

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

was necessary. And, indeed, it is remarkable that the apostles, when they speak of themselves as ordinary ecclesiastical office-bearers, take the designation of presbyters, and no other; and that (what is a very striking coincidence) perhaps the most specific statement we have in Scripture upon this whole subject is, that Timothy was ordained by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery,—an irrefragable proof that presbyters are quite competent to the valid and regular performance of *that act*, for which Prelatists specially hold the presence of a higher functionary to be indispensable.

Let me repeat, before proceeding to consider the testimony of antiquity upon this subject, that the *onus probandi* lies upon our opponents, and that if we can merely answer their arguments, and show that they have not produced sufficient proof of their position, we are quite entitled, upon this ground alone, to reject all their claims and pretensions, even without needing to adduce and establish the direct and positive evidence in support of the fundamental principles of Presbyterianism.

*Sec. II.—Prelacy:—Argument from Antiquity.*

In dealing with the argument from antiquity, on the subject of Prelacy, we have, first, to examine what evidence we have of the actual state of matters on this point, both in respect to doctrine and practice, in the primitive church; and then, secondly, to consider whether the actual state of matters, when once ascertained, affords any proof or even presumption that proper Prelacy, in the modern sense of the word, was introduced by the apostles. I have already shown that the only genuine and uncorrupted uninspired remains of apostolic men—men who had associated with the apostles—are the first epistle of Clement to the church of Corinth, and the epistle of Polycarp to the church at Philippi; and I endeavoured to answer an observation of Neander's upon a passage in Clement's epistle which he thinks favours Prelacy or the hierarchic system, and which, in consequence, he regarded as an interpolation of a later age. If the passage really favoured Prelacy, I would willingly concede to Neander that it must have been an interpolation; but it was proved, I think, that it did not in any measure favour Prelacy. This is the chief passage in Clement on which Prelatists profess to find anything in their

favour. Some of them, indeed, have attempted to found on a passage in which a distinction is made between *ἡγουμενοι* and *πρεσβυτεροι*, which they would fain represent as meaning prelates and presbyters; but it is perfectly certain, from the scope of the passage, that the word "presbyters" there means merely old men. So certain, indeed, is this, that even Archbishop Wake, who has not scrupled sometimes, in his translation of the apostolical fathers, unfairly to render presbyter by the word priest, translates it here "the aged." There is nothing, then, in the epistle of Clement which directly or by implication affords any countenance to the notion that bishops, in the modern sense, then existed or were thought necessary; while from the general substance and leading object of the epistle, it is perfectly manifest that, if there had been any bishop at Corinth, or if the see had been vacant at the time, as some ingenious Episcopalians have fancied, or if the idea which seems afterwards to have prevailed had then entered men's minds,—viz., that Prelacy was a good remedy against schism and faction,—something *must*, in the circumstances, have been said which would have proved this. So clear is all this, that the more candid Episcopalians admit it; and the latest Episcopalian Church historian, Dr Waddington, now Dean of Durham—whose History of the Church, though written for a popular purpose, is a very respectable work—after asserting without evidence, that all the other churches were provided with bishops by the apostles, adds: \* "The church of Corinth seems to have been the only exception. Till the date of St Clement's epistle, its government had been clearly Presbyterian, and we do not learn the exact moment of the change."

It is rather unfortunate for our Episcopalian friends that the church of *Corinth* should have been the exception; for, if Prelacy is felt to promote unity, peace, and subordination, and to check schism and faction, and if this consideration was present to the minds of the apostles in establishing it,—and all this they commonly allege,—there is no undue presumption in saying that the apostle Paul would surely have taken care that, whatever *other* churches might have been left to the evils and disorders of Presbyterian government, the proud and factious church of Corinth

\* This passage was omitted in the second edition, but so far as concerns the actual condition of the church of Corinth, the statement is undoubtedly true.

should have been subjected in good time to the wholesome restraint of Episcopal domination. There is another unfortunate circumstance about this solitary exception. The church of Corinth happens to be the only one about whose internal condition, with respect to government, we have any very specific and satisfactory evidence applicable to this period,—viz., the end of the first century; and we are expected, it seems, to believe that *all* the other churches were at this time in a *different* condition in respect to government from the only one whose condition we have any certain means of knowing. Dr Waddington admits that the government of the church of Corinth was at this time “clearly Presbyterian,” but he says it was the only exception. Well, then, we put this plain question, Will he select *any other* church he chooses, and undertake to produce evidence *half* as satisfactory that *its* government at this time was Prelatic? The remains of antiquity afford no sufficient materials for doing so; and the important fact, therefore, stands out, that the only church about whose internal condition we have any clear and satisfactory ex-scriptural evidence, applicable to the first century, had a government “clearly Presbyterian.”

We have further in Clement’s epistle a distinct and unequivocal declaration that the apostles appointed the first fruits of their ministry to be bishops and deacons, with the consent of the whole church; while there is no hint of their having appointed any other class of office-bearers than these two. It is scarcely disputed that the word bishops here is used, as it unquestionably is in the New Testament, synonymously with presbyters; and, therefore, we are warranted in saying that we find in Clement just what we find in the New Testament,—viz., that the apostles appointed only two orders of ordinary ecclesiastical office-bearers—the one called bishops or presbyters, and the other called deacons. And whereas those Episcopalians who admit that the bishops of the New Testament were just presbyters, or the second order, as they call them, contend that the apostles, before they left the world, indicated their mind that there should be a third and higher order, who were to be specially and pre-eminently *their* successors,—a position sufficiently disposed of by proving that there is nothing in the New Testament to establish this, and much to disprove it,—it is further to be observed that Clement, in telling us that the apostles appointed two orders of office-bearers—bishops and deacons

—evidently intended to describe the condition in which the apostles left the church, and in which they, so far as he knew, meant that it should continue.

All that we learn from Polycarp’s epistle to the Philippians concurs with what we learn from the New Testament and Clement. We find in it no evidence for Prelacy, and clear proof of Presbyterian principles. The letter runs in the name of Polycarp and the presbyters who are with him; and without straining, we may fairly say that this expression just as naturally implies that these presbyters were his colleagues as that they were his subjects.\* But the main point is, that the epistle distinctly intimates that the church of Philippi was at this time under the government of presbyters and deacons, while there is not a hint of the existence, past, present, or prospective, of any other and higher functionaries. This is the more important, because we find in the New Testament, that when, about sixty or seventy years before, Paul wrote to the same church, it was under the government of bishops and deacons, as we see from the first verse of his epistle,—no doubt the same as the presbyters and deacons of Polycarp’s time. This combination of the scriptural and the ex-scriptural evidence in regard to the church at Philippi has sadly perplexed the Episcopalians. Some of them, such as Dr Hammond—a man of much more learning than sense or judgment—contend that the bishops of whom Paul speaks were bishops in the modern sense of the word, that is, prelates; but that Philippi was a metropolis, and had an archbishop, the bishops being the suffragans of the province, and the primæ or metropolitan himself being either dead or absent at the time when Paul wrote. But the more judicious among them admit that these bishops were just presbyters; and they add that the bishop, properly so called in the modern sense, must have been either dead or absent when Paul wrote, *or*, that a prelate had not yet been appointed, the episcopate being still exercised by the apostle himself. But unfortunately it appears from Polycarp’s letter, written about seventy years after, when the apostles were all dead, that the church of Philippi was *still* under the government of presbyters and deacons, without any trace of a bishop. What is to be done with this difficulty? Why, we must just *try to suppose* again, that the bishop was either

\* Πολικαρπος; και οι συν αυτω πρεσβυτεροι.

dead or absent. Bishop Pearson says, and it is literally all he has to say upon the point: "Sed quis dabit Episcopum Philippensium tunc in viris fuisse? Quis præstabit Philippenses ideo a Polycarpo consilium non efflagitasse, quod tunc temporis Episcopo ipsi haud potirentur?"\* Presbyterians are not bound, and certainly will not undertake, to produce proof, as Pearson demands, that the Bishop of Philippi was then alive. It is quite enough for us that there is no trace of the existence of any such functionary in the church of Philippi—no evidence that they had had, or were again to have, a prelate to govern them; while it is further manifest, that if the reason why they asked Polycarp's advice was, as Bishop Pearson chooses to imagine, because the see was vacant at the time; it is not within the bounds of possibility that there could have been no hint or trace of this state of things in the letter itself. Philippi surely should be admitted to be *another* exception. Its government was likewise clearly Presbyterial, and this too after all the apostles were dead, and, consequently, after all the arrangements which they sanctioned had been introduced. So far, then, as concerns the *only* two apostolic men, of whom it is generally admitted that we have their remains, genuine and uncorrupted, it is evident that their testimony upon this point entirely concurs with that of Scripture,—that they furnish no evidence whatever of the existence of Prelacy,—and that their testimony runs clearly and decidedly in favour of Presbyterial government; and if so, then this is a blow struck at the root or foundation of the whole alleged Prelatic testimony from antiquity. It cuts off the first and most important link in the chain, and leaves a gap between the apostles and any subsequent Prelacy which cannot be filled up.

Ignatius is the stronghold of the Episcopalians in regard to this period. We have already explained the grounds on which we think it impossible to believe that those parts at least of Ignatius' epistles, which speak of bishops, presbyters, and deacons, could have been written by him. It speaks in a style upon this subject, which is not only very different from that of Clement and Polycarp, but which is entirely unexampled during the whole of the second century; and he inculcates obedience to bishops, presbyters, and deacons, especially to bishops, with a frequency and

\* Pearson's "Vindiciæ," P. ii., p. 168.

an absoluteness that are utterly opposed to the whole spirit of the apostles, and the whole scope of their instructions; and that are, indeed, very offensive. We need not go over this ground again. We are not convinced that all the epistles of Ignatius have been proved to be wholly forgeries, but we are persuaded that Daille's argument upon this particular point is unanswerable; and that it has been conclusively defended by Larroque against the objections of Pearson, though Episcopalians continue to boast till this day that Pearson has never been answered. It has been conjectured—and there is nothing improbable, but the reverse, in the conjecture—from the anxious solicitude which the epistles of Ignatius manifest upon this point, that those parts of them at least were fabricated at the time when Prelacy, or something like it, was beginning to spread in the church, and were intended to throw the sanction of the venerable name of Ignatius around the pleasing innovation. This idea was first thrown out by Salmasius, and it is thus expressed in a valuable work by a recent author, which contains a great deal of useful information in a convenient form: "If the epistles are entirely genuine, they prove the very opposite of that for which they are adduced—the apostolic origin of Prelacy. For here we see a child parading a new toy, of which he thinks he can never make enough. . . . The extreme anxiety to obtain submission betrays a consciousness of a novel assumption, for which the early extension of the church at Antioch, probably, gave both occasion and encouragement."\*

We would only further observe, that while the epistles of Ignatius prove that at the time when they were composed, or put into their present form, at whatever time that may have been, a real distinction among bishops, presbyters, and deacons, so that they formed three distinct orders or classes of office-bearers, had been introduced, or was in the very act of being introduced, they contain no clear intimations of what were the distinct functions, provinces, and prerogatives of these different orders. It seems pretty plain that even then the bishop was but the pastor of a single congregation, while there is no clear evidence that the presbyters—whom, however, he greatly magnifies, as well as the bishops—were pastors or ministers of the word. Hence some Presbyterian writers, in discussing Ignatius, have taken up the

\* Bennett's Theology of the Early Christian Church, p. 20.

ground that, even admitting his epistles in their present form to be genuine and uncorrupted, they are quite reconcilable with Presbyterian principles,—the bishops being the pastors, and the presbyters our ruling elders. I cannot say that I attach much value to this mode of disposing of the testimony of Ignatius, though it has been adopted by some respectable Presbyterian writers. The whole *usus loquendi* of the second century is decidedly opposed to an explicit and uniformly recognised distinction among three different classes of office-bearers; and as soon as we find unequivocal and genuine proofs of this distinction, we find also evidence that the presbyters were pastors, though there are certainly difficulties to be met with in tracing the progressive history both of the episcopate and the presbyterate, which the existing materials of antiquity do not enable us fully to solve.

Soon after the middle of the second century, we find plain enough traces of the existence of some distinction between bishops and presbyters: *i.e.*, we find that, whereas these words had been used indiscriminately, when applied to ecclesiastical office-bearers, for a century both of inspired and uninspired writers, they were now *sometimes* applied to designate two somewhat different classes of persons; and though we have not materials for determining very fully what the precise difference between them was, we have sufficient materials for deciding that it was very unlike the distinction between bishops and presbyters in modern Prelatic churches. The distinction between Ignatius, who lived in the beginning of the second century, on the one hand, and Irenæus, Tertullian, Clemens Alexandrinus, and Origen, who flourished from the middle of the second to the middle of the third century, on the other, is this, that he uniformly uses the words bishops, presbyters, and deacons, as designating three different classes, while they *all* sometimes distinguish them, and sometimes confound them, or use them synonymously,—thus clearly proving, that in their time the distinction, though it existed, was neither very great in itself, nor very much regarded, nor very constantly observed. There is no evidence that Irenæus, Tertullian, Clemens Alexandrinus, and Origen believed that bishops were, by divine appointment, a distinct class or order of office-bearers from presbyters: no proof can be produced from their writings that this was generally the mind of the church during their life, while not a little can be produced from them which fairly leads to the

opposite conclusion; though it must be admitted that, from the subject not having been during all this period discussed controversially, there is some ambiguity and obscurity about their statements, and some ground for dispute as to the precise nature and amount of the conclusions which they warrant. The general result of a comparison of all the various indications upon this subject, contained in the writings of this period, is this, that while at first bishops or presbyters and deacons were the only two classes of office-bearers in the church, the presidents or moderators of the presbyters came to assume, or had conceded to them, an increasing measure of power or authority; and that this gradually led to a general restriction of the name bishop to the president, while the name presbyter was continued to the other pastors. The words, however, are still sometimes used indiscriminately by all these writers. It is perfectly certain that during all this period the churches were still governed by the body of presbyters, acting substantially as colleagues; that the bishops were not regarded as constituting a distinct superior order; that no separate ordination, or consecration, as Prelatists call it now, and nothing but the united choice of the presbyters and the people, was necessary to make a presbyter a bishop. If this be so, then assuredly bishops, till the middle of the third century, were not prelates, and the evidence adduced in support of Prelacy from this period does not bear upon the proper point in dispute.

Here it may be proper to advert to a very common misrepresentation of Episcopalians. One can scarcely open a work in defence of Prelacy, without finding it asserted, that the most learned Presbyterians admit that Prelacy existed as early as the middle of the second century, from which they think themselves entitled to draw the inference that it must have existed in the apostolic age. And in support of the allegation that learned Presbyterians make this admission, they will probably quote two or three short garbled extracts from Salmasius and Blondell, which have been handed down as an heir-loom from generation to generation among Episcopalian controversialists. The statement is wholly untrue. Neither Salmasius nor Blondell, nor any other learned Presbyterian, ever admitted that *Prelacy, in the modern sense, existed as early as the middle of the second century*. All that they have admitted is, that about that time there are traces of a distinction being *sometimes*, though not uniformly, made in

the use of the words bishop and presbyter, indicating, no doubt, that the presidents of the presbyteries were beginning to assume greater prominence and influence, while they strenuously deny that at that time bishops were at all like modern prelates, either in the *potestas ordinis* or in the *potestas jurisdictionis*, which they assumed and enjoyed. In regard to Blondell and Salmasius more particularly, they maintain that, during the first half of the second century, the moderatorship of the presbytery went by seniority, the oldest minister presiding, and when he died the next oldest taking the chair; that this custom was generally changed about the middle of the second century, and the practice was then introduced of appointing a president by free choice, instead of by seniority. They do not admit that this president, though the name bishop began soon to be in a great measure restricted to him, was regarded as belonging to a distinct superior order; that he had anything like even a veto or negative over the proceedings of the presbytery, or that he was possessed of any exclusive powers or prerogatives. They believed, and they have proved, that it was only after a long train of gradual and growing usurpations, not completed till more than two centuries after this period, that the primus presbyter, who had the *πρωτοκαθέδρια*, or moderator's chair, was transmuted into a prelate; and yet they are constantly quoted by Episcopalian controversialists, as admitting that Prelacy existed in the middle of the second century.

The great battle-field, however, is the Cyprianic age, the period during which Cyprian held the see of Carthage,—*i.e.*, for ten or twelve years immediately after the middle of the third century. The government of the church during Cyprian's time has been discussed at great length; and we formerly mentioned some of the principal works on the subject, recommending especially Jameson's "Cyprianus Isotimus." Episcopalian usually affirm with great confidence that Cyprian's writings prove that in his time proper Prelacy prevailed in the church. It cannot be denied that in Cyprian's writings we have abundant proof that in his time there was a clear and palpable distinction between bishops and presbyters, that he very strenuously inculcated the superiority *in some sense* of bishops over presbyters, while there is good reason to believe that he contributed in no small degree to advance the process of the progressive elevation of bishops, which had no doubt been going on from a very early period, and, indeed, we may almost

say since the time of Diotrephes, who loved to have the pre-eminence. There is no evidence, however, that Cyprian, with all his zeal and earnestness in maintaining the prerogatives of the episcopate, believed bishops to be of divine appointment—a distinct superior order to presbyters—that he claimed for them anything like the exclusive government of the church, or that he held that there were any ecclesiastical acts to the performance of which presbyters without a bishop were intrinsically incompetent. If bishops are to be held to be by divine right a superior distinct order from presbyters, it is quite plain what are the scriptural grounds upon which the doctrine *must* be based—those, *viz.*, on which modern Prelatists usually defend their principles. Now, it is remarkable that in all Cyprian's earnest argumentation and vehement declamation in defence of the bishop's prerogatives—a point which he evidently laboured with all his heart—there is not the slightest allusion to any one of the common arguments of modern Prelatists, except that derived from the Jewish priesthood; and even this is not commonly applied as they apply it. His sole argument is taken from those obscure and mystical notions of unity to which we formerly referred, which led him to ascribe a certain primacy to Peter over the other apostles, and to the Bishop of Rome over the other bishops, while yet he explicitly contended that all the apostles and all the bishops were possessed of an equal measure of proper authority or jurisdiction. The superiority which he ascribed to bishops over presbyters he rests upon the same grounds, and defends by the same arguments, as the superiority which he ascribed to Peter over the apostles; whence the inference is unavoidable, that if he really understood his own principles, he did not intend to ascribe to bishops any real superiority of order or proper jurisdiction over presbyters, any more than to Peter over the apostles, though he might not be so anxious to bring out the conclusion explicitly in the one case as in the other. There is nothing in Cyprian to countenance what may be called the doctrine of Prelacy, viewed in connection with the scriptural grounds on which it is commonly based; nay, the entire absence of them from Cyprian's discussion of this point, proves that they had not then entered into men's heads—that they had not yet been invented—that they were utterly unknown.

As to the practice of the church in his time, all that is proved by it is, that there was then a marked distinction between bishops

and presbyters; that the bishop was the fixed president of the presbytery; that it was expected that ordinarily they would pronounce no ecclesiastical judgment, and perform no ecclesiastical act, without his consent and approbation, while he also ordinarily did nothing without theirs. Cyprian expressly informs us that he acted upon the principle of doing nothing without the consent of his presbytery, which consisted only of presbyters; and that, in matters of importance, he must also have the consent of the people,—restraints these upon episcopal domination, which modern Prelatists would ill brook, and which a man of Cyprian's high spirit and exalted notions of episcopal prerogatives would not readily have acknowledged and submitted to, unless the general doctrine and practice of the church of that time had imperatively required it. No satisfactory evidence has been produced, that the bishops in Cyprian's time claimed and exercised, as belonging to them inherently and *de jure*, a veto or negative over the proceedings of the presbytery, although this seems generally to have been, in fact, conceded to them; and still less of anything like evidence has been produced, that there were any ecclesiastical functions which presbyters could not then validly perform, and to which the bishop's actual presence was necessary. The Cyprianic bishop, then, was not a modern prelate, though the horns of the mitre were certainly appearing; and it was still true that, as Jerome, the most learned of all the fathers, assures us had been the case from the beginning, the churches were governed *communi consilio presbyterorum*, instead of presbyters being deprived of all share in the ordinary administration of ecclesiastical affairs, as they now are in the Prelatical Churches of England and Ireland.

The only thing else produced in support of Prelacy from primitive antiquity is, that some writers of the first three centuries have spoken of particular individuals as being bishops of particular churches, and as having been made so by the apostles; and that some of them speak also of a personal succession of bishops in particular churches. The inference is, that it was then generally believed that the apostles established bishops with Prelatic jurisdiction, and that there was a regular successor of *such* bishops from the apostolic times. The falsehood of this conclusion is clearly established by what we find in the epistles of Clement and Polycarp; and there is no difficulty in detecting the fallacy of the argument on which it is based. The fallacy lies in these two

points: First, in not making allowance for the unquestionably vague and equivocal use of the word bishop, and in imagining that whenever it occurs in ancient writers, it means a modern prelate; whereas nothing is more certain than that, in Scripture and primitive antiquity, it bore no such restricted and specific meaning: And, secondly, in not taking sufficiently into account that, as the word bishop came gradually to be restricted to the presidents or moderators, as distinguished from ordinary presbyters, men naturally applied the style of speaking common in their own age to the events and transactions of preceding generations, when they had occasion to describe or refer to them. The fair application of these two considerations, deprives that argument in favour of Prelacy of all weight, and even plausibility.

Let us advert to an instance: Irenæus speaks of Polycarp having been made Bishop of Smyrna by the apostles, and of a succession of bishops preserving the tradition of sound doctrine in the churches. Some distinction, in the occasional use of the word bishop and presbyter, with some corresponding difference in dignity or authority, existed in his time; but there is no proof that he regarded them as designating two distinct and separate orders; and, consequently, there is no proof that he thought Polycarp the Bishop of Smyrna to be like a modern prelate; besides that, in another passage, he expressly calls him an apostolical presbyter. While he speaks of a succession of bishops, he speaks also as frequently and as explicitly of a succession of presbyters, as representing the churches, and handing down the apostolic doctrine,—a fact of great importance in illustration of the doctrine of the second century upon this point. And in addressing the Bishop of Rome, he speaks of him and his predecessors in the Roman church as presbyters,—a mode of speaking which no genuine modern Episcopalian would ever think of employing in regard to the Bishop of Rome, or even in regard to his Grace of Canterbury.

With respect to the catalogues of the succession of bishops in the principal churches from the apostolic times, which Eusebius laboured to compile in the fourth century,\* it is enough to say that the general observations now made apply equally to them; and that, in addition, Eusebius has distinctly confessed that, from

\* Euseb. Hist. Eccles., Lib. iii., c. iv. Stillingfleet's Irenicum, p. 297.

want of records, no certainty could in his time be attained regarding the materials of which they were composed.

What is it that can really be held to be proved upon this point? Why, first, that in the age of Clement and Polycarp—the age of the apostles, and that immediately succeeding them—the government of the churches was “clearly Presbyterian.” Secondly, that in another generation, after the middle of the second century, we have some traces of a distinction being sometimes observed between the words bishop and presbyter, which had ever before, both by inspired and uninspired men, been used indiscriminately; that bishop was now often used to designate specially the president or moderator of presbyteries, while, at the same time, all pastors, including the presidents or moderators, were still often called by the general name of presbyters; and while there is not yet any trace of these bishops arrogating to themselves the exclusive right of performing any ecclesiastical function or administering the ordinary government of the church, except in conjunction with the presbyters over whom they presided. Thirdly, that in the Cyprianic age, or the latter part of the third century, there is no proof of any very material change in the government of the church from what it had been for a century before,—the difference being chiefly that the distinction between bishops and presbyters was more regularly and carefully observed; that the power of the bishops as presidents of the presbytery was somewhat more prominent and more extensive; but still there is no proof that there were any ecclesiastical functions exclusively appropriated to the bishop which presbyters could not perform without him, or in his absence; that there is not yet any satisfactory evidence that bishops alone administered ecclesiastical affairs in the exercise of an inherent power, regulated by their own judgment, or even that they had *de jure*, though practically they often seem to have now exercised *de facto*, a veto or negative over the proceedings of the presbytery. These are the facts of the case, as they can be,—as we are firmly persuaded they have been,—established by an investigation of the whole evidence; and if so, there was nothing like modern Prelacy in the second century,—and only a faint and feeble shadow of it, very different from the coarse and palpable reality, even in the latter part of the third century.

Now, the whole plausibility of the Prelatic argument from antiquity, depends upon the alleged universality of its prevalence

from the apostolic age downwards. This universal prevalence, however, is not only denied, but disproved. Could it be proved that proper Prelacy, in the modern sense, universally prevailed in the age immediately succeeding that of the apostles, this would be rather a startling fact, and, *had we no other evidence* of the apostolic arrangements, might be entitled to considerable weight. But the scriptural evidence, that the apostles established only two ordinary permanent offices in the church, is complete and conclusive; and, even if it were not, there is nothing in the testimony of antiquity,—in the facts which it establishes,—that affords even a presumption that they instituted a third and higher one. We see no trace of a third order in the generation immediately following theirs,—(of course we reject, for reasons formerly explained, the testimony of Ignatius upon this subject),—and we can trace thereafter, upon historical grounds, the formation and development of a third or higher order, through a period of more than two centuries, so fully as to leave not a great deal to be filled up by an appeal to the operation of the recognised principles of human nature, and to the general tendencies unquestionably exhibited in the history of the church during that time. We might concede a great deal more to Episcopalians than a fair view of the evidence requires, as to the origin and growth of Prelacy. We might concede, though it cannot be proved, that there were traces of a distinction between bishops and presbyters earlier than the middle of the second century, and even in the time of Ignatius (and let it be remembered that *some* distinction or superiority, without specifying what, is all that even his epistles indicate); and we might further concede, that a century later, in Cyprian's time, proper Prelacy, in the modern sense of the word, was in full and general operation; and yet, after conceding all this, we could not infer that there was any proof, or even any very strong presumption, that Prelacy had been established by the apostles. The evidence for the early and general prevalence of Prelacy is not such as to impose upon us an obligation to give any explanation of its growth and origin in order to escape the necessity of referring it to the apostles. But, even if it were, there would be no difficulty in explaining it. The history of the church exhibits from the very first a strong tendency to declension from the scriptural standard both in doctrine and government. So far as government is concerned,

the tendency, fully developed at length in the system of Popery, was to invent new offices or orders of office-bearers, to increase and extend the power or authority of individuals, to devise high-sounding titles, and to fabricate distinctions and differences, as pretences or excuses for applying them, and to convert what were originally mere titles of honour or marks of respect, into the grounds of claims to actual power or jurisdiction. Nothing but wilful blindness can fail to see *these* tendencies in operation in the history of the early church, even during the first three centuries; and if they existed at all, they are fully adequate, when viewed in connection with well-known and powerful principles of human nature, the operation of which is too often exhibited even in the conduct of those whom we cannot but regard as pious men, to account for the origin and growth of Prelacy, even though it could, in its proper sense, be proved to have had a much earlier and more general prevalence than can be truly ascribed to it. Prelacy, or rather *some* distinction between bishops and presbyters,—some superiority of the one over the other,—was one of the earliest and most respectable of these inventions, but there is no ground to look upon it in any other light.

Besides these general considerations,—which are of themselves quite sufficient to account for the whole facts of the case, and which would be quite sufficient to account for a great deal more, even for all, or nearly all, of what Episcopalians commonly assert to be matter of fact, if it could be established to be so,—we know enough of the state of the primitive church to be able to give a more specific explanation of the rise and growth of the superiority of bishops over presbyters, without needing to refer it to apostolic appointment. The men who had been settled by the apostles, or with their sanction, as the first pastors of churches, would naturally be looked upon with deference and respect by the other pastors who might be afterwards associated with them, would probably preside at their meetings, and have much actual influence in the regulation of all ecclesiastical affairs. They would naturally, and almost as a matter of course, be led to occupy a position of prominence and influence, and would be looked to by others as virtually representing in some measure the presbyters, and the churches or congregations over which they presided. This prominence and influence, and not any pretended higher order or superior right of jurisdiction, was, no doubt, the whole of the

Prelacy enjoyed by Clemens, Bishop of Rome, and Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna; and though it is essentially different in its whole character, elements, and foundation, from modern Prelacy, there is no difficulty in seeing how easily and naturally, when extended to another generation, and fostered by special circumstances in the condition of particular churches, and in the character and position of individuals, it might produce such a state of things as would naturally lead to an appropriation to the presidents of the presbyteries of one of the two designations which had formerly been common to all the members. The pastors of the early Christian churches were chiefly settled in towns, where they seem to have lived very much in common, transacting by joint authority the necessary ecclesiastical business; and as they extended their labours to neighbouring villages, and formed churches in them, these new churches seem for a time to have been supplied and superintended by the pastor or pastors of the city, through whose labour they had been planted, and thus to have been kept in some measure of dependence upon, and subordination to, the mother church, and the presbyter or presbyters who had most influence in managing *its* affairs. The presidency of the presbytery, and the control exercised over the new churches settled around the mother church, were thus evidently the foundations on which the structure of Prelacy was raised; and there is no difficulty in conceiving how, on this basis, might be constructed the whole progress which took place in this matter from the condition of the church of Corinth in the time of Clemens, to that of the church of Carthage in the time of Cyprian. The common allegations of the advocates of Prelacy about the impossibility of accounting for its origin and prevalence, unless we refer it to the apostles, are destitute of any solid foundation in the principles of human nature or the history of the church, even if we were to concede the accuracy of the representation they usually give of the actual facts of the case; but when we take into account how the matter of fact actually stands upon this subject, they become really ludicrous, and almost unworthy to be discussed in sober argument. Nothing is more natural, nothing more easily explicable, than the unquestionable progress which took place in this matter during the second, third, and fourth centuries.

It may be worth while to notice here one rather curious specimen of the tactics of Episcopalians in the management of this

branch of their cause. When they are discussing the general *status questionis*, they talk as if they were contented with a very scanty measure of superiority on the part of the bishops over the presbyters—as if they were perfectly satisfied with any distinction between them, however small, that could be in any sense called imparity or superiority of any kind. And so, in like manner, when they are investigating the remains of antiquity for the purpose of establishing the early and general prevalence of Prelacy, doing their best to make the most of every phrase or incident they meet with, they profess to be quite satisfied, and even delighted with, the very scanty and meagre traces they can discern of *some* distinction obtaining between bishops and presbyters, however slight it be, and however imperfect may be the information conveyed or indicated as to its real nature and amount. But when they come to the last branch of the argument, and profess to be proving the impossibility of Prelacy having prevailed so early and so generally, unless it had been established by apostolic authority, they then change their course, and give a very different view of what Prelacy is. They then represent it as something greatly and palpably different from anything which Presbyterians can admit of, and of course as being, upon Presbyterian principles, an entire subversion of the apostolic government of the church. Having laboured to make this impression, they then proceed to enlarge upon the awful sin of making so great and radical a change upon apostolic arrangements, and the injustice and unfairness of charging this fearful crime—as upon Presbyterian principles it must be—upon the pious and holy martyrs of antiquity. And then they go on—professing to think that Presbyterians allege that Prelacy was introduced suddenly and all at once—to show, that even if these pious and holy men could have been guilty of so great a sin as to subvert deliberately the government which the apostles established, it was impossible that they could all at once have succeeded in introducing so great and fundamental a change. Jameson describes this feature in their conduct in this way: \* “One would think, that at the beginning, they plead only for as good as nothing; and that the thing they would have is no bigger than the cloud which was like a man’s hand; but afterward the whole heaven of the Kirk of God is black with it.”

\* Sum of the Episcopal Controversy, p. 184.

We may give a specimen of this mode of procedure on their part. The famous Chillingworth, so deservedly celebrated for his writings against the Papists, in which he proves himself to be a singularly acute reasoner, wrote a short tract, which he called “The Apostolical Institution of Episcopacy Demonstrated.” He begins with a very moderate definition of what is meant by Episcopal government, abstracting, he says, “all accidentals,” and considering “only what is essential and necessary to it.” This definition of Prelacy, *of course*, contains nothing about a distinct order of men vested inherently with superior jurisdiction, or the exclusive power of ordaining. He then tries to show, which he does partly by perverting two extracts from Beza and Du Moulin, that “this government was received universally in the church, either in the apostles’ time, or presently after,” and that, therefore, “it cannot with reason be denied to be apostolic.” The conclusion he puts in this form: “When I shall see therefore all the fables in the Metamorphosis acted, and prove true stories; when I shall see all the democracies and aristocracies in the world lie down and sleep, and awake into monarchies; then will I begin to believe, that presbyterial government, having continued in the church during the apostles’ times, should presently after (against the apostles’ doctrine, and the will of Christ) be whirled about like a scene in a masque, and transformed into episcopacy. In the meantime, while these things remain thus incredible, and in human reason impossible, I hope I shall have leave to conclude thus:—Episcopal government is acknowledged to have been universally received in the church presently after the apostles’ times. Between the apostles’ times and this presently after, there was not time enough for, nor possibility of, so great an alteration. And therefore there was no such alteration as is pretended. And therefore episcopacy being confessed to be so ancient and catholic, must be granted also to be apostolic. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*” \*

Chillingworth could reason when he liked, and could reason admirably when he had a good cause to plead; but if he had produced nothing better than this, Locke would assuredly not have said, as he did say, “If you wish your son to be a good reasoner, let him read Chillingworth.” The fallacy of the reasoning, independently of other and more serious objections to its principles,

\* The Apostolical Institution of Episcopacy Demonstrated, sec. xi.

consists to some extent in the erroneous representation it insinuates of the views of Presbyterians on the topics which it includes. They dispute with him his account of the state of the question, and regard his account of it as little better than a juggle, to obscure and perplex the real merits of the controversy, or as an unmanly evasion of its real difficulties. They never imagined or asserted that Prelacy started into life fully grown, and was suddenly and all at once established over the church; on the contrary, their firm persuasion is, that it took from three to four centuries to attain to the maturity which it exhibits in modern times; and they do not need, in explaining its gradual rise and progress, in so far as they are at all called upon to explain it, to ascribe to any one generation in the church a larger measure of ignorance or sin, of indifference and unconcern about Christ's arrangements, and of love of power and pre-eminence, than is compatible with a large measure of Christian zeal and excellence, or than can be conclusively proved to have been exhibited in early times in other matters besides this.

Prelacy was not established by the apostles, for there is no proof of it in the New Testament. They established only two orders of ordinary permanent office-bearers—presbyters and deacons; and by *uniformly* using the words bishops and presbyters interchangeably, as both descriptive of one and the same class of office-bearers, and by giving us no hint whatever of any other intended permanent office, they, of course, designed that, in taking the word of God for a guide, and applying it for a standard of faith and practice, the church should adhere to the Presbyterial government which they, in accordance with their Master's directions, had established. Their immediate successors adhered to the apostolic mode, and retained their Presbyterian principles and practice. Gradually some measure of superior influence and authority came—perhaps from good motives or plausible professions of benefit to the church, and not at first from mere vulgar ambition and open disregard of Christ's arrangements—to be conceded to the presidents of the presbyters, who were also usually the pastors of the original or mother church of the district. A state of things, in some measure new, was thus introduced, which, of course, required to have some name or designation by which it might be represented and described; and this was effected by restricting, though at first without anything like regularity or

uniformity, the word bishop to the higher class, and leaving the word presbyter to the inferior.\* This unquestionable deviation from the apostolic and inspired use of the words, does, according to all the recognised principles which regulate the formation of language, necessarily imply the existence of a different state of things from that which the apostles established and left. A change was made in the use and application of the words, to indicate and express a change which had previously been introduced into the actual administration of ecclesiastical affairs,—a change which, in its progressive development, required the invention of several new words and titles, until the world at length became familiar both with the name and the reality of a universal bishop,—a sovereign pontiff,—the head of the church,—the vicar of Christ upon earth. If they had adhered rigidly to the apostolic arrangements, they would not have needed to have changed the apostolic phraseology.

A great deal of ingenuity has been employed by the defenders of Prelacy, from Epiphanius down to the present day, to account for the uniform interchangeableness and manifest identity of the words bishops and presbyters in the New Testament, and the distinction afterwards introduced between them. Some half-dozen of theories, with various subsidiary modifications, have been devised to account for it, and it is not very easy to say which of them is now most generally adopted by Episcopalians. These different theories are possessed of different degrees of ingenuity and plausibility; but they are all destitute of any solid foundation, either in actual historical evidence or in intrinsic probability, as might be easily shown. The only satisfactory explanation is, that in apostolic times the *offices* as well as the *names* of bishops and presbyters were thoroughly identical, and were designed to continue so; that a difference was afterwards introduced into the actual state of matters in the government of the church; and that this difference in the things required and produced a difference in the usage of the names. The principles of human nature, the lessons of experience, the informations of the history of the church, suggest abundant materials for establishing the entire probability of such a change. There is nothing in the least unlikely about it. So likely, indeed, is Prelacy to arise in the church

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\* Mason on Episcopacy.