been—runs precisely in the line which ultimately terminated in a universal bishop, and, no doubt, contributed to extend and strengthen it. At the same time, it is perhaps more proper and becoming that, out of regard to the valuable services which many prelates and Prelatists have rendered to the cause of Protestantism, we should abstain from the application of the term Popish to Prelacy, and content ourselves with asserting and proving that it has no

* *Canones et Decreta Con. Trid., Sess. xxiii., c. iv., Can. vi. vii.*

warrant in Scripture or primitive antiquity, and therefore should not exist in the church of Christ. But still, when Prelatists open their case, as they often do, by asserting that Prelacy prevailed over the whole Christian world for 1500 years, and was found obtaining over the whole church at the period of the Reformation, and adduce this as a presumption of its truth, it is neither unbecoming nor unreasonable to remind them that, if it prevailed generally till the time of the Reformation, it was rejected by the great body of the Reformers as a Popish corruption: that we can cut off two or three centuries from the commencement of their 1500 years; and that then we can show that some other Popish corruptions can be traced back, at least in their germs or rudiments, to as venerable an antiquity, and enjoyed thereafter as general a prevalence, as Prelacy can claim.

Sec. I.—Prelacy;—State of the Question.

The position which the advocates of Prelacy commonly lay down upon this subject is to this effect: We find from the writings of the early fathers, that from the apostolic age bishops are to be found in all the churches, recognised and obeyed as the highest ecclesiastical office-bearers;—this state of things could not have existed so early and so generally, unless it had been introduced and established by the apostles themselves: whence we infer that Episcopacy is of apostolic origin and authority. When the subject is presented in this form, the question naturally and obviously occurs, whether or not the argument, founded on the alleged earliness and universality of the existence of bishops, is expected to be received as a proof of a *jus divinum*,—a proof of what the apostles did, and of what, therefore, the church is still bound to do; or merely as a presumption in favour of a certain mode of interpreting some portions of Scripture, bearing, or alleged to bear, upon this topic. Both views have been held by different classes of Episcopalians. Some High-church Episcopalians—as, for example, the Tractarians—have admitted that the divine right of Prelacy could not be fully established from Scripture, but, agreeing in substance with the Church of Rome on the doctrine of tradition, or the principle of catholic consent, they regard the testimony of the early church as sufficient to prove it; and, indeed, they expressly adduce this matter of Prelacy as a proof of the

imperfection of Scripture, alleging that we are dependent upon tradition for conclusive evidence in support of it. Other Episcopalians think they can establish Prelacy from Scripture, and they refer to the testimony of the primitive church merely as affording some corroboration of the scriptural argument; while not a few seem to hover between these two points. Most of them, indeed, seem to have a sort of lurking consciousness that the Scripture evidence for Prelacy is not of itself very conclusive, and stands much in need of being corroborated by the testimony of the early church; while they vary among themselves in their mode of stating formally the value and importance of the evidence they profess to produce from antiquity, according to the soundness and clearness of their convictions and impressions with respect to the sufficiency and perfection of the sacred Scriptures, and the necessity of a scriptural proof in order to support a *jus divinum*.

It is, however, of the highest importance, that, in the investigation of all such subjects, we retain right impressions of the clear and unchangeable line of demarcation between the testimony of Scripture and all merely human authority; that we do not forget that we are bound to believe and to practise nothing as of divine authority, the proof and warrant of which cannot be deduced from the word of God; and also that,—as we had occasion more fully to explain in treating of the Pope's supremacy,—if, in order to establish any conclusion which is professedly based upon some scriptural statements, the proof of any matters of fact be necessary to complete the argument, these matters of fact must also be established from Scripture, else the evidence of a *jus divinum* falls to the ground. The facts may be established sufficiently by ordinary human testimony; but if the argument from Scripture cannot be completed conclusively without them, then we are entitled to say, that since God has not been pleased to make them known to us through the medium of His word, He does not require us to receive, as a part of His revelation, and as binding by His authority, the conclusion to the proof of which they are indispensable. Episcopalians often plead their cause as if they had some vague notion of its resting partly upon Scripture, and partly upon antiquity, or upon some indescribable compound of the two, which is neither the one nor the other. It is, however, indispensable that these two things be kept distinct, each having its own proper province and function assigned to it: that if Scripture be indeed the only rule of faith

and practice, its due and exclusive prerogative be always fully maintained; and that nothing be allowed to interfere, theoretically or practically, directly or indirectly, openly or latently, with its paramount and exclusive authority. It is of some importance that, if possible, the doctrine and practice of the primitive church upon this point, and upon all points, should be ascertained; but the importance of this sinks into nothing when compared with that of ascertaining the doctrine of Scripture and the practice of the apostles from the original and only authentic source of information. If it should turn out that the doctrine and practice of the primitive church, after the apostles' time, are in favour of Prelacy; and if it be further alleged, as is often done, that there is something peculiar in this case, which renders the post-apostolic practice a more certain proof of what the apostles established than in the case of other alleged apostolic traditions,—perhaps this alleged peculiarity may be entitled to consideration, though we think enough has been said to show that, as a general position, the prevalence of a doctrine or practice in the second and third centuries affords of itself but a very feeble presumption that it was taught or prescribed by the apostles. The truth, however, is, that antiquity affords no stronger evidence in favour of Prelacy even in degree, to say nothing of the vast difference in kind, than Scripture does.

In order to estimate aright the bearing of the testimony of antiquity upon the subject of Prelacy, it is of importance to attend, in the first place, to the true and proper state of the question between its advocates and its opponents; for I am persuaded that a considerable proportion of the evidence which Prelatists are accustomed to adduce from antiquity derives its whole plausibility from the tacit and insidious influence of the sophism called *ignoratio elenchi*, or a mistake as to the precise import of the point to be proved; and I need scarcely remark that the investigation and settlement of the *status questionis* is equally important, whether we are trying to estimate the amount of the scriptural or of the historical evidence. The general question may be correctly stated in this way: Should there exist permanently in the church of Christ, a separate and distinct order of ordinary office-bearers superior to pastors, invested with jurisdiction over them, and possessed of the exclusive right of performing certain functions which are essential to the preservation of an organized church, and the ordinary administration of ecclesiastical affairs? So far as the

scriptural argument is concerned, the proper question is, Have we in Scripture any sufficient intimation that it was the mind and will of Christ that this separate and distinct order of office-bearers should exist? and so far as the *historical* argument is concerned, the question is, Did this superior order exist in the early church? and if so, does this fact afford any proof or presumption that it was the mind and will of Christ that it should exist permanently in His church? or does it, upon any other ground, impose upon the church an obligation to have it?

The proof that it is the true state of the question which has now been given, is this, that unless Prelatists are prepared openly and manfully to take up the affirmative of these questions, Presbyterians have no real controversy with them, while they can have no material objection to adduce against Presbyterianism. The substance of the fundamental allegation of the Episcopalians is this, that Presbyterians want an important and divinely authorized order of office-bearers, which they have; and that, in consequence of the want of this order, there are certain necessary ecclesiastical functions, such as confirmation and ordination (exclusively appropriated to this higher order), which cannot be validly, or at least regularly, executed in Presbyterian churches; and, on the other hand, the substance of the fundamental allegation of the Presbyterians is, that they have all the classes of ordinary office-bearers which the apostles instituted,—that the ordinary pastors are fully authorized to execute all the functions which are necessary to the right administration of the affairs of the church,—and that the Episcopalians have introduced a new, unauthorized, and unnecessary order of office-bearers. No Presbyterian contends that the presbyters should not have a president, or that the president should not have, in virtue of his appointment, a certain measure of superior power or authority. No Presbyterian contends that there is any very definite standard of the precise degree of power or authority which the president or moderator should possess, or of the precise length of time during which he might be allowed to continue in office, or that, in settling these points, there is no room for the exercise of Christian wisdom, and a regard to times and circumstances. Many Presbyterians would admit that the main objection even to a perpetual moderatorship, or the presbyters appointing one of their number to fill the chair, *ad vitam aut culpam*, while he still continued a mere presbyter, with no exclusive right to

perform certain functions, which could not be executed without him, and rendered wholly subject to their jurisdiction, is the general injurious *tendency* of such an arrangement,—its tendency, as established by melancholy experience, in the history of the church, to introduce a proper Prelacy. Calvin was moderator of the presbytery of Geneva as long as he lived, probably just because no other man would take the chair while he was present. But after his death, Beza, to whom a similar mark of respect would then have been conceded by his colleagues, declined it, and insisted that the practice of having a constant moderator, as our forefathers used to call it, should be abandoned, as likely to lead to injurious results.* Presbyterians, too, would generally admit, that special and extraordinary circumstances might warrant the church in extending somewhat, *for a time*, the power of a president or moderator, and, more generally, in delegating extraordinary powers to individuals. All this goes to prove that the one essential subject of controversy is a proper prelate, holding a distinct ordinary office, higher than that of the presbyters, having jurisdiction over them, in place of being subject to their control, and possessed, in virtue of his superior office, of an exclusive power of performing certain functions which they cannot execute without him.

Many Prelatists dislike to have the true state of the question brought out distinctly in this way, from a sort of vague consciousness, which is certainly well founded, that much of the evidence which they are accustomed to adduce in support of their principles, does really not touch the point in dispute, as we have now explained it; and many of them have laboured to obscure and perplex it. These persons would fain represent the real subject of controversy as turning merely upon this, *viz.*, parity or imparity among ministers; and they are accustomed to talk in this strain, that they do not contend for any certain measure of superior power or authority in bishops, or about the name by which they may be called, but merely for some such imparity, or superiority, and subordination, as may prevent confusion and disorder. One might be tempted, when listening to some of them discussing the state of the question, or rather evading and perplexing it, to believe that the difference was very slight,—that Episcopacy was a very harmless thing, and might be tolerated without much danger, or

* Ruchat, Hist. de la Réform. de la Suisse, tome vii., pp. 47, 48.

much disturbance of the ordinary scriptural arrangements. The history of the church abundantly refutes this notion, as far as the general tendency of Prelacy in any form or degree is concerned; and the whole history of this controversy, as it has been conducted upon both sides, clearly proves that the real point in dispute is not the vague question of parity or imparity, but the warrantableness and obligation of having a distinct class of ordinary office-bearers, with inherent official jurisdiction over pastors, and an exclusive right in themselves to execute certain necessary ecclesiastical functions.

And here we may remark, that the settlement of the true state of the question, settles also the *onus probandi*, and throws it upon the Episcopalians. It is admitted on both sides, that the apostles instituted the presbyterate and the diaconate, and have sufficiently manifested their intention, or rather that of their Master, that these offices should continue permanently in the church. The question is, Did they also, in addition to these, institute another ordinary, distinct, and higher office—*viz.*, that of prelates—which was to enjoy the same permanance? Episcopalians affirm that they did, and are manifestly bound to prove it. Presbyterians deny it, and are merely bound, according to all the rules of sound logic, to answer the Episcopalian arguments,—to prove that they are insufficient to establish the conclusion in support of which they are adduced. This is all that can be justly demanded of Presbyterians, and is quite sufficient, when accomplished, to give them the victory, and to leave them in entire possession of the field; but they have never hesitated to undertake to prove, *ex abundantia*, that no such permanent office as that of prelates has been instituted by any competent authority, and that the pastors of congregations are the highest ordinary functionaries in the church, and are fully warranted to execute all the functions, including ordination, necessary for the preservation of the church and the administration of ecclesiastical affairs.

While it is important, in order to a right comprehension of this subject, and a fair estimate of the evidence commonly brought to bear upon it, both from Scripture and from antiquity, that we should see and remember that the real point in dispute is a permanent order of office-bearers distinct from, and superior to, pastors or presbyters; yet it should not be forgotten that there have been some, calling themselves Episcopalians, who have never maintained

the affirmative of the question, as we have explained it; and who, not to serve a merely controversial purpose, and to diminish the difficulty of their position in an argumentative point of view, but in all honesty and sincerity, have reduced the difference between bishops and presbyters to a very narrow compass. Such a man was the great and good Archbishop Usher, and several others of the most excellent and most eminent men in the Church of England, who have commonly made use, in explaining their views, of an old scholastic position, in support of which many authorities can be produced even from Romish writers who flourished before the Council of Trent,—viz., that bishops and presbyters *differunt tantum gradu non ordine*.* We may not be able to see very clearly the meaning, or the solidity and value, of the distinction which they employ, and may be somewhat surprised that they should continue to call themselves supporters of Prelacy; but we should not disregard the great importance of the concession which they make to truth: we should give them credit for the comparative soundness of their views; we should ever be willing to manifest courtesy and kindness towards them, and seek rather to diminish than to widen the distance between them and us, especially because the men who have supported this view of the question have usually been greatly superior to other Episcopalians, both in respect to general orthodoxy of doctrine, and to general worth and excellence of personal character. Episcopalians of this class all admit that Presbyterian ordinations, performed without a prelate, are valid, though they usually regard them as irregular; and it is not possible but that Presbyterians should view these men and their principles with very different feelings from those with which they contemplate the bigoted High Churchmen who regard all Presbyterian ordinations as null and void, and all Presbyterian ministers, though ordained, as Timothy was, by the laying on of hands, as unwarranted intruders into the sacred office, and profaners of sacred things,—a class of men in regard to whom history testifies that very few of them have given any satisfactory evidence of their living under the influence of genuine Christian principle, and that very few have been honoured with any considerable measure of Christian usefulness.

There have been some Episcopalians who have virtually

* Forbesii Irenicum, and Usher's "Reduction of Episcopacy."

abandoned all claim to a *jus divinum* in favour of Prelacy in any sense, and who have contented themselves with labouring to prove that Prelacy, though not established by the apostles, was a warrantable arrangement which the civil and the ecclesiastical authorities might lawfully introduce into the church, and to which, when thus introduced, men might lawfully submit; while they think it has many considerations, derived from its antiquity and usefulness, or from its accordance with the civil constitution and social arrangements of the particular country, to support it. This was in substance the view of the matter taken by many of the Reformers of the Church of England, as well as by some Lutheran divines, many of whom, like the Anglicans, have manifested a good deal of an Erastian and latitudinarian spirit in matters of outward order. Our dispute with these persons does not properly involve a discussion of the truth of Prelatic principles, or the obligation and necessity of a Prelatic government, but must be settled by an investigation of the more general and comprehensive question,—whether or not it be lawful to introduce into the government of the church of Christ, offices and arrangements which have no scriptural warrant or sanction? This, however, is not the object which I have more immediately in view, which is to explain the true state of the question in the Prelatic controversy, as an indispensable preliminary to a right estimate of the evidence commonly adduced on both sides, in order to its decision. In regard, then, to all the various and abundant materials usually produced and discussed in this controversy, the only proper question is,—Do they, or do they not, furnish evidence in support of a distinct order of office-bearers, superior to presbyters, and authorized to execute certain ecclesiastical functions which presbyters cannot perform? All the various arguments usually adduced and discussed in the Prelatic controversy, should be brought face to face with *this* question, on which the whole controversy hinges. The only point of very great importance is just to determine whether or not they contain anything that requires, or contributes to require, us to answer this question in the affirmative. The habitual recollection of this would greatly aid us in discerning and establishing the insufficiency of the Prelatic arguments, whether derived from Scripture or antiquity.

If this be the true state of the question, then all the elaborate attempts in which some Episcopalian controversialists have in-

dulged themselves in order to establish the general position, that there ought to be an imparity among the office-bearers of the Christian church,—especially those derived from the constitution of the Jewish church, and from our Saviour sending out seventy disciples as well as twelve apostles,—are at once swept away as irrelevant. We say they do not affect the real point in dispute; and we say *further*, that a proof of the general position of the propriety, expediency, and probability of an imparity or gradation among ecclesiastical office-bearers, concludes nothing against us, for we have imparity in the two distinct offices of presbyters and deacons, the one subordinate to the other. Some Episcopalians have thought they could deduce arguments both from Scripture and antiquity in favour generally of a threefold order among ecclesiastical office-bearers. Could they prove generally a threefold order among *pastors*, or three different ranks or gradations among men all equally entitled to preach the word and administer the sacraments, this would be something to the purpose; but they do not pretend to produce any proofs or presumptions of a general kind in favour of *this* position; and as to any general consideration, whether of arguments or authorities, that may seem to tell in favour of a threefold order among ecclesiastical office-bearers, we say, *in addition* to the general allegation of irrelevancy, that they conclude nothing against us; for we too have a threefold order, inasmuch as the fundamental principles of Presbyterian church government may be correctly stated in this way,—first, that two distinct classes of permanent office-bearers were instituted by the apostles, viz., presbyters, to perform spiritual offices, and to administer the spiritual affairs of the church, and deacons to manage its temporal or secular affairs; and secondly, that the general class of presbyters is divided by good scriptural warrant into two ranks or orders, commonly called teaching and ruling presbyters,—thus making a threefold order among ecclesiastical office-bearers.

The other arguments commonly employed by Episcopalians are founded upon the alleged fact that James (whether this James was an apostle or not, is still a matter of controversial discussion) was settled by the apostles as bishop of the church at Jerusalem; upon the angels of the Asian churches, to whom our risen Saviour addressed epistles by His servant John; and upon the cases of Timothy and Titus. In regard to the first of these

arguments from the alleged episcopate of James, it is disposed of at once, in so far as it professes to be a scriptural argument, by the consideration formerly adverted to,—viz., that the fact, if fact it be, that James was in the modern sense Bishop of Jerusalem, is not asserted, either directly or by implication, in the Scripture itself; for it is little better than ridiculous to adduce, in proof of it, anything contained in the scriptural account of the Council of Jerusalem in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts. As to the Asian angels, even admitting, for the sake of argument, that they were single individuals, though this cannot be proved, and though we think that it is highly improbable—*i.e.*, we think that the preponderance of evidence is against it—yet the very utmost it proves is, that there was some one man in these churches who occupied a somewhat prominent or outstanding place as distinguished from others, who was in such a sense the representative of the church as to render it a proper and becoming thing that any communication intended for the church, as our Lord's epistles unquestionably were, should be addressed to him. After it is proved that these angels were literally single persons, then *this* further may be regarded as proved, but most assuredly nothing more. And here, again, we have to remark, that this does not come up to the point in dispute. There is not a vestige of evidence, not even a presumption, that the angel was a prelate, that he belonged to a higher class or order than the presbyters, that he had singly any jurisdiction or authority over them, that he could execute any functions to which they were incompetent; in short, there is not a vestige of evidence, not even a presumption, that he was anything more than the moderator of the presbytery.

The argument founded upon the cases of Timothy and Titus, and the power or jurisdiction which they exercised, is the only one adduced in favour of Prelacy from Scripture which appears to me to rise even to the rank of plausibility. "The Unbishopsing of Timothy and Titus," to adopt the title of a valuable work of Prynne's, filled with curious and varied learning, requires a mode of discussion that does not lie within the range of any present object. It is to be effected chiefly by proving, what can be conclusively established, that the office which they held was that of an evangelist, and not that of a prelate or diocesan bishop; and that the office was an extraordinary one, and not intended to

be either perpetual or universal; while it may still be competent for the church to vest somewhat similar powers, in special and extraordinary circumstances, and for a time, in a single individual. Still the application of the view which has been given of the true state of the question between Presbytery and Prelacy, the only point with which I am at present concerned, does contribute *somewhat* to a satisfactory disposal of this argument as well as the others; for it is important to observe, that while Timothy and Titus seem to have exercised some jurisdiction over the presbytery of Ephesus and Crete when they were there, there is no proof in anything said in Scripture concerning them, that their presence was necessary to give validity to any ecclesiastical acts; nothing which implies or indicates that during their repeated and prolonged absences from their alleged dioceses,—of which absences we have clear intimations in Scripture,—the presbyters themselves could not do all that could be done when they were present; or that presbyters could not perform all necessary ecclesiastical acts in other parts of the church where, so far as we learn from Scripture, there were no such functionaries as Timothy and Titus, no persons vested with the jurisdiction which the apostles delegated to them. This exclusive right of executing certain ecclesiastical functions, incompetent for ordinary presbyters, is an essential feature of the office of the prelate, and there is no evidence whatever that it applied to Timothy and Titus; or, to employ a good and useful scholastic distinction, often introduced by old writers in the discussion of these topics, we admit that the case of Timothy and Titus, *could their office be first proved to be ordinary and perpetual*, might afford a good argument in favour of prelates having a superior *potestas jurisdictionis*; but we maintain that it would not even then, or upon that supposition, conceded for the sake of argument, afford any evidence in support of their possessing a higher *potestas ordinis*, in virtue of which their presence could be held indispensable to the valid, or even the regular, performance of any necessary ecclesiastical acts; and if so, then it falls short of furnishing an argument in favour of modern Prelacy.

The application of a correct view of the true state of the question in the controversy between Presbyterians and Prelatists, is equally obvious and useful in enabling us to form a right estimate of the evidence commonly adduced in favour of Prelacy from antiquity; but the illustration of this must be deferred for the pre-

sent. In the meantime, I wish it to be remembered that I have not now been professing to give anything like a formal refutation of the Prelatic arguments derived from Scripture; and that still less have I been attempting to bring forward the direct scriptural proofs in support of Presbyterian church government. I have been merely explaining the true state of the question, the real import of the point in dispute, and have only referred *incidentally* to some Prelatic arguments, in order to illustrate the importance of having clear views and definite impressions upon this subject, and to elucidate the way and manner in which the views that have been given of the true state of the question may and should be applied in an investigation of the evidence.

I have said enough, however, even in these brief and incidental remarks, to show that *a large proportion* of the arguments which Episcopalians usually attempt to deduce from Scripture in support of their system of church government, are just specimens of the *ignoratio clenchi*, and that, even if admitted to rest upon a satisfactory foundation, they are quite insufficient to establish the point which is really controverted. Even if we admit, what cannot be proved, that the angels of the Asian churches were literally single individuals, there is nothing in anything said or indicated about them that affords even a presumption that they belonged to *a distinct* class of ordinary functionaries, superior to pastors of congregations. Even if we admit that the office held by Timothy and Titus was intended to be ordinary and perpetual, there is nothing said or indicated concerning it, which proves that their successors in that office, though they might be possessed of a certain superior, controlling jurisdiction over presbyters, had an exclusive right to perform any functions to which presbyters were incompetent. And if it be alleged that the case of Timothy and Titus affords an indication that the apostles intended their own superiority of office over presbyters to be perpetuated in the church, then we have to say, independently of every other consideration that may be brought to bear upon this argument, that there is no evidence whatever in Scripture, that the apostles, any more than Timothy or Titus, exercised any exclusive *potestas ordinis*: in other words, there is no evidence, that after presbyters had once been settled and ordained, there was any ordinary ecclesiastical functions for the performance of which these presbyters were incompetent, and for which the presence of an apostle