

SUPPLEMENT

TO THE SPIRIT OF THE XIX. CENTURY FOR 1843.

PRESBYTERIAN GOVERNMENT,

NOT A HIERARCHY, BUT A COMMONWEALTH:

AND,

PRESBYTERIAN ORDINATION,

NOT A CHARM, BUT AN ACT OF GOVERNMENT.

THE SUBSTANCE OF TWO ARGUMENTS DELIVERED BEFORE THE
SYNOD OF PHILADELPHIA MET IN BALTIMORE,
OCTOBER, 1843.

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BY ROBERT J. BRECKINRIDGE. *Jan 1852*

ὁ ἀληθὴς Χριστὸς, 1 COR. IV. 1.

To the Rev. Dr. ROBERT J. BRECKINRIDGE:

SIR—The undersigned, Elders of the Presbyterian churches in the city of Baltimore, being exceedingly desirous that a more general knowledge on the questions in reference to Ruling Elder discussed in Synod at its late meeting in this city, should be diffused amongst the Elders and members of the Presbyterian Church generally, in this country, respectfully request that you will write out your speeches on these questions, delivered in the Synod, and cause them to be printed for circulation.

Such of the undersigned as were present in Synod at the discussion of these agitating questions beg leave respectfully to tender you their sincere and grateful thanks for your very able and eloquent defence of the rights and privileges of Ruling Elders, which they deem to have been invaded by the late General Assembly.

BALTIMORE, *November 3, 1843.*

MAXWELL McDOWELL, }
W. L. GILL, } *Elders of the*
DAVID STUART. } *1st Presbyterian Church*

DAVID B. PRINCE. *Elder of the 3d Church*

JOHN McKEEN. *Elder of the 4th Church*

JOHN WILSON, }
R. J. CROSS, } *Elders of the 2d Church*
ROBERT BROWN, }
JOHN FRANCISCUS, }
J. HARMAN BROWN, }
PETER FENBY. }

*Recd
Nov 10*

PRESBYTERIAN GOVERNMENT

NOT A HIERARCHY, BUT A COMMONWEALTH.

THE SUBSTANCE OF AN ARGUMENT ON THE COMPOSITION OF THE QUORUM OF A PRESBYTERY;
DELIVERED IN THE SYNOD OF PHILADELPHIA, MET AT BALTIMORE,
ON THE 20TH OF OCTOBER, 1843.

My regret, Moderator, that the gentleman who has just taken his seat (*Kensey Johns, Esq.*) should be found contending against the rights of that class of officers of which he is an ornament, is mixed with admiration of his frank and kind demeanour—contrasting so strongly with the course which leading ministers of the gospel in this body, have considered it their duty to pursue. If the advocates of that preposterous dogma, so current amongst us, that by ordination men transmit the essence of the offices they hold, could only prove that in the same manner they may transmit the spirit which actuates them; I, for one, sir, would infinitely prefer to be ordained with the imposition of the hands of a body of ruling elders, like my friend from Delaware, to the most unimpeachable descent through popery, prelacy, or new-schoolism, which can be boasted by any of those, who find themselves in positions which should entitle them, as they appear to suppose, to control these questions in this Synod. As to the proposition which the member has read,* and which he proposes to offer at a future stage of the business, I am glad to see that it distinctly repudiates the miserable sophistry put into the mouth of the last Assembly, and proclaims the duty of the churches to send up ruling elders, and that of the elders to exceed the Presbyteries.† I must say, however, that the notion of a quorum of a church court being established by those gracious promises of our Saviour that he would be present where two or three are gathered in his name, and that if two would agree what they ask shall be done for them; seems to me in the last degree fanciful: or if there be any weight in the argument of the minute, then it is too manifest to need proof, that on this ground two officers, whether they be preachers or ruling elders being wholly immaterial, may constitute every church court authorized by Scripture, and therefore the Assembly, and the constitution of the church are as far wrong, as the persons against whom the member has levelled his paper. But in truth these divine promises settle the quorum of a prayer meeting, or at most of a church, and have no relation to the present subject.

It is unfortunate that the question before us appears to be so minute. In point of fact the ultimate principle involved is one of the most important and comprehensive that could be submitted to the people of God. In deciding it, we virtually decide, whether our church constitution establishes a government under which the final power and the actual authority are in the hands of the preachers as preachers, or of the body of Christian people to

be exercised through officers regularly connected with them: and as we confess that our constitution derives its binding force from its accordancy with the word of God, the question at last is, between a divine hierarchy and a divine commonwealth. It is a question whose fearful scope is manifest upon every page of the history of Christianity; and the members of this Synod who have made so great efforts to strangle in the birth this effort to examine it, are unjust to themselves, and inattentive to some of the most portentous indications of the age.

There are many great, general, and precious truths upon which I will not venture to doubt that we are all agreed—and which, yet seem to be decisive of the present subject. I cannot therefore omit to state the more obvious of them; and yet I ought not to consider it necessary to prove them, since they are explicitly held forth in our ecclesiastical standards. Such are the propositions, that God has established a kingdom in this world; that this kingdom is wholly distinct from all secular kingdoms, and entirely independent of all civil magistracies; that the visible church of Jesus Christ is that kingdom, and he, the Lord Jesus, its only head and king, its sole lawgiver, its sole priest, and by his word and Spirit its only infallible teacher—and that the only safe, certain, and entire rule of faith and practice is contained in sacred Scripture. That to this kingdom, thus set up, held forth, and guided, the Lord Jesus Christ has given an outward government and permanent officers, our standards clearly teach, (Conf. Faith, ch. xxxi. sec. 1.); but the immediate application, as well as the great importance of these two principles, require a more particular notice of them.

That church government is in the hands of *Assemblies*, congregational, classical, and synodical, and not of church officers individually considered, (Form of Gov. ch. viii. sec. 1.); that the church is governed by *Judicatories*, not by officers acting personally, (Idem ch. xiii. sec. 1.) is the explicit doctrine of our constitution. This principle is fundamental and vital to our entire system, and constitutes one of the most striking characteristics by which Presbyterianism is separated from Prelacy on one hand, and Independency on the other. For our government is not in the hands of individual officers, and therefore is not prelacy; neither is it in the hands of the whole brotherhood of each separate congregation as an independent body, and therefore it is not Independency: but it is in the hands of *Assemblies*, of *Assemblies* too which are classical and synodical as well as congregational, and which even when congregational, are delegated and not popular. It is a Christian commonwealth; it is

* See it, p. 614 *Spirit of the XIX. Century*, for November, 1843.

† Compare Chancellor Johns' paper with the Assembly's

democracies. And such is the constant doctrine of the soundest Presbyterian churches in every age, and of the greatest expounders of our system every where. "It is lawful and agreeable to the word of God that the church be governed by *several sorts of Assemblies*, which are congregational, classical, and synodical," is the language of the Westminster Assembly, adopted by the venerable Kirk of Scotland nearly two hundred years ago; language conveying a sentiment, held from the first dawn of the Reformation. Four years before the Scottish Kirk approved the "Form of Presbyterian church government," agreed on at Westminster (which it did in 1645), indeed, two years before the Westminster Assembly convened, the General Assembly of 1641, in a formal paper addressed to the Parliament of England, "with universal consent," as they declare, pleading that "the Prelaticall Hierarchie" might be "put out of the way," adopted the following remarkable language: "For although the Reformed Kirks do hold without doubting, their Kirk officers, and Kirk government by Assemblies higher and lower, in their strong and beautiful subordination, to be *jure divino* and perpetuall; yet Prelacie, as it differeth from the office of a pastor, is almost universally acknowledged by the Prelates themselves, and their adherents, to be but an humane ordinance," &c.* And still earlier, the leading mind in the church of God during the illustrious era of the second Reformation in Scotland, the Solemn League and Covenant, and the Westminster Assembly—the most brilliant epoch of modern history—had set this whole subject in precisely the light in which I am now endeavouring to present it, as a matter absolutely inherent in the very nature of Presbyterian polity, and distinguishing it precisely from a government by prelates. In a paper drawn up by *Alexander Henderson* in 1640, and submitted by the Scottish Commissioners in London (of whom he was one,) to the "Lords of the Treaty" who were endeavouring to draw closer the bonds of union between Scotland and England; "unity in religion, uniformity of church government, as a special means to conserve peace" being the general subject of the paper—and the utter hopelessness of unity, uniformity or peace, while prelacy remained the established, exclusive, intolerant State religion of England, being one of the special points argued in it; that wonderful man, uses the following explicit language: "They (the prelates) have left nothing undone which might tend to the overthrow of our church, not only of late, by the occasion of these troubles whereof they have been the authors, but of old, from *that opposition which is between episcopal government and the government of the Reformed churches by Assemblies*;" and again, "The Reformed churches do hold without doubting, their church officers, pastors, doctors, elders, and deacons, and their church government by Assemblies, to be *jure divino*, and perpetual, as is manifest in all their writings."† It cannot be questioned, sir, that all those churches, strictly called *Reformed*, did once hold with unanimous consent, and that their standards of faith, order and discipline do still every where teach, that the government of the church of God is, *jure divino*, a free commonwealth, a government by Assemblies; and it would be the idlest affectation for me to labour in a body like this, to prove that, this being granted, every thing which cannot, both in principle and in practice, be made to accord with this grand truth, is contrary to the revealed will of God and to the general

sentiment of the Reformed churches, and necessarily tends either to the disorganization of the church or tyranny in it.

The manner of constituting these Assemblies and the officers who compose them, are stated in the clear manner in our standards. "The ordinary and perpetual officers in the church are Bishops or Pastors; the representatives of the people, usually styled Ruling Elders and Deacons." (Form of Government ch. iii. sec. 2. The church Session consists of a Pastor and Ruling Elders, (Idem ch. ix. sec. 1:) a Presbytery of Ministers and Ruling Elders, (Idem ch. x. section 2:) a Synod of Bishops and Elders, (Idem ch. xi. sec. 2:) and the General Assembly "of an equal delegation of Bishops and Elders." (Idem ch. xii. sec. 2.) These are the ordinary Assemblies of the church; these are the officers who compose them; these are the Assemblies and these officers composing them, into whose hands God has committed the government of his visible church—according to our covenanted faith. And with us agree the Reformed churches in general. The *Second Book of Discipline* of the Scottish Kirk, drawn up by *Andrew Aylemer*, a man heroic as Knox and learned as Calvin—system formally adopted by the Scottish Assemblies 1578 and 1581—deliberately sworn to in the national covenant, and revived and ratified afresh in the memorable Assembly of 1638, and not only confirmed by the acts of other assemblies, but made the basis of the law which settled the church-government of Scotland 1592, 1640, and 1690: this clearest and noblest monument of church order not only fully bears out the statement of our own constitution,* but declares, concerning Ruling Elders and their relations to the Church Courts—what are the special subjects of this discussion, that, "The principal office is, to hold assemblies with the pastors and doctors, who are also of their number, for establishing good order, and execution of discipline." (Ch. vii. section, Duncan's Coll. p. 77.) And the Scottish Assembly of 1647, in one of the most emphatic public documents ever put forth by a church court, bearing a sole and, as the paper asserts on its face, a unanimous testimony "against the dangerous Tenets of Erastianism and Independency"—delivers itself, in these words, "6. Ecclesiastical Government is committed and entrusted to Christ to the Assemblies of the Kirk, made up of the Ministers of the Word and Ruling Elders:" and this, with seven other heads of doctrine, "the General Assembly doth firmly believe, own, maintain and come unto others, as solid, true, orthodoxe, grounded upon the Word of God, consonant to the judgment both of the ancient and the best Reformed Kirks."† And again, says *Henderson* and the Scottish commissioners to London in the paper before cited, "Much is spoken and written for the limitations of Bishops; but what good can their limitation do to the church, if ordination and ecclesiastical jurisdiction shall depend upon them, and shall not be absolutely into the hands of the Assemblies of the Church."‡]

Now, sir, here is testimony just as conclusive as that on the former point, that Ruling Elders are by divine right by inherent necessity a component part of every assembly in a settled church state; that this is the general principle of the Reformed churches as well as of our own constitution; that the right and necessity of this presence of Ruling Elders in church Assemblies, distinguishes Presbyterianism from Erastianism and Independency, as well as Prelacy, as completely as the existence of the Assemblies

* See *Printed Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland*, 1638, p. 130, acts of the year 1641.

† See remarkable passage in *Hetherington's Hist. West.*

* See *Second Book of Discipline*, chs. vi. and vii. p. 77.

† See *Acts of the Scottish Kirk*, 1647, p. 206, N. 1.

themselves does; and that the usurpation by Bishops of the two grand powers residing in these Assemblies, called by *Henderson* the powers "of ordination and ecclesiastical jurisdiction," must at last place the church, as such a usurpation always heretofore has placed her, helpless and prostrate at the feet of a hierarchy; just as inevitably as the usurpation of the same powers by the State subjects her to the civil power; or the usurpation of them by the brotherhood in each congregation disorganizes entirely her whole constitution. Sir, these truths are as obvious as their operation is irresistible; and it is incomprehensible to me how any man who is qualified to sit in any assembly of our church, can have a doubt in regard to them. They are truths which are infinitely fruitful as well as transparently clear; and their careful consideration would settle many questions now disputed amongst us, and correct practices neither few nor harmless which may one day become too strong for reason. I will not, however, follow them at present beyond the scope of the question before us.

The exact accordance of these two fundamental truths with Holy Scripture, will not, I presume, be openly questioned here. Not only is the general scope of God's word constantly relied on, but the particular passages are always cited in our own and in all the standards of the Reformed churches, by which it is judged that every proposition asserted, is divinely sustained: and then it is confessed in the most unqualified terms that where God's word does not bear us out, either by its express language or by its necessary intent, there we have no authority to define any thing or to enforce any thing—except it may be in some circumstances common to the church and to human actions and societies, and even with regard to these the general rules of the Word are always to be observed. (Confession of Faith, ch. I. sec. 6.) It must also be well known that questions of church government, and these questions touching Assemblies and Ruling Elders in particular, have been more largely and elaborately discussed than most others; and that the purest Reformed churches, and especially those standards from which ours have been chiefly taken, are clear and positive, in asserting the *jus divinum* of Presbyterian government. A *jus divinum* of the same character as that asserted for our system of doctrine; requiring in both cases a simple and faithful adherence on our part, and requiring in neither, harshness or intolerance towards those who differ from us; asserting in both cases the duty of God's people; but denying in neither that his people may be gathered into true churches, though neither their doctrine nor their order may seem to us scriptural in all respects. Such, I venture to believe, is the view of the Presbyterian Church in the United States; and as regards the present aspect of this argument, there are none here, I suppose, who will openly question that if our standards teach that jurisdiction is in the hands of the Presbytery, they do so on the authority of God's word; if they teach that none but Presbyters may be component parts of Presbytery, and that Ruling Elders are Presbyters and therefore are component parts of Presbytery, they teach this also on the same authority. That these standards and those of the Reformed churches in general do thus teach, I think I have clearly shown; and when it shall be questioned that this teaching is in accordance with divine truth, I will endeavour to make good this ground of our common faith.

It would appear, then, that the case is clearly against our Church a Presbytery can be regularly constituted without

all proper respect, that the circumstances attending the progress of this question through the Assembly, furnish ground for surprise and regret. It seems to have been taken up by the Committee of Bills and Overtures without any order from the house; to have been laid before that committee by a single individual; and to have occupied in its entire consideration only a part of one session of the Assembly. It does not appear that there was difficulty in the church upon the subject—or any call for sudden action in regard to it. The committee which reported it consisted of two Ruling Elders and six Ministers, and of these six Ministers three were from one Synod (New Jersey), and three only were Pastors; and in the Assembly itself, which struck this deadly blow at the office of Ruling Elder, there were above forty more Ministers than Elders—and this excessive disproportion was aggravated by the fact that an unusual number of the leading ministers of the body, were persons not engaged in the regular work of the ministry of the word. Of the eighty-three persons who voted for the minute which passed the Assembly, sixty-three were ministers; of the thirty-five who voted against it eighteen were ministers; demonstrating that unhappy and dangerous prepossession which seems to characterise the feelings and opinions of our ministers upon every question touching the position and rights of the Ruling Elders, and to threaten the Church with the terrible calamity of the permanent subjugation of these last named officers, and, as must inevitably follow, the overthrow of the freedom of the church itself.*

Now, Moderator, what is pretended—what is alleged to justify such a decision, under such circumstances? Let any man read the formal justification of the Assembly,† and, if he is able, pronounce it satisfactory. What, sir, are idle professions of respect an adequate compensation for a fatal decision impeaching the fundamental truths that our church government is one by Assemblies, of which Ruling Elders are a constituent part, and this *jure divino*? Is it true, sir, in point of fact, that according to our constitution, congregations are not required to send delegates to Presbytery? Is it true, that "a Presbytery has no authority, whatever, to compel the attendance of Elders?" If these are the real sentiments of the church, the idea of our possessing any government at all, in the proper sense of that word, is utterly absurd—except so far as that government is for ministers and in the hands of ministers; which can result in nothing but an irresponsible clerical domination. If these are not the sentiments of the church, let us vindicate at once the sacred principles which we profess to have received from God himself, and uphold in its integrity that noble spiritual commonwealth, in which, being divinely called, we bear offices for whose proper exercise we must account both to posterity and to Christ.

But, it is argued, the constitution itself bears out the decision of the Assembly, and provides that a *quorum* of a Presbytery may be formed without the presence of Ruling Elders. The Assembly decided, "that any three ministers of a Presbytery, being regularly convened, are a quorum competent to the transaction of all business." (Minutes, p. 196.) The constitution of the church on the other hand declares that "Any three ministers, and as many elders as may be present belonging to the Presbytery, being met at the time and place appointed, shall be a quorum competent to proceed to business." (Form of Government, ch. x. sec. 7.) The thing to be proved is

* See Minutes of the Assembly for 1843, pp. 196. 190. 170.

that these two propositions contain one and the same truth; a thing which never can be proved, while words retain their proper signification, and the great principles of our church polity remain unchanged. And until it is proved, the decision of the Assembly is erroneous and destructive—and it is our manifest duty to labour for its reversal. What is required to be disproved, is the agreement of these two propositions, and of consequence the erroneousness of the one pronounced by the Assembly. This I now proceed to do.

What sir, is a *quorum*? Gentlemen talk and write, as if it were a fifth court of the Church; or rather a sort of sub-court to every Church Assembly. If Ruling Elders are essential to the composition of a Presbytery, and a quorum of a Presbytery is actually and potentially a Presbytery; then by the terms of the proposition, Ruling Elders are essential to the formation of this quorum. If a quorum of a Presbytery is not a Presbytery, actually constituted and competent to proceed to business—then to assert that it can do all the business of a Presbytery—is utterly absurd and self contradictory; or else it is the erection of a new court, which can do all the business of a Presbytery, without being a Presbytery—which is contrary to common sense, to the constitution, and to the Scriptures. And yet, sir, it is upon quibbles and evasions like this, that men having a character in the Church, are content to rest the defence of acts and principles subversive of the order of God's house! It ought to be, and I suppose is, well known to the members of this court, that many law processes take their names from the first or other prominent words in them. Thus we say, *habeas corpus, capias ad satisfaciendum, fieri facias, venditioni exponas, venire facias, &c. &c.*; designating by these terms writs in common use and well understood. Such is the origin of our use of the word *quorum*; the king by his writ appoints certain persons to particular duties or offices, of which persons (*quorum*) he specifies in his warrant, certain individuals or a certain number as competent to act, or required to be present. The rule of common sense, and universal practice, in the absence of any such specific provision, in regard to deliberative bodies at least, necessarily is *lex majoris partis*—the law of the greater number; less than the majority not being, in the eye of reason, the body itself, and the majority being capable of determining the question, even where all are present. Thus taken, the two provisions determining the composition and the quorum of a Presbytery, put together, read as follows:—A Presbytery consists of all the ministers and one Ruling Elder from each congregation within a particular district; of whom (*quorum*) any three ministers, and as many Elders as may be present, shall be competent to proceed to business, (Form of Government, chap. x. sec. 2 and 7); and the question is, are any Elders at all required to be present? I answer yes. 1. Because every instrument of writing is to be so construed as to be consistent with itself: this instrument declares Ruling Elders to be a component part of all church Assemblies; and therefore it cannot here mean to say this Assembly is not composed in part of them; for in that case a quorum of Presbytery could be no church Assembly at all. 2. Every law must receive such a construction, if such can be fairly given to it, as will make it consistent with fundamental constitutions which the makers of the law recognised as paramount authority, and which they are not to be presumed to violate, unless they plainly do so: but the makers of the constitution of our church constitution admit the paramount obligation of the word of God, and admit that by

therefore as they do not here expressly say they are not they must not be presumed to mean that they are not for if they do, they must mean that a quorum is a mere nullity, which is absurd. 3. In construing every instrument, the parts that are doubtful must be explained by the parts that are clear: but it is absolutely plain that by this instrument Elders are a component part of all church courts; therefore this doubtful sentence cannot mean that they are not a component part of this particular church court; and if a quorum of Presbytery, is no a Presbytery, and so a church court, there is nothing to argue about. 4. The words about the presence of Elders must have some meaning given to them, if there be any meaning they will bear; to say they mean that Elders may be members if present, is idle—for that is already provided for in the second section; to say they mean it is not material whether they be present or not, is absurd, as is already proved—for other parts of the instrument settle, that, *jure divino*, they are a component part of the body: there is nothing else they can mean except that *some* must be present, but *how many* is immaterial; this therefore is obliged to be the sense of the words—and this is, indeed, their obvious sense. 5. The copulative, *and*, plainly shows that others besides the three ministers were designed to be present; if the three ministers make a quorum, that is clearly expressed in the definition of the General Assembly; but the constitution adds another clause about Elders and couples conjunctively; therefore it must mean more than the Assembly means—and Elders must be those meant; or if not, who are the others meant in the clause? 6. This is the more clear when it is considered that the Presbytery being composed of two classes of persons, differs in many important respects, something more than a mere indirection must be necessary to exclude one entire class and above all where the class thus to be excluded is the very one from which the particular court and the entire denomination derive their name, the very one which by eminence invested with the right to exercise government and discipline in all church assemblies. 7. It is said *may* be present never can be made to mean *must* be present; and therefore there must be implied a condition and a discretion: I answer *many* can never be made to mean *none*; and as for the condition, it applies to the *number* present not to the *fact* of presence; and as for the implied discretion, I deny it, for it is the duty of session to send the Elder, it is his duty to go, and it is the duty of the Presbytery to make him come and to receive him when he arrives. 8. Suppose the same phraseology were used as to the ministers necessary in making a quorum as is used in regard to the Elders, thus, "A Presbytery consists of all the ministers and one Ruling Elder from each congregation within a particular district, whom (*quorum*) as many ministers and as many Elders as may be present, shall be competent to proceed to business;" in this case would any human being doubt that both ministers and Elders must be present? If not then it is manifest that the present phraseology requires some Elders to be present. 9. It is the settled doctrine of our church, and of all other Reformed churches, that the right to convene in church assemblies, be stated and *pro re nata*, is divine, inherent, and altogether independent of the civil power;* by our constitution, a meeting of Presbytery *pro re nata* cannot be convened unless two elders, and they of different congregations

* See Confession of Faith, chap. xxxi passim; Form of Government, chap. x. sec. 10; also the act of the Kirk of Scotland, adopting the Westminster Confession. DUNCAN

gations, sign the requisition for it along with two ministers; and these four persons with the presiding officer, being convened upon their own call, may do the business thus specified, but no other. Now will it be pretended that the power to meet and act *pro re nata* has a different origin or nature, from that to meet stately? that the power to do some special and it may be immaterial business, is more hedged about, than the power to do that business and all other business besides? If not, then it follows, that in this provision we have a clear and explicit statement of what our constitution intends by the quorum of Presbytery. 10. I consider all arguments drawn from the possible inconvenience that might result, in extreme cases, from the establishment of the construction here contended for, as being entirely fallacious, beside the question, and unworthy of the subject—and all such as are based on alleged danger from the possible inattention, perverseness, or revolutionary spirit of Ruling Elders, leading them to defeat or break up meetings of Presbytery, as being insulting to the Ruling Elders, and displeasing to those who employ them. 11. If it be urged that as the Presbytery is one body in which two classes of members are amalgamated, and vote and act jointly and not by classes, and therefore the presence of any members of the class of Elders is not indispensable; I reply, this argument is inconsistent both with the general principles of the constitution, and the express words of the clause under consideration, for if it were true it would prove that a sufficient number of either class might make a quorum, but the words expressly preclude this sense. I answer further, that upon this argument it follows inevitably that Ruling Elders thus amalgamated must have the right to impose hands in ordination with other members, which is denied by those who use this argument, and who thereby show their want of confidence in their own theories. 12. If it be said that inasmuch as in extreme cases a session may be constituted without the presence of a minister (Form of Government, ch. ix. sec. 4.) it follows that in extreme cases a Presbytery may be constituted without Elders; I answer, that as the first is by express law, the second must be also, and there is no such law; further that the existence of clear law for the former, and the total want of it for the latter, is conclusive against it; and further still, that the argument contradicts itself, since it argues from the plenary powers of Elders to their total want of all power—from their paramount importance in a parochial Presbytery to their insignificance in a classical Presbytery—from their ability to act without ministers in one assembly to the inability of ministers to act without them in another assembly—all which is absurd.

It is upon such grounds as these, sir, that I am led to conclude that this clause about a quorum affords no pretext whatever for constituting a Presbytery under our constitution, out of three ordinary ministers of the word, without the presence of Ruling Elders. How far the exercise of such a power might be justified in a forming or unsettled church state; or how far it could be successfully maintained in relation to Evangelists, who are admitted all the reformed churches to be temporary and extraordinary officers; nay, how far Ruling Elders alone would be justified in very extraordinary cases, in transcending boundaries which we have established between parochial and classical assemblies; all these are questions in regard to which there is no necessity for me to express at this time, any other opinion than this—that such power

seem you to consider how easy it would be to subvert the principle that our church is governed by assemblies, after subverting that which establishes the composition of those assemblies. Surely it would be a task of small difficulty to find some plea upon which the potential authority of the assemblies themselves might be irregularly exercised, after succeeding upon one so miserable as the best of those we have yet been favoured with, in establishing the monstrous proposition that ecclesiastical jurisdiction is complete in three ministers without charge, without the concurrence of the body of Christ's people, or the presence of their immediate representatives divinely called to the exercise of this very function. Or can it be that it is the want of any adequate impression that the church of Christ has really a divinely ordained polity, which makes it so difficult to prevent her own ministers from transgressing some of her plainest principles—her own courts from laying violent hands upon some of her most precious defences, at the same moment they are devolving on secular corporations some of her most sacred obligations? I desire to speak with tenderness and respect; but unless I greatly deceive myself, the issue of these questions involves interests which we cannot handle with too much sobriety.

It has appeared to me, Moderator, that there is a fundamental error pervading most of the reasoning which I have heard and read against the rights of ruling elders, which has great influence in fostering the opinions against which I am now contending. It seems to be supposed that ministers of the word are more essentially and permanently members of our church courts, than ruling elders are; indeed that they are, some how, more immediately and sacredly officers of the church of Christ. Such notions are altogether wrong. These offices are both alike ordained of God; the persons who fill them are equally supposed to be called and qualified from above; the gift of ruling is as real and as distinct a gift of God as that of teaching; and though the teaching elder is entitled to double honour if he both rules and also labours in word and doctrine, the ruling elder is also by the same divine word, entitled to double honour if he rules well; and by the same law the teaching elder who does not labour in word and doctrine, is entitled for all his ruling to no honour at all, for he has foregone the most important part of his calling; and the ruling elder who rules ill is bereft also of the blessing, because he has neglected his only calling. Elders, they are alike—Presbyters and no more, are they both; to deny which is to deny the express letter of the word of God;* rulers are they both, because they are Presbyters; and though one class has the superadded and more honourable function of teaching, as their main work, let them not think that for this reason they are any more rulers than other Presbyters—and especially let them not think that they may neglect their work of teaching, as too many do, and strive to make up the omission by engrossing, as their main work, that which is the only work of the ruling elders; and let not this latter class fail of the reward of ruling well, by allowing their office to be despised, their crowns to be taken from them, their double honour to be rendered nugatory. The work of teaching, and the work of ruling require gifts entirely distinct from each other; they are works not only separable, but ac-

* See 1 Tim. v. 17. Also, "The True Nature of a Gospel Church"—by the great John Owen, especially chs. iii. iv. vii. viii. in the 20th vol. of his works, edited by Orme; also Dr Miller's *Essay on the Ruling Elder*, especially ch. ii. iii. iv. v. vi. vii. also the first article in the *Spirit of the XIX. Century* from the pen of Prof. Thornwell.

tually separated in our church—in which our ruling elders have no pretence of a right to be public teachers: and it is as rulers and not as teachers, that the officers of the church are invested with its government. It is not because our ministers of the word are invested with the right to preach and administer ordinances that they are invested with the power of rule; but it is because they are ordained church rulers as well as church teachers, that they hold and may exercise jurisdiction. Preacher and Ruler are the furthest possible from being synonymous words; Elder and Ruler are strictly synonymous, as the Scriptures every where teach.* Seeing then that our ministers of the word exercise spiritual jurisdiction simply and exclusively because they are Elders themselves, upon what ground soever the notion may have arisen that they are in any way or to any degree more competent to rule than other elders—it is utterly untenable. And seeing it has been proved already that all church rule is in the hands of Assemblies, it follows that preachers as such, can have no relation to such assemblies that can give them any power to rule, but must derive that power from the fact that they are elders—Presbyters; the very fact upon which ruling elders rest theirs. No man has the right to rule as minister at large, even though he be both teaching and ruling elder, as all admit; but he must be Pastor of such or such a church to give him any power in it; and he must belong to such or such an assembly to give him any power there; his membership and not his right to preach being the immediate ground of his power, and his office as elder, not as minister of the word, being the final ground of it.

These distinctions are impregably established by the very nature and distribution of church power. It is held with a universal consent amongst us that the power of the church and of all its courts, is merely a ministerial and declarative power; a power to declare the sense of God's word, and to execute it: moreover that it is a power strictly and exclusively moral, to be exercised only over the souls, the minds, the consciences of men—a power therefore not absolute in us—but in God only—and to be exercised by us, simply as a spiritual trust and upon the authority of Christ, and by no means as an inherent power; and again, that its whole force is spent upon those only who are voluntarily the followers of Christ, and through their own act fellow-citizens with the saints. The light of nature and the word of God alike teach us, that such powers can never be exercised except by officers bearing a double relation to God and to the household of faith: it is by the authority of God, but it is also by the consent of God's people, that every spiritual officer is to be appointed and every act of authority exerted. Every kind of power that can be exercised, is either a joint or a several power. Ecclesiastical power that is *several*, is defined to be *potestas ordinis*—the power of order; that which is joint, *potestas jurisdictionis*—the power of rule.† To the former class belong all such powers as any church officer may exercise personally, singly—and by right of his order—*ex officio*; as that a minister of the word may preach, administer ordinances &c., or that an Elder may counsel, rebuke &c.: to the latter class belong all powers that can be exercised only in assemblies of the church, all which are

* Acts xi. 30; xv. 2, 4, 6, 22; xvi. 4; xx. 17, 28; xxi. 18. 1 Tim. v. 17. 1 Pet. v. 1. 2 John i. 3 John i. Rom. xii. 8. 1 Cor. xii. 28. 1 Tim. iii. 5, &c.

† See *Second Book of Discipline of the Kirk of Scotland*, sec. 6, which is full and explicit on this subject; see *Wesley's Gospel Church*, ch. vii. vol. 20, p. 473, works; *A Collection of Stuart of Pardovan*, p. 38. B. 1. t. iv.

joint and corporate powers, without exception. It follows, inevitably, that to suppose the possession of certain rights which are *several*, that is rights of order, give a peculiar, inherent, permanent and sacred right to the exercise of powers which are *joint*, that is powers of jurisdiction, is absurd; and that the notion that one sort of *several* power, to wit, preaching, gives this right more sacredly or really than another kind, for example, ruling, is also absurd; but that all the possessors of a *joint* power have an equal and the very same right to its joint exercise, and of course to membership in the assemblies where alone it can be exerted. And it cannot be too often noted that the *several* exercise of joint powers, is prelacy and not Presbyterianism; for, as Henson has well said, in the remark already cited from him—if ordination and jurisdiction, both of which are according to our system and to divine truth, joint powers depend on Bishops—all other limitations can do the church no good. And what is it, but a tincture of prelacy, for ministers of the word to claim, if not indeed an exclusive several right to the exercise of all joint powers at least a superior, more permanent, and more sacred right founded upon the peculiar nature of their several powers, to exercise even to the exclusion of Elders, powers which are purely joint?

Let it be further observed, sir, that it is a total illusion to suppose, as many seem to do, that any church courts—Presbyteries for example—are radically composed of ministers of the Word. Presbyteries are properly composed of parishes, congregations, particular churches, and ministers of the Word. The grand reason assigned for the necessity of Presbyteries is, that “*The church being divided into many separate congregations, these need mutual counsel and assistance,*” and therefore the importance and usefulness of a body in which they may be supported by their ministers and elders. (Form of Government x. sec. 1 and 2.) The keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed into the hands of those who are officers of churches; and all Synods and councils, in a set church state, are Assemblies which, “*it belongeth to oversee and other rulers of the particular churches to appoint.*” (Confession of Faith, ch. xxx. sec. 1—2, ch. xxxi. sec. 1.) The General Assembly of the 1 of Scotland, in acts passed during the noblest era of its illustrious church, has settled this point in the same manner, over and over. In an act passed Decr 20, 1638, they say, in terms, “*Presbyteries are composed of sundry Parochina.*”* In an act passed June 3, 1640, “*for the present entrie of the new erected Presbyter Biggar,*” and which seems to be in the common form twelve particular churches are named and erected in Presbytery, and then all the ministers and Ruling Elders of the said named churches are empowered to meet in Presbytery and exercise the power and jurisdiction long to such a body.† And in the important act proving the Westminster Confession of Faith, passed the 27th of August, 1647, the Assembly expressing its sense of ch. xxxi. sec. 2, of that Confession as it pertains to the Synod of Westminster—expressly say, that it is in churches “*not settled or constituted in point of government,*” that the civil magistrate may call Synods which are even properly composed, or that “*the ministers of Christ without delegation from their churches meet together themselves, and by virtue of their office meet together Synodically;*” and that “*neither of these ought to be done in Kirks constituted and settled;*” for proceed

* Printed Acts of the Assemblies of the Kirk of Scotland, p. 6.

act, the magistrate may always consult, in a settled church, the assemblies "of ministers and ruling elders meeting upon delegation from their churches;" and these assemblies are always free to meet as well *pro re nata*, as at ordinary times, upon deputation from the churches, by the intrinsical power received from Christ.* I therefore take it, sir, to be indisputable, that according to our constitution, and according to the general principles of the case as understood by the purest Reformed church in her purest day—ministers not only do not compose Presbyteries or other church courts, by virtue of their office as ministers; but in a settled church state they are not, in strict right entitled even to appear in them as constituent members, except as they are ministers of the particular churches which make up the presbytery. Whatever force may be derived from a contrary practice in our church, allowing ministers as such, to sit in Presbytery—is spent upon the mere fact of that practice; and that far, in the past and existing condition of the church, might appeal to the sound discretion of the church: but even in this case every act and record of our church tolerating such a practice, proceeds on the assumption that such ministers are at least engaged in the cure of souls, as their main work.† But now, when a claim is set up, as of right, and is enforced by a fatal act of the Assembly, which not only places every minister simply as a minister, and in total disregard of his having forsaken his covenanted calling—in full possession of the amplest powers belonging to a church ruler; when it is alleged, as of divine right, that men of this description are more inherently church rulers, than those whose sole duty it is to rule, and that they may rule independently of them, and if need be to the exclusion of all participation of authority by them; it is high time to recur to first principles, and to set the whole subject upon its true and scriptural basis. Thus considered, nothing is more clear, than that the rule of the whole church is lawfully and righteously in the hands of the rulers of the particular churches; and to assert the contrary is to contend for a government which is irresponsible, incompetent, without warrant and without delegation; a kind of government equally repugnant to the light of nature and the word of God.

I will now, sir, advance a step further, and show that the act of the last Assembly is contrary to the clear and well settled construction of the law of the case—that it is directly contradictory of the established construction of

* *Idem* p. 352.

† The reader will observe that there are here four associated but distinct questions: (1) the formation of Presbyteries, (2) the meetings of them without elders, (3) the sitting of ministers in them, who are not Pastors or Evangelists, (4) the sitting of such ministers, who have forsaken their calling. As it is *law* not *practice* that I am discussing—and this question of practice is both uncertain and extensive, I leave it, just now, upon the general statements of the speech, which contain the conclusions I have arrived at. The main points here argued, will be found to be borne out by the great mass of the acts of the Assembly and of all our Synods constituting Presbyteries, which are essentially geographical, making the Presbyteries consist of certain churches and their ministers, or certain ministers and their churches, or a certain district of country, or certain ministers and a certain district; but very rarely—of ministers only—and then against the law and the sense of the church. The principle of *elective affinity*, was thoroughly a New School principle and was utterly repudiated by the church. The point of the argument is that Presbyteries are not composed of ministers *alone*, nor of ministers *as such*; and a careful examination will show this truth to be deeply im-

our own and of the Scottish constitutions upon this important subject. The whole matter is *res adjudicata*, and the decision of our last Assembly is as completely aside from the whole current of decisions, as I have shown it to be of fundamental principles. According to the settled law of the Scottish church, every church court in which ruling elders do not sit, is illegal, and all its acts are null. *Steuart of Pardovan* declares that neither the constitution of the church nor the law of the land, in Scotland—"do authorize any other ecclesiastical judicatory but Assemblies, Synods, Presbyteries, and Kirk Sessions, or their committees, consisting of ministers and ruling elders;" that "no ecclesiastical judicatory, or committee thereof, can be lawful" "without consisting of both ministers and elders;" and he expresses a doubt whether the State would recognise or correspond with any bodies, not thus composed.* The Assembly of 1638, the most memorable except that of 1843, that ever met in Scotland, annulled, as utterly illegal, no less than six preceding, and as they called them "pretended Assemblies;" to wit, those of 1606, 1608, 1610, 1616, 1617, and 1618. Amongst the reasons assigned for this immense stretch of authority, in five out of six cases, one reason is that there were no ruling elders in these Assemblies; in some, none being lawfully commissioned, in others, none lawfully sent.† The Assembly of the following year in an elaborate statement entitled "Causes and Remedie of the by-gone evils of this Kirk," addressed to the King, assign as the fifth cause of past troubles, the six fore-cited Assemblies, which they pronounce to have been corrupt, null, and unlawful—amongst other chief reasons because they were "called and constitute quite contrary to the order, constitution, and uninterrupted practice of the church ever since the reformation, by all which ruling elders did rightly constitute a part of lawful General Assemblies."‡ The law as laid down by Pardovan extends even to commissions and committees of the church courts; which differ from each other in this, that the former may examine and conclude, while the latter can only examine and report; and I have discovered a very curious fact strongly illustrative of the subject now before us in which the Commission of the Scottish Assembly of 1643, in appointing a special commission of itself, had its attention directed to the very principles for which I now contend, and fully recognised them in one of the most interesting acts, and in its issues one of the most important, ever performed by a church court. It was on the occasion of appointing the Scotch Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly. Baillie, who was one of them, tells us, that he moved in the meeting of the Commission of the Assembly, that some elders should be placed on the Commission about to be sent to Westminster; but, he adds, "I gott not a man to second me; yet the absurditie and danger of such an omission pressing my mind, I drew up reasons for my judgement, which I communicat to Argyle and Warristone; and when they had lyked the motion, I went so about it, that at the next meeting, it was carried without opposition."§ These "reasons," more fortunate and effectual than reasons usually are, have come down to us, and are worthy still to be pondered. The one which is immediately pertinent to my present argument is in these words: "4. The excluding of Ruling Elders

* Collections, p. 68. Book I. tit. 15. sec. 29.

† Printed Acts of Scottish Assemblies, p. 8—14; Pardovan, p. 57. Book I. tit. 15. sec. 1.

‡ Printer

from a Commission of this nature, *may call in question the validity of the Commissione; may hazard the approbation of it by the next Generall Assemblie; may give just offence to all Ruling Elders; may make all the actions of these ministers more unpleasant, and of lesse authority with the bodie of any nation.*"* The result was the recognition of the universality of the principle, that Ruling Elders must regularly be members of all assemblies whose constituent parts are Preaching and Ruling Elders, and even of all commissions and sub-commissions of them, whether general or special; and three Ruling Elders, the Earl of Cassalis, Lord John Maitland, and Johnstoun of Waristoun, were united with the ministers Henderson, Douglas, Rutherford, Baillie, and Gillespie, as commissioners on the part of the Kirk of Scotland to the Westminster Assembly. All this is the more remarkable, when we compare the phraseology of the Scottish Standards with that of our own, and the construction of the language with the construction adopted by our late Assembly. In the Printed Acts of the Scotch Assemblies, I have before me repeated acts of the successive assemblies from 1638 to 1649, appointing their standing "Commissione for the public affairs of this Kirk." These acts name first a large number of ministers, then a large number of Ruling Elders, who are directed to meet on a day certain at a place fixed, and afterwards "as they shall think good;" and then "gives and grants unto them, or any fifteen of them, there being twelve ministers present, full power and commission &c."† Here is a case far stronger for the exclusion of Elders, who are not even named as a part of the quorum, than can be produced out of our Standards; and yet of such cases as this, Pardovan asserts that unless Elders are present the commission is illegal;‡ and Baillie informs us, that in this identical commission of which he was a member, so many ministers, "and three Elders made a quorum."§ In regard to the quorum of Presbytery, the case is even more striking; for "to perform any classical act of government or ordination there shall be present, at least, a major part of the ministers of the whole classis," says Pardovan; and yet, says the same authority, this very Presbytery is illegal, unless Ruling Elders be also present.|| That is, by the Scottish Standards, in the quorum of a Presbytery there must be at least the major part of all the ministers of the body—nothing being said in this relation, of Elders; but seeing it is a fundamental principle of the whole system that Elders enter into the composition of every court—they are, upon that principle, held to be indispensable here, and are so adjudged to be. But our Standards fully recognize and assert the same general principle, and moreover particularly name Elders in the special clause about a quorum, as members presumed to be present; and yet our Assembly concludes that they need not be present at all! The state-church of monarchical Scotland, with rules less manifestly clear for the rights of the especial representatives of the Christian people, declared steadfastly and clearly for those rights, ages ago; while the free church of republican America, with every general principle and every special enactment of its constitution, strongly and manifestly for those high and important rights—decides even at a time like this, earnestly, yea indignantly against them; nay, a storm is raised against

* Baillie's Letters and Journals, vol. ii. p. 479.

† Printed Acts for 1643, p. 209: see also pp. 147, 223, 318, 334, &c. for the commissions of other years, where the phraseology is used.

‡ Instructions, p. 68.

§ Letters and Journals, vol. ii. p. 97.

|| See Book I. Title xiii. sec. 1, p. 44, with Tit. xv.

the presumption of vindicating what are stigmatized Brownist, radical and revolutionary doctrines, and even many of the Elders themselves are amongst the foremost in destroying their own sacred liberties! Surely these things are calculated to arrest the public attention and to create a profound anxiety in the minds of those who know how difficult it is to preserve the purity of free institutions, and to maintain the spiritual liberty of mankind.

This extraordinary decision of our General Assembly and the violent efforts made to uphold it as just and wise are the more surprising, when it is remembered that it is contrary to former decisions of our church. From the earliest period of this church in America, the *Collectio of Pardovan* have been its rule of discipline, and the general principles therein embodied recognised as essential to our own;* and that work was made the basis of a portion of our present standards when they were compiled. Although, therefore, it may have been true, in the foregoing and unsettled state of the church, and especially at the difficulties created by a bloody and protracted national struggle for freedom, in which our whole church embarked with the country, as one man; that occasional departures from strict rule were unavoidable: yet the irregularities could do little harm so long as the law remained unaltered and clear against them, and the sentiment of the church was right—as the places I have cited clearly prove it was, up to the period when our present standards were compiled, fifty-five years ago. Upon the law of those standards, as written, I have already spoken fully. That law as expounded, presents little or nothing to countenance, and a mass of proof against the interpretation of the last Assembly. Even the early and monstrous violation of the constitution by the formation of the *Plan of Union* of 1801, so far respected reason and truth that no pretension was made that the contemplated arrangements were either regular, constitutional, or permanent. The plan as it relates to the present question, virtually abolished the office of ruling elder; and if there is one principle upon which this church has pronounced an irreversible judgment, it is that that plan was utterly null and void from the hour of its inception up to the declaration that nullity thirty-six years afterwards, by the Assembly of 1837. It is true the controversy which resulted in this decision, involved other questions; questions of doctrine, and questions of practice, as well as questions of church order; and I am ready to admit that in all these efforts, and no man made more, to reform the church during that period, the question of order was never considered by me the paramount question. But the fact is recognizable and beyond denial upon all the proceedings of that period, civil and ecclesiastical, that the controversy was settled mainly on the point of church order. There were great irregularities and there were great necessities no doubt, to be removed; but these could not justify the *Plan of Union* unconstitutional—they could not make it improper. But the Assembly of 1837 announced that plan as unconstitutional, and then declared the Synods out of our connexion for the reason that they were illegally constituted and illegally continued, by their adherence to that void Plan. In what respect, sir? Why were the churches, the Presbyteries, and the Synods declared to be not Presbyterian mainly upon the very point this day involved. They had no ruling elders and therefore were not Presbyterian. And whoever will carefully study the acts of the Assembly of 1837—its answers to the protests—its official letters—the whole current of

* See printed Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in

proceedings, will find the stress of the whole question laid upon church order, and the hinge of the whole case, in the question debated before you this day. Upon this ground, more than upon any other, it was triumphantly carried through that great Assembly, through the church at large, and through the civil tribunals of the country. Sir, I was an actor in all those scenes. I have personal knowledge of what I assert. The records of the church and of the country bear me out in what I say. And I now tell you—I tell the church—I tell posterity, that if the decision of the Assembly of 1843 is law, the decisions of the Assembly of 1837 are not law. If it is law that ministers without charge make a Presbytery, a Synod, and an Assembly—for the decision covers all this, then it was illegal, it was monstrous, to separate four entire Synods from the church, upon the pretence that even ministers with charge cannot, without the presence of ruling elders, constitute church courts which can constitutionally belong to this church. They might deserve, upon other grounds, to be separated from us; but it could not be true, that for this defect they never were with us, or of us, if this defect is no defect. It is vain to say, the disowned Synods had no elders appointed in any of their churches: the fact is otherwise—there were elders, more or less, in many churches; and as it regards the Presbyteries and Synods, the fact of presence, not the fact of existence, is the sole fact in the case. For my part, sir, I stand by the reform of 1837—by its principles, and by its acts. I pronounce the decision of 1843, a counter revolution; and I unhesitatingly denounce it, as at once compromising the character of the church, subverting the fundamental principles of its polity, prostrating the rights of the elders, and endangering the spiritual freedom of the people.*

Moderator, if I am capable of feeling the force of truth, I have now proved these propositions; that in our church, the government is in the hands, not of a priesthood, nor of the brotherhood, but of assemblies; that these assemblies are composed, regularly, of ministers of the word and of ruling elders—and these two fundamental principles are revealed to us, from God; that a quorum of Presbytery, which is nothing more nor less than a Presbytery constituted for business, is to be composed according to the two preceding rules, and that the fair construction of our constitution can lead us to nothing else; that it is so far from being true that ministers of the word are more sacredly the rulers of the church, and the organic members of our church courts, by virtue of

* It would be perfectly easy to show by citations from nearly every important paper of the Assembly of 1837, and from the elaborate report of the trial at law growing out of the acts of Assembly of 1837-8, that both the church and the civil tribunals, allowed this great controversy to go off mainly on the point of church order—and that the question of church order turned essentially upon the illegality of the Plan of Union, and that illegality upon its provisions allowing elders to be superseded entirely or supplanted by committee men. The length to which this would protract this argument, and the general acquaintance which must exist in regard to matters so recent and so important—induce me to omit the detailed proof. It is also worthy of serious reflection, and is a strong collateral support to my general principles, that the German and the Dutch Reformed churches in this country, both in principle and practice adopt the view contended for by me, in this speech. In the former church, it is extremely common, for an elder to preside in consistory, the pastor being present. And it is well known, that the Classes and Synods erected in England under the advice of the Westminster Assembly, consisted of twice as many elders as ministers, and that no act was valid except a certain number of the former class assented to: a point not embraced

their office as teachers, than ruling elders are—that the fact is precisely the reverse, and that the ministers are members of any of those courts, simply because they are elders themselves, and therefore rulers; that this whole view of the subject is fully established by the acts and decisions, both of the church of Scotland after which we have copied most, and by those of our own church from its origin, and especially in recent and memorable transactions. I think, sir, I have also proved, that according to the well settled principles of the whole subject in its widest extent, and according to the clear judgment of the ablest men, and the purest churches which have handled these great questions, any serious departure from the positions I have established, leads by inevitable necessity to Prelacy or to Independency—and, sir, I could easily show, if it were required, that in all past time, whatever clear thinker or learned man, or gathered church, has held other opinions and stopped short of Prelacy or Independency—has seriously doubted or wholly denied the *jus divinum* of the office of ruling elder. It is apparent then that some of the most important considerations which can ever be presented upon the subject of church order, must be carefully weighed before we can render a safe, an intelligent, or a just decision in the matter before us. And if gentlemen can find any pleasure in scoffs at old books, the very outsides of which they confess they never saw until now, and at that patient and minute search into the past, which they are pleased to consider, as its fruits are laid at their feet, a useless display of learning irrelevant to the questions we are to decide; I am so far from presuming to rob them of any part of that gratification, that I can only lament my utter inability to take up knowledge by absorption, to decide intuitively what God has revealed or ought to reveal, to divest myself of all reverence for the judgment of great and good men who have devoted vast powers of thought and investigation to subjects I desire to understand, or to bear as a light and easy thing, the responsibility laid upon me by my calling and my vows, to seek for, to cherish, and to maintain truth.

It does appear to me, sir, that principles of the deepest importance are involved in this subject, and that practical consequences of the gravest character would be likely to follow the final confirmation by the church, of the hasty and ill considered decision of the Assembly of 1843. The most terrible calamity which can befall any government is to separate it either in feeling or in reality from those who are subject to its authority: as the most obvious proof that any community is already subjugated, is that the government is paramount to the state itself. Shall we bring upon ourselves both these disasters? All spiritual authority, from its very nature ought to be, and with us happily is, submitted to only as the voluntary act of those who obey it. The government of the church of God was made for the church, not the church for it—its officers given to the spouse of the Lamb, not placed as lords over her. The church courts are not the church; but preachers and elders are alike, and are only a *ministry*—a body of servants given by the ascending Saviour to the body of his redeemed. Shall the ministers of the word become a close corporation, self-perpetuated—and in effect irresponsible—connected with the church only by an undefined dominion over it—not being, if we dare credit the last Assembly, even members of it? Or shall they continue to be helpers of the joy instead of lords over the consciences of God's people, their great and paramount function being to teach the

world the religion of Jesus, and their less important office to join with those whose special duty it is to rule, in the gentle and divided authority, which the representatives of Christ's people, in Christ's name, exercise over them? Are the ruling elders of our churches to continue the honoured and chosen guides of the particular flocks, the authorized and immediate representatives of the people in the assemblies of the church, an integral and necessary portion of every assembly to which jurisdiction appertains? Or are they to occupy a position altogether equivocal, accidental, provisional, humiliating, and become an appendage to the ministers—yea an appendage adding nothing when they are present that did not equally exist when they were absent, and taking nothing when they depart that is essential to be retained? Are our congregations to look for direction to Presbyteries composed of teaching and ruling elders selected by themselves, participating in all their feelings, efforts, and wants, and distinctly acquainted with their whole estate? Or are they to be ruled by three ministers without charge, who, it may be, have forsaken their covenanted calling, and who presume to exercise the powers of government over ministers, elders, and people, with none of whom they hold more than a purely nominal relation? Sir, it cannot be denied that these two church states are immeasurably distant from each other. One is a hierarchy—the other is a Christian commonwealth.

For my part, there is but one course which I can adopt. It does not satisfy my conscience, to be told that the construction which is to work this destructive change, was adopted by a great majority of the Assembly; that it is approved by the leading men and institutions of the church; that learned civilians pronounce it correct; that foreign ministers have been consulted and have acceded to it. It does not deter me, to be threatened with the pains of an incendiary, and the penalties of a church disturber. It does not remove from my path one ray of light, nor shake in my heart one firm resolve, to have predicted defeat and threatened ignominy set before me in the most distinct and appalling forms. I have borne much in the service of this church; I am willing to endure more. I have stood for the truth, when fewer stood by me, than I can count to-day. Make this cause as desperate as you please, as degraded as you can; make the danger to me and to the church as imminent as the most confident of those against me can desire—or the most timid of those with me can dread; and still I will take the risk, and meet the peril. When the army of the king of Babylon beleaguered Jerusalem, the very prophet who in the face of death itself and with the brand of a traitor upon him for his fidelity, denounced the doom of the wicked city, paid down in the very courts of his prison, the price of the field that was in Anathoth, and subscribed the evidence, and called witnesses, and with all precision and formality redeemed the spot, it may be, on which the victorious army of the Chaldeans was encamped: for he knew that houses, and fields, and vineyards would be possessed again in the land of Israel. Sir, I will take courage from this sublime example. Let this Synod say the church is not a free commonwealth established of God, but is a hierarchy—which my soul abhors; and I will meekly, I trust, but yet resolutely deny that the Synod utters God's truth. Let the great institutions which rule the church—and the great men who conspire with them—assert with one accord, that

we are a hierarchy and not a free commonwealth; and I will still lift up my humble voice against their loud and unanimous cry. Let the General Assembly of the church, if such be the will of God, angry at us for our sins, adjudge for a hierarchy and against a commonwealth; and while I must respect even the errors of that venerable court, I will set my poor name against its adjudication, and let posterity decide betwixt us. Let the Ruling Elders themselves, overcome by the clamour or seduced by the caresses of the ministers, prove insensible to their calling and negligent of the sacred trust reposed in them by God and God's blood-bought people; and even this fearful apostacy shall not shake my immovable purpose, to defend the spiritual freedom of the church, while there remains one inch of ground on which I can plant myself. For surely I trust in God that this sudden, amazing and wide-spread stupor which has seized the officers of the church, and blinded them to the true character of our institutions, and under whose baleful influence a line of conduct and a course of observation so remarkable have been adopted in this Synod and elsewhere, cannot be perpetuated; and that sooner or later the church must return to her ancient landmarks, the distinguishing and vital principles of her polity.

It is therefore, sir, with a profound conviction of its truth, and a deep sense of its timeliness, that I submit to the Synod the following minute, praying God—if such be his will—to grant it favour in your sight:

Whereas it is the explicit doctrine of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, that the kingdom of Jesus Christ erected in this world, is his church (Form of Gov. ch. ii. sec. 1;) that the said church, in its earliest and purest form was and in accordance with Holy Scripture, should be "governed by congregational, presbyterial, and Synodical assemblies," (Idem. ch. VIII. sec. 1;) that all these assemblies are regularly and scripturally composed only of the regular and scriptural officers, appointed of Christ to bear rule in his church, to wit in the ordinary and settled state of the church, of Preaching and Ruling Presbyters, commonly called pastors and Ruling Elders (Idem. ch. I. Sec. 3 and ch. II. Sec. 2;) that every church court, or Assembly congregational, presbyterial or Synodical, consists of both sorts of the aforesaid officers; (Idem. ch. IX. Sec. 1: ch. X. Sec. 2; ch. XI. Sec. 1: ch. XII. sec. 2, and Confession of Faith, Ch. XXXI. sec. 1:) and whereas the General Assembly of 1843 has decided "That any three ministers of a Presbytery, being regularly convened, are a quorum competent to the transaction of all business," (printed minutes p. 196) although not only the conclusive force of the divine ordination of a Presbytery, composed not of one but of two classes of Presbyters, is directly against this decision—but the explicit doctrine of the church is that the quorum of a Presbytery is not "any three ministers"—but "any three ministers, AND as many elders as may be present," &c. (Idem. ch. X. sec. 7.) Now, this Synod believing the principle here involved to be practically the question between an aristocratical hierarchy, and a free Christian commonwealth, and judging the word of God and the constitution of the church to be against the former and for the latter; we do therefore, according to the power inherent in this Synod, and so declared to be in our Form of Government (ch. XI. sec. 4,) "propose to the General Assembly," by way of Overture the Repeal of Overture, No. 20, adopted on the 30th of May 1843, by yeas and nays, 83 to 35 in the last Assembly, as being in its doctrine contrary to Scripture and to the standards of the church, and in its effects subversive of the office of Ruling Elder, and of the rights and liberties of the Christian people; and the adoption, in its stead, of a declarative overture, to the effect that, by the constitution of the church no Assembly of the church, whether it be congregational, classical, or synodical, can be regularly, legally or completely constituted without the presence of Ruling Elders as members thereof.

PRESBYTERIAN ORDINATION

NOT A CHARM, BUT AN ACT OF GOVERNMENT.

THE SUBSTANCE OF AN ARGUMENT ON THE RIGHT OF RULING ELDERS, WHEN MEMBERS OF PRESBYTERY, TO IMPOSE HANDS IN THE ORDINATION OF MINISTERS OF THE WORD; DELIVERED IN THE SYNOD OF PHILADELPHIA, MET AT BALTIMORE, ON THE NIGHT OF THE 23D OF OCTOBER, 1843.

No one, Moderator, can regret more than I do, the necessity of arguing a question like the one I have now submitted to this Synod, under the extraordinary and difficult circumstances which surround me. Nothing but the deepest convictions of duty, could induce me to press upon the attention of this body a subject in regard to which it is painfully evident so many of its members are resolved to hear nothing; while so many more listen under the blinding influence of a foregone conclusion. Nothing but the impression that necessity is laid upon me, could sustain me under the interruptions and vexations, altogether without precedent in this Synod, which have consumed nearly one entire session, and so large a portion of another, in a struggle on the part of many leading ministers to prevent me from being heard at all, or even having liberty to put this great subject in a position which will insure the review of the court above. And you can easily imagine, sir, that at this late hour of the night, with a body worn down, a mind harassed, and a heart full of sadness—I am but illy qualified to acquit myself in a manner becoming either the subject or the occasion.* I am no novice, sir, in scenes of profound agitation: but I must say I have never witnessed one which seemed to me more needless, whether reference be had to the subject which has produced it, or the object towards which it has been directed. It is not in this manner that practical questions of great importance, which it is manifest the most of us have not examined, can be settled in a church renowned for the thoroughness with which it examines every thing, and the care with which all its fixed opinions are made up. It is not by such methods that its confidence can be weaned from those who are known to it only by their advocacy of its precious faith and scriptural order; an advocacy which never stopped to count the cost, nor waited to be enlightened by the law of majorities. Nor is it in this way, that ministers can most clearly establish their exclusive title to the exercise of powers, which, they seem to think, are much too sacred to be shared with our ruling elders. Sir, I have seen and heard, both in public and in private, strange things since this body met. And while I deeply regret to be obliged to say what has now fallen from me, I should feel constrained to add much more, if I were not convinced that gentlemen will, upon reflection, see reason to regret a good deal that has been said and done: and especially, if I were not sure that they will hardly think of executing, in any event, either

their threats of secession from the church, or their intimations of arresting by the discipline of the church, inquiries and discussions whose whole object it is to vindicate the established order of that very church, and to place it on the immovable basis of divine right.

I think, sir, the majority of this body has been misled in several incidental decisions rendered by it during the long struggle to suppress this subject; and that I have reason to complain of the effects of those errors as regards myself. But I should be unjust to my own feelings and to the Synod, if I did not express my admiration of that spirit by which, mastering itself, it has at length put an end to those disorders which seemed designed to prevent a decision of this question; and has resumed the usual tenor of its business. It is equally foreign from my nature to trespass needlessly upon indulgence, as to be violently turned aside from my convictions. Respecting, as far as my duty will permit, what I cannot doubt are the wishes of this court, I will omit many things which I desired to offer to its consideration; and will observe, in what I cannot properly pass by, as much brevity as is consistent with any tolerable clearness of statement.

The most of those great truths which must, as it appears to me, control the decision of the present question, are held with a common consent in the Presbyterian church—and in most other reformed churches. God has always had a church in this world; and when he first instituted outward ordinances for it, he did not then for the first time have a seed to serve him, but he then placed a visible and permanent mark of separation between them and a guilty world. When he added a written revelation and set up an abiding priesthood, these were new gifts bestowed upon his church, and not the first calling of an elect people; and the whole Jewish economy was but a means whereby the covenant of grace was held forth and administered. To this church of God, catholic and visible, the Lord Jesus ascending up on high has given "the ministry," (Conf. Faith, ch. xxv. sec. 3.) that is, ordinary and extraordinary officers; and in our church those officers held to be "ordinary and perpetual, . . . in the church, are Bishops or pastors—the representatives of the people, usually styled Ruling Elders, and Deacons," (Form of Gov. ch. iii. sec. 2).^{*} Of these, we all admit, that the first class only have it in charge to preach the gospel of Christ and to administer the sacraments: that the two first classes only have any charge in the rule of the church, and by consequence in the composition of those assemblies in which the power to rule is lodged: and that officers of the third class are neither public teachers nor church rulers.[†] The lawful vocation of these offi-

* The reader is referred to the printed Minutes of the Synod for an official record of the facts, and to the Spirit of the XIX. Century, Vol. II. pp. 611—20. Nov. 1843, for a rapid description of the scenes alluded to. It is proper to say, once for all, that this report, only pretends to give the sub-

cers, and especially of ministers of the word, is not a subject of dispute amongst us; but it is commonly held that to be real, it must be divine, and that the subject of it ought to have as the foundation of his purpose to preach the everlasting gospel, an inward call and fitness imparted by the Holy Ghost. To make his outward vocation complete he is presumed to be called to the spiritual charge of some particular church, by the members of that church,* and then the Presbytery under whose care he is, being satisfied upon these grounds, and also upon its own independent judgment carefully exercised in each particular case—sets the candidate apart by ordination, to the work unto which he and they and the people of God concur in believing the Lord has called him.

Our church has always held, in accordance with the opinion of the Reformed churches in general, that the office of Evangelist, is an extraordinary one; but contrary to the judgment of the European churches, it has held that it is an office not extinct: and provision is made in our system for the ordination of Evangelists in particular circumstances.† I concur fully in the truth of both these positions; but at the same time I am bound to say, that in my opinion the practice which has long prevailed with regard to ordinations *sine titulo*, and which has grown to such an evil as to demand a vigorous intervention by the General Assembly to correct it;‡ is eminently calculated to introduce into the gospel ministry persons neither called nor qualified for it, and who under the pretext of being Evangelists, are too often open deserters of their covenanted calling. Nor can it be denied that by this means the proper influence of the people of God, in determining by their call, or in refusing to call, is rendered to a great degree nugatory in regard to ministerial ordination: and that a large body of nominal ministers, ordained without ever having received a call from any particular church, and employed chiefly in avocations which have little relation to the ministry of the word—are exerting, through many of our most important Presbyteries, an immense authority over the whole church, while they have no right to exert a particle of authority in any church in particular. This is the more extraordinary when we reflect that such results are not only contrary to the whole scope of our system, but to express provisions of the standards of those foreign churches, to whose law and practice appeal is continually made, when infractions of our standards are to be justified or explained away.§ Sir, it is worthy of more than a passing thought, that such furious opposition should be made against the claims of that class of Presbyters called ruling elders, whose vocation is unquestioned and their employment in their proper duties undisputed; while at the same moment another class of Presbyters, called ministers *sine titulo*, of whom so considerable a proportion may be seriously questioned as to the regularity of their vocation, and still more gravely called to account in regard to the nature of their employments, are permitted, without question, to exercise the highest and most delicate prerogatives of the pastors and rulers of the church.

The main point of this discussion, so far as the question is one of positive law, is one, in regard to which it would seem to be impossible there could be a difference of opinion amongst us. Where is the power of ordain-

* See Form of Government, ch. xv. *passim*.

† See Form of Government, ch. xv. sec. 15.

‡ See Assembly's printed Minutes for 1841. p. 447 (Conclusion on Overture, No. 11), and Minutes for 1842, pages

doctrine of the First Book of Discipline of the church, see Duncan's Collections, p. 54—5; for Second Book of Discipline, *Idem* p. 71—2; for

ing ministers of the word lodged under our constitution "The Presbytery has power . . . to ordain, install, remove and judge ministers," (Form of Gov. ch. x. sec. 8.)—What Presbytery? Why, sir, beyond all doubt, the Presbytery which is one of the divinely instituted assemblies declared in this same constitution to be invested with power to govern the church of Christ; (ch. viii. sec. 1.)—that Presbytery defined in the same chapter which declares its power to ordain, as being composed of many separate congregations, which, by their need of mutual counsel, invest presbyterial assemblies with their importance and usefulness, and declared to consist of ministers and ruling elders; (ch. x. sec. 1 and 2.)—that Presbytery, thus constituted, which is so often and so prominently held forth throughout the entire chapter which treats expressly of the ordination of Pastors and Evangelists; (ch. xv.)—that Presbytery, to which as constituted of the officers called of God to receive the fearful trust of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, the power of church censures is committed. (Confession of Faith ch. xxx. sec. 1 and 2.) This, sir, is the body to which by language as plain as language can be, the power to ordain ministers is confided under this constitution. This power is confided to it as a body—not to its individual members; to it, as the body defined in the instrument itself: and to place the power in any other hand than those of an assembly composed of the Pastors and Ruling Elders of the churches of a particular district, is to act in gross disregard of law which we have solemnly declared we believe to be in full accordance with the revealed will of God, and which we have sacredly bound ourselves by mutual covenants to observe. It is nothing to the present argument whether other ordinations be valid or invalid; though I readily admit them to be for substance good, even when they are irregular in form. It is nothing worth to enter into the question so largely disputed in the Westminster Assembly, about congregations fixed and congregations fluid; about church state settled and a church state unsettled; about the exclusive power of Presbytery and the concurrent power of Presbytery and consistory or church session in the premises. It is wholly beside the question, a matter of strict argument, what our own church even believed or did before the formation of the present Form of Church Government and its adoption in 1788: a much so as it would be to determine the powers of the present Congress of the United States, by the practice of the theory of the government under the old Confederation, instead of doing it by a fair construction of the present constitution. The true question is, what is the law of this church as laid down in this book? And the answer is simple, clear, explicit—that the ordination of ministers of the word belongs under our covenant system, neither to Pastors nor committees, nor nondescript things called church sessions, or Synods—but to Presbyteries; and not to Presbyteries in the vague and general sense of the term, but to the Presbyteries of this constitution. Nor can I conceive, sir, that a candid mind can doubt in regard to this point after it has been plainly stated.

The formal parts of this ordination are stated with absolute precision. A fast day ought to be observed in the congregation where the ordination is to take place previous to it. (Form of Gov. ch. XV. Sec. 11.) The Presbytery being convened, a member ought to preach a sermon; the same or some other member should explain, enforce, and recapitulate the case; the person appointed to preside should ask the questions set down to be answered both by the candidate and the people (Idem sec. 12 and 13); "Then the presiding minister shall by prayer, and with the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery, according to the Apostolic example, solemnly ordain him to the holy office of the gospel ministry." (Idem Sec. 14.)

the concurrence, in the bosom of the constituted Presbytery—as its moderator—and not otherwise: so are the words written. Whose hands are to be laid on him that is ordained? “*The hands of the Presbytery*,” so again are the written words. What Presbytery? Why beyond all the powers of human ingenuity and perversity to gainsay—the Presbytery of this constitution; the Presbytery of this chapter; the Presbytery that licensed the candidate—the Presbytery that received his call and put it into his hands; the Presbytery that examined him, and appointed a day to ordain him, and met for that purpose in the church that called him; the Presbytery that chose one of its ministers to preach, another to deliver a charge to the people, another to deliver a charge to the new minister, another to preside at his ordination. This is the Presbytery that lays its hands on him—and to assert the contrary, I say it without intending to give offence, is utter folly. But this Presbytery is a presbytery which consists of ministers and elders; a presbytery in which one elder from every congregation in the district, has a right to sit as a member. Therefore, by the irresistible force of the very terms of the law, every elder present and a member of the body, is as much bound to lay on his hands as any minister present can be. Why, sir, would you stultify our fathers? Did they first define with the utmost clearness the term *Presbytery*; then invest the body so called with the power of ordaining ministers of the Word; then in a long chapter treating of this ordination in detail use the word a dozen times in its defined sense; and then without notice or motive use the same word in the same chapter and touching the same business, in a sense not only inconsistent with their own definition of it, and their constant use of it, but in a sense flatly contrary to both? The thing is supremely absurd. We have in this city a municipal government which consists of a Mayor and two bodies called jointly the City Council. Suppose the Legislature of this State were to pass an act of fourteen or fifteen sections, defining the power belonging to the municipal government over any particular subject, and directing minutely the manner of its exercise: suppose it should say in one section it meant by the words “municipal government,” the Mayor and the two branches of the City Council, and then throughout the act use the words confessedly in this sense, until it came to the fourteenth section, and in it should use the same words, in regard to the same matter, once more; now, sir, I demand of you, what would be thought of a man, who could seriously contend that in this case, the words “municipal government”—used in the fourteenth section of the act, really did not mean the Mayor and both branches of the City Council—but in fact meant only and singly the first branch? Will you say, no man would venture upon so marvellous a folly? Then why, sir, shall we have a thing just as preposterous, forced upon the Church, in the name of reason, of our constitution, and of the Word of God?

A good deal has been said and written to prove that the views held by me are essentially Congregational, and that the ordination contended for by me is Congregational ordination. Various bodies calling themselves Congregationalists or Independents, have adopted a threefold method of ordination. Some have contended that the brotherhood in each congregation must ordain; which is strict Independency. But, sir, have I not put forth all my strength, here and elsewhere, to prove that ordination appertains to government, and that church government is *jure divino*, in assemblies of Presbyters, both teaching and ruling? Others have contended, as did most of the early English Independents, that ordination is in the hands of the teaching and ruling officers of each particular congregation. But, sir, have I not always and earnestly testified that the ruling as-

church, are classical and synodical, as well as congregational; and that ordination regularly belongs to the classical—that is Presbyterian assemblies? The Congregationalists of America, in their early platforms, directed that in “calling and choosing a pastor,” the particular church should “consult and advise with the pastors of the neighbouring congregations;” and that in ordaining him and setting him apart to his office, “’tis ordinarily requisite that the pastors of neighbouring congregations concur with the preaching Elder or Elders, if such there be.”* That is, they held ordination to the ministry, to be in the hands of ministers only; which is precisely the doctrine against which I am contending,—precisely the doctrine of those who denounce me as a Brownist!—[Here the *Rev. Dr. Cuyler* interposed, and said, that the practice of the New England churches at present, is to ordain by Councils, composed both of ministers and lay messengers from the particular churches; and that in the act of ordination, the ministers alone imposed hands.] Moderator, I have carefully examined this subject, as it is contained in formal and public acts; and I do not see how I can have been misled in regard to it. But, the testimony of my excellent friend, being to matter of fact, of which he says he has personal knowledge; of course, I take it as unquestionable. And I beg him and this Synod to observe how my argument is strengthened by the information he has given us. Why, sir, congregational ordination as now explained, is precisely the ordination which the construction of the Assembly of 1843 established, as taught in our standards: ordination by an assembly of ministers and others, in which, all but the ministers stand aside when hands are imposed, and they alone perform this act. Indeed, ours is the more unwarrantable of the two; for our ordaining assembly thus broken into fragments, is a real church court, while the New England council is but a special and occasional assembly; our ruling elders are scriptural Presbyters—ordained officers, set apart to compose such assemblies, while the Congregational lay messengers do not pretend to be Presbyters, and may be only private members of the churches. No, sir; the principles for which I contend, are strictly Presbyterian principles; the ordination they establish is a purely Presbyterian ordination: nor am I able to comprehend how these principles and this ordination can be rejected, without falling off on the one side to the final grounds of Prelacy, or, on the other, to those of Independency.

It cannot escape notice, that if ruling elders are denied the right of imposing hands in the ordination of Pastors and Evangelists, it must necessarily follow that they ought to be prevented from taking any part in every other portion of these ordinations. The ground upon which they act in the matter at all, under this constitution, is, that they are declared to be a component part of the Presbytery, (Form of Government, chap. x. sec. 2); that the Presbytery is declared to have power to ordain ministers, (Idem. sec. 8;) and that “the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery” is declared to be a formal part of this ordination, (Idem, chap. xv. sec. 14); and it is a ground altogether impregnable. If the laying on of hands be the only essential part of ordination, or the main part of it, then the more clearly this is proved, the more important it is that ruling elders be not illegally ousted of their rights, and the more manifest it is that this right is inherent in their office—since, if this is ordination, this is the very thing they are commanded to do. But, on the other hand, if the imposition of hands is any part at all of ordination, then, manifestly, the body which has the entire power of ordination, has power to perform this part of ordination, and therefore ruling elders have it upon the same ground.

* See Heads of Agreement and Articles of Church Discipline, passed at Southmead Sep. 9 1708. ch. II. sec. 4 and

precisely that preaching elders have it, namely, that they are members of the body to which the right appertains: and to deny this involves, either that imposition of hands is no part of ordination, or that ordination is not by the Presbytery, both of which are absurd and contrary to express law—or that ruling elders may be denied any participation in a part of ordination which is expressly declared to belong to the whole Presbytery; and if this can be done, then they can, on the same grounds, be deprived of all participation in all parts of ordination—and that act cease to be presbyterial and become merely hierarchic, as to every part of it; which is precisely the tendency of the greater part of the arguments I have heard and read on the other side. Furthermore, upon the same grounds precisely, the ruling elders ought to be deprived, and if they tolerate the present encroachment, they will be deprived at last, of all right to take any part in installing, removing, and judging ministers, as well as in ordaining them; for the whole four powers are of one and the same class, and are embraced and invested by a single clause (Form of Government, chap. x. sec. 8) of the Constitution. There is full as much sense in the notion that an elder cannot take away the ministerial office because he cannot give it, as in that so current amongst us, that he cannot give it because he has it not himself; and there is far more reason to say he shall in no case take part in installations, than to prohibit the imposition of his hands, since the latter act is only and always presbyterial, while the former one may be done by committee, (Form of Government, ch. xvi. sec. 6.) And surely it is far more evident that when ministers are installed by a committee of ministers, ruling elders can have no right to take part in removing them, seeing they had none in placing them; than it is that they cannot impose hands in ordination, even though ordination be an act of Presbytery only, and they members of the body. The truth is, Sir, the whole matter resolves itself into one of these four propositions—either the imposition of hands is not a Presbyterial act, which is exactly contrary to the words of the Constitution;—or Presbyterial acts may be performed where there is no Presbyterial authority, which is absurd and revolutionary;—or ruling elders when members of Presbytery must unite in the act, which is true;—or you must show an explicit statement in the Constitution, not only that a Presbytery is good without them—which the Synod asserts and the Constitution denies—but that even when they are present, they are denied this right; that is, that even when members they are not members.

Extraordinary as the attempt is, gentlemen of high character in the church, have been found willing to undertake the proof of the proposition; that ruling elders when members of Presbytery, are, *pro hac vice*, not members of it. They try to show this, first, analogically, as a thing that might be; for as there are other rights of which they are deprived, they might also be deprived of this; and the instance taken is, they cannot be moderators of the body. I reply, this is by clear law of the church; and as that law was requisite in order to obtain that result, the absence of any such law in regard to the point before us, is conclusive of the case. But seeing the law is positive against the thing which the analogy is supposed to prove to be possible—it is preposterous to argue for what might be, in the very teeth of what is. The constitution might have allowed ministers to be ordained by committees of ministers: it chose another plan, and required them to be ordained by Presbytery: and it is argued that the elders may be ousted from Presbytery, of which they are members, because the plan of ordaining by committees, of which they were not members, might have been adopted. This is mere trifling. Another ground of argument is sought in a play upon the word "ministry," used at the close

take him by the right hand, saying, *in words to this purpose*, We give you the right hand of fellowship to take part of this ministry with us," (Form of Government, ch. xv. sec. 14): and it is urged that *ministry* in this clause, means ministry of the word, and therefore elders cannot use it. What then? Suppose they cannot do this,—how does that prove they cannot impose hands? They cannot preside: but does that prove they cannot do something else which is different? Again, the man is already ordained; our argument is not about what may be done after, but in the act of ordaining. Again, suppose some other suitable word which an elder could use, were substituted for the word *ministry*,—the order being "*words to this purpose*;" how then? Again, the order is "*all the members of the Presbytery*:" are elders not members? But, chiefly, the whole sophism, rests on an error of fact. The word *ministry* is, no doubt, in its popular use often, perhaps generally, applied to the ministers of the word; but our standards, and those of other Presbyterian churches, and our Bible too, use it technically to mean all the divinely ordained officers of the church. Our Confession says, "Christ hath given the *ministry*, oracles, and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world," (ch. xxv. sec. 3), and our Form of Government declares that Pastors, Ruling Elders, and Deacons, are the ordinary and perpetual officers of the church, given to it by Christ—as already abundantly proved: therefore these standards must contradict themselves, or else in them, and so in this place—the word *ministry* does not mean simply the ministers of the word. The *Second Book of Discipline*, of the Kirk of Scotland, is equally explicit:—"according to the parts of this division, (to wit, of the policie of the Kirk,) ariseth a sort of threefold officers in the Kirk, to wit, of ministers preachers, elders governors, and deacons distributors. And all these may be called by a generall word, *ministers of the Kirk*," (ch. II. par. 2).^{*} Yes, sir, and our brother Paul is more explicit even than our brother, Andrew Melville; for knowing that the master had laid down, and enforced in his own inexpressible humiliation, the great truth that *minister* of the church and *servant* of the church are the very same thing; † he expressly declares that all the gifts of him who ascended far above all heavens, were for a work which he expresses by a word borrowed from the name of the humblest office in the church—a *deaconry*—a *ministry*; ‡ and seeing that he had called Christ himself—*a minister, a servant*§ for the truth of God, using the same word—when he speaks of himself and even of his apostolic office he goes out of the circle of ecclesiastical phraseology and selects a word lower than the lowest he could find there—to say, "so account of us as of the *ministers*|| of Christ." And has it really come to this, that *ministry* no longer means a service, *minister* no longer a servant? and that the preaching elders of this Church shall separate themselves from the profane herd of ruling elders—when the more sacred functions of their common rule are to be discharged, because the former are above that rank which Christ attributes to the highest, or because the latter are below even that service, which, as the very humblest, Paul, in his humility, attributes to himself? And what shall justify this torture of our Constitution, that in the midst of its groans, ministers who are unwilling to be classed with other servants of the Church, may find some dubious sounds which they can interpret so as to favour their

* See also in Niemeyer's *Collectio Confessionum*; Confessio Belgica, Art. xxxi.—Confessio Helvetica posterior, Art. xviii. Confessio Bohemica (1575) Art. xii.

† Matt. xx. 26—28, *διακονος—δουλος*.

‡ Eph. iv. 8—13.

§ Rom. xv. 8, *διακονου*.

exalted conceptions of their official rank? *The practice of the church! The practice of the church!* What church, sir? The same church that declared the office of deacon to be divine and perpetual—and through a century and a half practised that it was neither one nor the other? The same church that declared the pastoral office to be not only divine and permanent, but the first of all in “dignity and usefulness”—and after a century and a half, not one-third of all its ministers had ever been pastors? The same church that provides only for the ordination of pastors and evangelists, and then fills its Presbyteries with ministers who are neither one nor the other? The same church that binds its Evangelists by the most solemn vows to labour in frontier and destitute settlements, that is to be real missionaries—and allows these same so-called Evangelists, to concentrate about the great marts of population, business, and wealth, and to spend their lives in utter disregard of the cries of our hundreds of vacant churches, themselves absorbed all the while in secular pursuits? The same church that, by solemn and deliberate treaty, provided for the abolition of the office of ruling elder, which office it professed to believe was *jure divino*—and covenanted to allow Presbyteries to be formed in direct violation of what it professed to believe was the divine model of Presbytery, and for six-and-thirty years tenaciously held by these monstrous stipulations? And as for the pretended practice—what is it? That Elders *shall not* impose hands in the ordination of ministers of the word? I deny that any such practice ever did, or from the nature of the case ever could exist, independently of clear law; or if it existed could be proved in the manner here attempted. That Elders *did not* so impose hands, might be a practice, and might be proved; but that they *should not*, is a long step farther; and the moment this principle has been attempted to be asserted as the sense of the Church, it has created an excitement which it will require better arguments than the previous question to allay. That Elders *did not* impose their hands *actually*, is asserted with great confidence to have been the uniform practice; the very *general* practice it may have been; the *universal* practice, I have personal knowledge it was *not*—and that in portions of the church the most thoroughly imbued with the principles of our system. That *potentially*, whoever did impose hands, did it as the act of the whole body, and therefore of the Elders in the body, is just as clear, as that when the candidate is ordained by the Moderator presiding—as by the words of our book he is—the ordination is potentially that of the body—and so is Presbyterial; and this is one manifest proof of the absurdity of talking about a practice that Elders *should not* impose hands. Can any case be produced of Elders having been turned out of Presbytery when the body was about to proceed to an ordination? Can any man produce an act of the General Assembly before 1843, sanctioning so portentous an outrage? If so, let us have it. And suppose, sir, it could be proved with absolute certainty that Elders never did lay on hands; would it be our duty to make the law conform to that practice; or ought we not rather correct the practice by the law? And suppose the provisions of the law were as vague as they are clear and precise, and the construction would favour the previous practice and understanding of the church, while an opposite one accorded with the great principles of our system, and with the word of God: who could hesitate in such a case? I am fully persuaded that the opinions of the men who framed our system can be shown from their decided and well considered acts to have been wholly inconsistent with the view of this subject which is attempted to be fastened upon their memories; but I am also bound to say that if every man of them were sitting in this Synod to-night, it would be your duty, and my

ed with the sense of the instrument itself. We have sworn to this constitution, not in any hidden, reserved or implicit sense, locked up in the minds of those who drew it up, and capable of being brought to light only by putting the thing to the rack; but we have sworn to it, in its own sense, held forth in its own terms, and made obvious by the just consideration of all its parts, according to the fair, true, and simple meaning of the whole. And sir, we should never have heard of the opinions of our fathers, and the practice of our church—tradition and infallibility in Presbyterian church courts—if gentlemen had been able to meet this question, upon the law and the testimony, either of the Church, or of the Church’s glorious Head.

The methods of wresting the plain sense of written instruments, which I have now considered, and which as you well know, are, as applied to our standards and to the present case, common to nearly all who have lately spoken or written against the rights of our ruling elders; incompetent as they are in their own nature, and empty of all force, yet have a show of respect for the forms of reason, and for the established order of the Church. They pretend to ascertain the actual sense of actual law. But gentlemen take much higher grounds when such as these fail them; and with all their nervous anxiety for the reputation of the fathers of our Constitution, they do not hesitate to bring them and their handiwork to a very summary issue, by a very summary process. The ruling elder—so they argue—is, from the very nature of his office, incompetent even to assist in the ordination of preaching elders; and therefore it is impossible the Constitution can mean to say he ought to be allowed to do any such thing as impose hands on them. This, sir, is not to imitate, it is to judge our fathers; it is not to interpret, it is to try the law; it is not to execute, it is to make a constitution. Yet I willingly meet the issue; and having, as I humbly conceive, proved that the law is what it is, I will venture to offer some of those considerations which satisfy my mind, that it ought not to be different.

The earliest national confession of the Kirk of Scotland, that read in the face of the Scottish Parliament and ratified by the three estates of the realm on the 17th of August 1560, declares that the word of God truly preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and discipline executed according to the word of God, are the infallible signs of the true Church, (Art. xviii. and xxv.) The sacraments, adds this venerable confession, can be rightly administered only by “lawful ministers, whom we affirm to be only they that are lawfully appointed to the preaching of the word, into whose mouth God hath put some sermon of exhortation, they being men lawfully chosen thereto, by some Church,” (Art. xxii.) *John Knox* and four other persons composed this confession; the same hands composed the *First Book of Discipline*. Treating expressly of the ministers of the word, this early platform of Church Order and Discipline, declares that “the lawful vocation standeth in the election of the people, examination of the ministry, and admission by both.” And then afterwards that, “In their admission . . . other ceremonies, except fasting with prayer—such as laying on of hands, we judge not necessary in the institution of the ministry,” (ch. iv. paragraphs 1 and 2.) About twenty years after the adoption of this book, the *Second Book of Discipline* was drawn up by *Andrew Melville*, and adopted by all the civil and ecclesiastical authorities of the Kingdom. It has been made the basis of more numerous and solemn national acts than any other paper, perhaps, of merely human origin; and as far as I can discover is still in full force in the Scottish church and Kingdom. This remarkable work treats in the same chapter, and as one general subject, the admission of all persons bearing eccle

that "ordinary or outward calling hath two parts—election and ordination;" that election is the choosing by "the eldership and consent of the congregation;" that "Ordination is the separation and sanctifying of the person appointed, to God and his Kirk, after he is well tried and found qualified;" and that "The ceremonies of ordination are fasting, earnest prayer, and imposition of the hands of the eldership." (Ch. III. par. 1, 6, 10, 11.) Such is ordination according to the doctrine of that venerable church whose standards have furnished so large a portion of our own; and such it is, essentially, as held by all the Reformed churches—and I may add by the primitive and apostolic church. There is no charm here; no mystery—no incantation—no juggle—no *opus operatum*—no symbolical hocus pocus—no transfer of a virus—no pretence of a flux of spiritual influences—nothing about a transmission of any thing. The whole is simple and grand. God chooses his servants by an inward vocation, and designates a mode by which their outward calling may be regularly sealed, in a lawful election and a solemn dedication of each to his appointed work; and this is all. What there can be in the doctrine of ordination properly conceived, that should make one shudder at the idea,—as at profanation and sacrilege—that a ruling elder should be presumed competent to aid in the ordination of a preaching elder—is, to me, altogether incomprehensible. Or if gentlemen insist that I do not fairly state the case—or the exact point of their objection—and are in earnest when they make a distinction between the act of imposing hands and all other parts of ordination, why let us give them the benefit of this correction. And what is there in the nature of this act, which was entirely rejected by the early Scottish church, that renders it improper for a scriptural Presbyter, yea a scriptural Bishop to take part in it? To deny that the Elders of the New Testament are *Presbyters*—is mere nonsense—for the English word is only a translation of the Greek one—and is just the same as to say an Elder is not an Elder, or to say a Presbyter is not a Presbyter. To deny that the Elders of the New Testament are bishops, is to contradict the very words of the divine record, for the very same men and offices have both words indiscriminately applied to them; and to set up Prelacy upon a foundation stronger than its own advocates assume. To take refuge under the distinction held by Presbyterian churches in general, that there are two classes of scriptural elders, namely such as rule only, and such as both rule and labour in word and doctrine; is but to betray ignorance of the whole subject. For you will be obliged to go a step further and either show that ordination does not appertain to the power of *regimen* in the church, but to the power of *order*—which is stark popery; or else that those who are elders simply *for rule*, do not belong to those bodies which have the entire *regimen* of the church in their hands—which is stark nonsense. Sir, I do beseech this Synod to consider these obvious truths, every one of which is so perfectly simple as to be, upon our common principles, pretty nearly self evident, as soon as it is put clearly before an unprejudiced mind. Let it be once conceded, as it is on all hands, that imposition of hands if practised at all, is a part of the ordination service, and then it follows irresistibly, from the truths just stated, and from each of them separately, that ruling elders ought to lay on hands, and therefore, that our law is right. *Presbytery* imposes hands in ordination; elders are of right members of that body; therefore they must necessarily impose hands. *Presbyters*, when met in *Presbytery*, ordain by the imposition of hands; elders *Presbyters*, and do meet in that body; therefore

hands. The power of *order* is a *several* power, such as the power to preach, administer sacraments, &c.; but imposition of hands, with every other part of ordination, is a *Presbyterial*, that is a *joint* power; therefore a minister of the word does not impose hands as a minister, nor as exercising any power of *order*; but as ruler, that is an elder—and therefore upon the same ground as elders of the other class, that is ruling elders. All power of *regimen* is *joint*, that is *Presbyterial*, for the whole rule of the church, as I have largely demonstrated in a former speech before this Synod, is in Assemblies; but imposition of hands, at every other part of ordination, is a *Presbyterial*, that is a *joint* power; and therefore all who have the power to rule must have the right to impose hands.* And, sir, we look at the subject in the opposite aspect, it is equally overwhelming. Are these elders scriptural Presbyters? If not, let them depart from your church courts. Are your Presbyteries scripturally composed, where teaching and ruling elders meet together in them? If not, let us break up our system, and confess our error like honest men. Does the right of ordination belong to the power of *order*, and is it transmitted ministerially by the imposition of hands? Then let us turn paper at once, and establish the sacrament of orders. Is par a distinctive feature of Presbyterianism? Then shall we defend this more than prelatic imparity? If the highest churchman on earth admits all Presbyters to be by order equal—all bishops to be of the same rank; nay while their prelates ordain their presbyters they allow other Presbyters to assist and impose hands. If these are our opinions, and we are determined to make our standards utter such principles as these, we at least avoid the charge of handling the word of God deceitfully, by citing and stereotyping texts in sense the opposite of our belief. Our Form of Government ch. viii. sec. 1 and 2, quotes Acts xv. 6, to put the government of the church to be *jure divino*, in assemblies congregational, classical and synodical; then in ch. x. sec. 1, and ch. xi, on the title, it quotes the same passage to prove that, *jure divino*, classical synodical assemblies are composed of Pastors and Ruling Elders. In ch. xv. sec. 14. 1 Tim. iv. 14 is quoted to prove that in ordination the hands of the Presbyter ought to be imposed; and in ch. x. sec. 1. the same passage is quoted to prove that many congregations are unite one Presbytery composed of Pastors and ruling elders that holding ruling elders to be incompetent to impose hands, we quote a passage which proves that Presbytery ordains by imposition of hands, and quote it again to prove that ruling elders as well as preaching elders were that Presbytery. And holding that the power of *regimen* held by ruling elders does not qualify them to act in a matter which falls immediately and absolutely under the power of an assembly having rule; we quote the same passage to prove, in the first place, that this assembly has the power of rule, and in the second, that ruling elders were in it! The passage in Timothy, puts of dispute that the body which ordains is a Presbytery and that it ordains with imposition of its hands; that in Acts is equally conclusive that it had jurisdiction and that the elders who sat in it, were all neither more nor less than Presbyters. Here, sir, I may boldly stand. These marginal citations clearly prove from Scripture, that the doctrine asserted in our standards is that which I assert before you now; and that

* The reader is referred for a very clear and learned demonstration that ruling elders, are both Presbyters and Rulers, to Dr. Miller's Essay on the Ruling Elder. The ground of this being, is that the power of *regimen* is a *joint* power, and the power of *order* is a *several* power.

men who put them there and have kept them there, understood these standards to teach this doctrine. Assemblies which have rule in the Church—which are composed of teaching and ruling elders, and are therefore called Presbyteries—ordain ministers of the word, by the imposition of the hands of their members, without discrimination. This is the doctrine of these standards and of God's word. And, sir, I invoke your solemn consideration of the state of the question to which the whole argument conducts us. The whole office of the ruling elder is involved. His power to ordain depends on his power to rule—and they stand or fall together. His position under our constitution and by the word of God, is determined by the same argument, and will be decided by the same vote. With him falls the grand peculiarity of Presbyterian, and as I believe, of Christian, Church Order. And if the opinions now predominant in this Synod, prevail over the Church—a revolution in every part of your ecclesiastical practice and opinion must follow, perhaps insensibly, but not the less fatally; and the final assumption of all authority into the hands of the ministers, will bring after it, those results and that ruin, which we have seen in all ages flow from that frightful calamity.

I will venture, Moderator, to go a step farther in this investigation, and meet in its germ, what seems to be the radical error of those who deny the principles for which I contend. Their immediate error lies in a misconception of the power which is exercised in ordination, and from thence very naturally, a mistake arises as to the depositories of this power. I have entered the less fully into this part of the case, both because I have clearly exhibited its principles in my argument before the Synod on the question of *jurisdiction* as involved in that of a *quorum* of Presbytery; and because of the painful and embarrassing circumstances in which I am addressing you. But I have probably said enough to make it apparent that the denial of this right of ruling elders for which I plead, must rest at last, if it has any rational foundation, upon the double assumption that ministerial ordination depends upon and is related, some how or other, to the *potestas ordinis*, and that this dependence and relation are such that it is the *potestas ordinis* of ministers of the word only, that is available in the ordination of other ministers of the word. The question of imposition of hands is only the touchstone that reveals the existence of these two fallacies; either one of which fairly pursued, annihilates the whole fabric of that church order, whose fundamental principles, both as they are rational and as they are scriptural, are that ordination as well as jurisdiction, is not a several power, but a joint one—and that both are in the hands of assemblies constituted, not of one, but of two classes of elders. But there is an error behind both of these, and to which both are traceable,—as to the very tenure of all power held by the officers of the church of Christ. If the power held by the assemblies or the officers of the church, was absolute in its nature, and held in the way of sovereign and inherent right; there might be a very remote approach to plausibility, perhaps, in a great deal that has been said and written on this question. But, sir, all the powers we hold, or can hold, in the church, are utterly and immeasurably removed from the nature of absolute authority. All power is absolutely in Christ: he gave, *but only in trust*, to his inspired Apostles, authority to found and shape his kingdom; to that kingdom he gives officers, who are not inspired, and to these he gives—*but also in trust*—powers very much inferior both in kind and in degree to those he gave, in trust and temporarily, to his apostles. The Apostles, far above us in all respects, had nothing to *transmit*, in any proper sense of that word, as of themselves or even as officers of Christ's church; but when Christ chose to add to them other

selves*—they gave another the right hand of fellowship after he had been, independently of them, for many years an Apostle. So, we as ministers of the word, or as rulers in the church, have nothing to *transmit*; our business in this respect is simply, when God shows to us that he has chosen another minister, another ruler, to add him to our number—to give him the right of fellowship: to do this by such acts and such significant ceremonies—of which we suppose the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery is one—as the first, the great servants of our Lord have, by his orders, instituted. The mode of arguing, that men cannot impart what they have not, and therefore elders cannot act—implies that we can impart what we have—to wit, if the argument has any sense—our divine calling and sufficiency and unction from above. But will any Presbyterian maintain a doctrine so monstrous? And yet upon any other ground the sophism is a mere play on words. For what sane man will venture to say, a trust can never be executed unless the trustee has exactly the same interest, both in kind and in degree, that he has upon whom the trust terminates; for example, that Christ could not, either permanently or temporarily, empower Kings to select prophets or prophets to select kings; preachers to select rulers in the church, or rulers to select preachers; or both unitedly to select both; just as readily, as simply, yea, reverently speaking, just as rationally, as to direct preachers to select preachers; he himself by his Spirit, his providence, and his word, for ever superintending the whole? Why, sir, even under the Jewish economy, when a priesthood was not only divinely instituted, but continued in a right line from Aaron by a special providence attesting that divine institution, and intrusion into it was punished by death; the priests were subjected to the inspection and the decision of the Elders who were judges and rulers, and of whom not a single man was, by any necessity, a priest himself—in order to ascertain the reality of their call of God, as to birth, age, physical, social, and ceremonial facts, which settled the right of each particular priest, to be admitted to offer sacrifice; and Moses, who was no priest, but a ruler, consecrated Aaron and his sons. Those priests were, by a divine law entitled to their office; but the conditions of entrance and the proof of their claim, must necessarily be passed on by some competent authority; which authority was—the elders of Israel. So with us, a ministry appointed of Christ, and its members called and qualified by Christ, have a divine right to the exercise of the functions belonging to their respective offices: but it necessarily must be, that some competent authority in the church, must pass upon these facts: and the Christian people and the Elders of the church are that authority; the former by their call, the latter by their ordination, attesting and giving outward regularity to the vocation of each person in particular.—The whole notion of a *transmitted* authority in the Christian ministry, is utterly fallacious; and the whole assumption that, if there was such a transmission, it must be through a succession of the same description of persons, is a second and still more absurd fallacy built upon the first. Nor are these fallacies barren speculations. We see their first influence in the violent advocacy of principles in our own church, which are wholly sub-

* That is on the supposition that Matthias was in any true sense an Apostle. The competency of the Apostles to do what they did in his case—especially before the descent of the Holy Ghost—the almost total subsequent silence in regard to him—the probable limitation of the true Apostolate to the number of twelve, and the transcendent claims of Paul to be the twelfth—are some of the reasons which cast doubt on the vocation of Matthias. (But admitting it to have been proper and valid—he was chosen by means of an extraordinary appeal to God—and was simply number

versive of its order, and in the harsh and intemperate conduct and sentiments which so remarkably accompany those principles: and we may read the fearful record of their progress and results, in every age and period where the hierarchic spirit and doctrine have been engrafted upon Christianity. Sir, the whole conception is as thoroughly at war with history as it is with reason and with scripture. There is not only no such doctrine in God's word—but there is no such ministry upon the earth: and if the right to preach or to rule in the church of Christ, depends on our ability to trace a transmitted authority through the imposition of the hands of other preachers or rulers; then it is manifest, that there is not in the world, one person who has the right either to rule or to preach. The moment it is proved that these rights are *transmitted* rights, which must come to us only through officers like ourselves, back to the Saviour—that moment it is proved that there is not under the sun any thing approaching to a valid ministry: for as to the matter of fact, not only is it utterly impossible to trace back any such succession—and so the proof is fatally defective; but it is capable of the clearest proof that every existing line of such pretended succession, has been repeatedly and incurably broken. As it regards this pretended transmission, it is perfectly notorious that the leaders of the glorious Reformation of the XVI. century came, every one of them, out of the church of Rome; that they renounced, every one of them, that church as the synagogue of Satan; that they relied, every one of them, on the extraordinary nature of their own vocation to justify their acts, and not on any ordination they ever had from Rome; and that in the exercise of the powers vested by Christ in his church—which is his body, they established, one and all, the broad foundations of truth, on which we stand until now. Here, sir, is the only succession that the nature of the case admits—the only permanent, available, scriptural succession; the succession of heaven-descended truth, and of the glorious fellowship, the redeemed host to which officers and courts are both alike given; the succession of Christ's doctrine and Christ's people—now here, now there—sometimes on the throne of Constantine, sometimes in the dungeons of the Inquisition—sometimes fully organized, sometimes disorganized—but everywhere the inheritors of the promises, the depositaries of the faith, the witnesses for the truth, the royal priesthood. To his church the Saviour has given a form of administration: to it, officers, to conduct its affairs: but the succession is neither in the form, nor in the officer, but in the truth, and in itself.* And when the form is corrupted or debased, it is its prerogative to restore it; and when the officers are extinct or are apostate, it is its prerogative, obedient to God's providence, and guided by his indwelling Spirit, to call forth from its bosom, new teachers and new rulers. Again and again has it done both—shut up to the necessity by a divine *constraint*, and rewarded for its obedience by the divine smiles. And, sir, I pray God it may never be forgotten, that in the primitive church, the hierarchic spirit first manifested itself, and laid the first principles of prelacy and popery, by the well-meant, but fatal error, of selecting one of the presbyters, and giving to him the sole power of ordination: † an error slight in its extent compared with what we shall commit, if we, instead of a temporary and prudential, though illegal and dangerous elevation of a single minister above his class—should by one

blow divide into two different orders, the Presbyters of the church; and while we elevate one above the church itself, degrade the other from the exercise of the common functions of their office. The act that converts Presbyterian ordination from an exercise of church power, into a charin—will work sorrow and ruin, when you and I, Moderator, shall have long ceased from our labours; and will be cited by our mourning children with an emphasis little according with the temper in which those around me have received my earnest warnings.

I think, sir, I have now shown that by our law as it stands, the principles of the minute I have submitted to this Synod are clearly established; and that the more closely we apply the tests of reason, of history and of Scripture, the more evident it is, that our law is right. The work of ordaining Ministers of the Word, is, and ought to be the work of a Presbytery constituted by teaching and ruling elders: and the imposition of hands, belongs to the same body which performs all the rest of the work. The doctrine and practice of other Reformed churches have been confidently appealed to as conclusive against the view which I take of this subject. The *practice* of other churches, I do not pretend to have sufficiently examined into, to speak with confidence about it; nor indeed does it appear to me a point of sufficient importance to be worthy of discussion, under the circumstances. If there was a total absence of written law,—if that law was vague,—if there was any tolerable certainty that the practice of churches always accorded strictly with their own law,—if there was the least pretext that all the particular churches do not require frequent reformations themselves,—or if we had certain information and a uniform practice—there might be some inducement to look into this idlest, vaguest, weakest part of the most uncertain of all rules of duty,—the opinions of men as weak, as ignorant, and as sinful as ourselves. The *doctrine* of other Reformed churches, I have considered as standing in a different light, and have carefully examined it, especially as it is set forth in their public and formal standards. There are many reasons why these authorised and carefully weighed statements are worthy of our profound respect: for, to state no more they were drawn up by men, and approved by churches whom God evidently called to a glorious mission, and their influence in giving shape and tone to our own formularies was very great. After all, however, their relations to us and to this question are but collateral for the word of God is our rule of faith,—the standard of our own church are our covenanted bond of union and in the light of them, we have not hesitated to reject important principles which were held with unanimous consent by the Reformed Churches of Europe and to establish others which were denied by them all I say not these things, sir, as fearing the testimony which these venerable witnesses and all others bear to the Apostles, who are recognized as parts of the elect Church of Christ, may bear; for the course of my studies has not left me ignorant of the sentiments of God's people in past times. But I say them, in candour, and because I love truth more than victory I the more willingly proceed to this portion of the case, because I am persuaded that this testimony not only more for me than against me, in itself considered; but because the distinct rejection, by the framers of our constitution, of such parts of the doctrine of older Reformed churches as was opposite the principles held by me, is no mean proof, that rightly interpret our own standards

* I will begin with the Reformed Church of France

* The reader is notified that this portion of the speech reported much more fully than it was delivered; the Syn

see Turretin III. pp. 240—9. Loc. 24, Que. 23. Magdeburg Centurions, Cent. I. p. 292, 391, 514, Cent. II. p. 130, I. p. 254.

Hieron. ad Evagrium. Also, Magdeburg centuria-

church which has suffered for the Lord Jesus, the most and the longest of all the churches of the Reformation; a church which furnished, in less than ten years, more than two hundred thousand martyrs—and in whose bosom many particular congregations could count their confessors by tens of thousands.* Sir, there is no portion of the history of the visible church of Christ upon which the serious mind lingers with more profound interest, than that which records the wonderful dealings of God with the Christians of France. In defiance of the whole power of Rome and of a succession of persecuting sovereigns, they spread abroad with such astonishing rapidity, that the national Synod of 1571 in which *Beza* presided, could count 2159 churches, the greater part of which had two ministers, and many of them five or six;† and they shot their roots so deeply, that two centuries and a half of war, persecution, exile, and civil infamy, aided by frequent and wide-spread apostasies, great and dangerous departures from the simplicity of the gospel, and an original constitution by no means perfect—have failed in extirpating them from the soil of France. The confession of this church was drawn up, as is generally supposed, by *John Calvin* himself, and was adopted by several of its national synods, including the first of the twenty-nine, which met at Paris on the 15th May, 1559. By it ministers of the word were ordained by committee, which always consisted of two pastors deputed by a provincial Synod or Colloquy (Presbytery) (Discipline ch. I. Can. 8.); they were never ordained before being admitted by a Synod or Colloquy, and if by the latter, seven pastors must be present (*Idem.* can. 4); never without the consent of the people, and never without a particular flock (*Idem.* Can. 6 and 10). The Colloquy consisted of neighbouring churches, and was constituted of their ministers and an elder from each (ch. vii. can. 1); and their provincial Synod answered to ours. (ch. viii. can. 1). The Consistory corresponded with our church session—and consisted of the pastors and elders of the particular church (ch. v. can. 8); but these particular churches were often very large, many of them having more than 10,000 members, and they had generally a plurality of pastors. The Consistory, as well as the Colloquy and the Synod had power to suspend ministers of the word, yea, to depose them outright, (ch. I. can. 19 and 50, and ch. v. can. 19 and 32); and I greatly fear, sir, if some of our leading divines were to come under the scope of some of these canons, it might go ill with them; for example chap. I. can. 19, against all secular pursuits, that too much hinder “them in the principal duties of their ministerial office”—such as the practice of law or physic, the teaching of youth, or “any other worldly distracting business”—which are the cases stated in the canon. This platform differs from ours, in many particulars; and in many more from the interpretations forced upon ours. By it, ordination is by committee of two ministers, instead of by the Presbytery with imposition of its hands: it is by Pastors only, who are the only sort of ministers of the word admitted into the church courts, instead of by three ministers without charge as defined by our last Assembly: the Colloquy must consist of at least seven Pastors, instead of three unemployed ministers, which gentlemen say, are sufficient; by it, the church session could suspend, yea “depose out of hand,” ministers of the word—a notion so revolting to our late General Assembly, that they declared ministers to be not church members at all, rather than allow their names and sa-

ing on towards midnight, and other causes, which need not be repeated, conspiring to render its delivery useless, if not improper. I have hesitated about going into this part of the subject: but on the whole it seems best

cred persons to fall under the notice of a church session: and above all, by it, ruling elders are expressly held not to be perpetual officers in the church (ch. iii. can. 7; also, ch. xi. of the Second Synod of Paris, 1565). All these things bear a strong resemblance to the well known peculiarities of *Calvin*; and following the general principles on which they rest, he engrafted into the discipline of the church of Geneva, their most aggravated form.* He held, and avowed his belief, that “imposition of hands” is “a sacrament in true and legitimate ordinations;”† an opinion difficult to reconcile with his general sentiments, and altogether peculiar to himself, but which, it is easy to see, would naturally lead to exactly such practical results as I have stated from the French Confession. Let it be observed also, that whatever there is peculiar in this platform is so by express law, and that in so far as its provisions are opposed to the principles for which I contend, they are opposed also to the express law of our church; for if ruling elders are not perpetual officers of the church, and if imposition of hands in legitimate ordinations is a sacrament—then indeed it is true enough, that neither elders nor Presbyteries should impose hands, but that pastors only should do it. The whole argument therefore is conclusive to this, that even according to the judgment of *Calvin* and the Reformed church of France, our views of the office of the ruling elder, of the nature of ordination, of the power of the Presbytery, and of the total separation of church and state, which in Geneva were strictly united—necessarily oblige us to allow the imposition of the hands of the ruling elders; and the adoption of the principles of that great man and the practice of that noble church, from whom we have ventured to differ in these particulars, would oblige us to alter entirely our principles upon these four important points; that is, to refuse elders the right of imposing hands, upon the united authority of the churches of France and Geneva, it is necessary to hold that they are not perpetual officers, that imposition of hands, is, virtually a sacrament, and that it appertains not to the Presbytery but to a committee or other meeting of pastors, appointed by some competent authority, civil or ecclesiastical, and that the state itself has para-

* The government of the church of Geneva was established by a municipal law passed by the “*Syndics* and the grand councils and the assembled people of Geneva.” By it, persons seeking the ministry of the word were examined by the “company of pastors” in their weekly meeting; elected by the same body, with the concurrence of the small municipal council; announced from the pulpits on one Sabbath, and if no objections were made, presented before the pulpit the next Sabbath, and prayer offered by the officiating minister—afterwards being taken to the council they took a minute and comprehensive civic oath before the Lords *Syndics*: and thus their examination, institution, and form of induction were complete—without one word about a Presbytery, an elder, or imposition of hands by any body. The elders were elected from year to year by the small council, with the advice of the ministers: there were twelve of them, two from the small council, and ten indiscriminately from the Councils of Sixty and of Two hundred; they were proclaimed from the pulpits to allow of objections and were confirmed by the Council of Two hundred, and took the civic oath. Synod, Presbytery, Colloquy—there was none. The consistory or church session was made up of “the Elders with the ministers,” and there seems to have been one for the whole city. By the “*Summary of Doctrine, &c.*”—it is explicitly taught that “the church ought to be governed by the Pastors who have charge of preaching the word and administering the sacraments.” See *Les Ordonnances Ecclesiastiques de L’Eglise de Geneve, passées et reveues au Conseil General le 3 de Juin 1576—A Geneve 1609.* The whole system is as different from ours as well can be, both in its principles and its details

mount authority in the premises. It is needless to say, that the doctrine of the church of France, is to be sought only in the past. For one hundred and eighty-five years no national Synod has met; since the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, one hundred and fifty-eight years ago, no ordinary and regularly constituted church court has been lawfully convened; and for one hundred and eight years of this period, from 1685 to 1793, the reformed religion was prohibited by law and persecuted unto blood in that deluded land. In 1814 Napoleon restored this church of martyrs to the condition essentially in which it now stands; for the freedom of religion secured by the charter of 1831, has proved, under the growing influence of popery in France, a mere illusion. At present, the ruling elders of the French churches are created by the civil law, being a certain number of persons in each church, who pay the most taxes to the state; and the ordinations of its ministers are performed by meetings of ministers convened spontaneously for this purpose, as necessity requires: so that it is virtually, and has been for about two centuries past, a Presbyterian church, robbed of the power of setting up or continuing the regular administration of its affairs. Would to God, that its day of deliverance had come; and until it does come, let the Reformed world remember these dear brethren in bonds, and unitedly plead their glorious cause at the throne of our common Saviour.

I pass next to the most remarkable confession to which the Reformation gave birth; the one which undoubtedly deserves to be called more emphatically the *confession of the Reformed churches*, than any other composed during the sixteenth century. At a period of great difficulty and doubt, when the hatred of the papists burned with intense fury, and the bitterness of the Lutheran section of the Protestants against those who followed Zwingle and Calvin, was excited to a degree that seems to us now, inconceivable; the Confession commonly called the *second or latter Helvetic Confession*, drawn up by *Henry Bullinger of Zurich*, and put forth under the auspices of the Elector Palatine, Frederick, then the chief protector of the Reformed, was, during the year 1566 adopted by all the churches of the Helvetic Confederation, with those of their allies and dependencies, embracing Geneva, which did not then form a part of the confederacy, but whose national church, with Theodore Beza at its head, subscribed this Confession. During the same and the following year, the church of Scotland, the churches of Poland, of Hungary, and in general the body of the Reformed throughout Europe, adhered to this Confession, as embodying the grand peculiarities by which they were separated from the Lutherans on the one hand, and still more widely from the papists on the other.* The xviii. chapter of this Confession treats, "*Of the ministers of the church, and their institution and offices*;" and occupies seven pretty closely printed pages. After a page and upwards of precedent matter, it treats of the "*Ministers of the New Testament*;" which it says, "are called Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Bishops, Presbyters, Pastors, and Doctors;" which, defining in that order, it says of *Bishops*, "they are inspectors and overseers of the church, who dispense food and necessities to the church;" of *Presbyters*, "they are Elders (*seniores*) and as it were senators and fathers of the church, governing it with wholesome counsel;" of *Pastors*, "they keep the fold of the Lord, and provide for it necessary things;" of *Doctors*, "they instruct, and teach true faith and piety." And the conclusion is, that these are the present ministers of the church, and those their names. A little further on, the subject treated is, "*That ministers are to be called and*;" they are to be chosen "by the church, or by

the Confession itself, pp. 462—536 of Niemeyer's

those deputed for this purpose by the church;"—*scilicet* persons only as are described in 1 Tim. iii., and in Tit. i., are to be chosen. "*Et qui electi sunt, ordinentur senioribus cum orationibus publicis, et impositione manuum: And those who are chosen, ought to be ordained by Elders, with public prayers, and imposition of hands.*" (pp. 507—8). Towards the end of the chapter, Discipline in general, and Discipline amongst ministers is treated; and then Synods incidentally, in which "the life and doctrine of ministers ought to be diligently required into. Those who sin are to be reprehended by the Elders (*senioribus*), and brought back to the way, they are curable, or *deposed* . . . if they are incurable. (p. 512). Now, sir, according to the doctrine of the Reformed churches in general, are there any officers whose duty it is to be church governors? In your own constitution you say there are, and that their office is to rule—and their name is Ruling Elders. (Form of Gov. ch. v.) And this renowned Confession bears you out. Is there any Presbyterian church which holds that there is a class of ruling officers whose special duty it is to be senators, governing the church—and these officers are not Elders? If there is, tell us its name.—But here we have amongst the permanent officers of the church, a class set down, called from the Greek *Presbyters*, from the Latin *Seniors*, in English *Elders*, who are the special governors of the church; and to whom, by the Confession, it specially appertains to ordain all ministers, and that with imposition of hands. This is just the doctrine which I have endeavoured to set forth: *that the power of ordination is in church rulers*,—and therefore in *all Elders*, because Elder and ruler are essentially one. And as if to put the matter out of dispute, the subject is closed with the declaration that *the who depose and they who ordain are the same*.[†] When I remember that this Confession had the immortal names of *Knox, Beza, and Bullinger* subscribe to it, I am consoled under the deep affliction of not being able to agree with gentlemen, whose acquaintance with the repositories of truths which many think ought to decide these questions, has at length extended to sight of the books; and whose discrimination has led them to argue, as if the order of the church of God depended on the distinction between the *quorum* of a Presbytery and the Presbytery itself.

It would be easy to establish the same doctrine from other Confessions—for example those of the Bohemian churches, of 1535 and of 1575, and various Professions of the Polish and Lithuanian churches of the following century. I pass however to the Kirk of Scotland. In the first and many succeeding General Assemblies of that Kirk, the great majority of the members were Ruling Elders; indeed in 1560, when the first one of these appear to have been only twelve Reformed preachers in the whole kingdom.† By the First Book of Discipline which was adopted in 1561, imposition of hands in ordination was, as we have already seen, declared to be unnecessary; and for about twenty years seems not to have been used. It is also true that during this period there was not in all Scotland a single Pre-

* See the whole subject of Imposition of hands largely treated by Selden in his Commentary on Eutychius, see in Vol. II. pp. 435—44 of his works. See also de Moor in Johan. Marek, cap. xxxiii. De Regimine Ecc. sec. 16. A worthy old drudge (de Moor) arguing that Elders and Pastors ought not to be ordained with imposition of hands says, quoting Spanheim, "Nec satis esse credit pro dignitate et prerogativa Ministerii sacri, si eodem quo ipse pastori ritu rusticelli sæpe et cerdones et idiotæ inaugurentur." Tom. vi. p. 330. Certainly if the Dutch ministers considered it disgraceful that farmers, tradesmen, and nurses should be ordained by the same rite they were; it is quite natural that American ministers should consider it an impeachment of their dignity and prerogative to have

bytery, according to our ideas of such a court, nor any thing exactly answering to it.* It is not important to us now to inquire how far these defects might impair the *regularity* of ordinations considered merely as to their form, since I should hope no one here would venture to contend that their substantial *validity* could be in any degree affected by them. Yet is it obvious that in such a condition, ordinations, as now in France, must have been performed in some way which it would puzzle sticklers of various descriptions to bring within the rules of their respective theories. Perhaps they ordained by Synods—which indeed are but Presbyteries at last; and having, in primitive times, been only occasional and extraordinary, have for several centuries been stated and ordinary courts. Perhaps they did it by a sort of parochial presbytery, or church session of some collegiate charge, or some joint meeting of two or three adjacent congregations, by the whole body of ministers and all the Elders of them, which was a sort of model out of which the “Elderships” of the Second Book of Discipline grew; and if they did, they had, if we dare credit learned men, the example of all primitive antiquity†—if not of the churches founded by the apostles themselves, if their order is rightly expounded by the Westminster Assembly;‡ for that venerable Synod so far from denying has indeed by implication, if not in terms, admitted, strange as the doctrine may sound to this Synod, that any single congregation that cannot conveniently associate may assume to itself all and sole power in ordination—though this is a proceeding very requisite to be avoided, when it can be conveniently.§ Perhaps they ordained by the General Assembly itself: we know certainly that the time honoured Assembly of 1638, did, *ex mero motu*, in open session, depose two Archbishops and four Prelatic Bishops; and that various assemblies since, have exercised powers commonly allowed to go along with the power to ordain. Or possibly they ordained by committees of church courts, up even to the Assembly; for I find that the Assemblies of 1642 and 43, did both empower a committee sent to Ireland “to try and ordain such as shall be found qualified for the Ministry.”|| And it is not a little remarkable that the “Petition of the Distressed Professors in Ireland,” which led to these appointments, should have contained a prophecy, which, at the end of two centuries, is fulfilled before our eyes. “The day may come”—say these faithful men, hoping against hope in the midst of the ruin of their church and the desolation of their country, brought about by the papal massacre of 1641—“the day may come, when a General Assembly in this land may return to you the first fruits of thanks, for the plants of your free gift.”¶ The day has come, sir: and nobly has the Church of Ireland redeemed the obligations of this ancient pledge. As I have allowed myself to be seduced into this train of observation, I may as well say, in the same connexion, that my views upon the whole question to which they relate, will be entirely mistaken, if any one supposes that I call in question ordinations performed in either of the ways referred to; I do not. What I contend for is, that ordination is in the hands of all such as have rule in the church—that regularly this power is to be exercised by church assemblies in which those rulers sit—and that ruling elders cannot be deprived of their part in this act of authority, when they are present and

members of the court. It is true, I have, on a previous day, attempted to prove that according to our written law there can be no Presbytery in our church without the presence of Ruling Elders, and that this law is good and right, in a settled Church state: and it plainly follows from that argument, that if our Presbyteries cannot constitute, manifestly they cannot ordain, in the absence of Ruling Elders. But the converse does not follow: for Ruling Elders might not be indispensable to the constitution of the court, and yet it might be a gross outrage upon law, upon truth, and upon propriety, to make them stand aside as incompetent—when they are present as members: and it is upon this obvious distinction, that I have thought it worth while to argue this question, after the decisive vote of the Synod against the former minute.

The *Second Book of Discipline* put the whole subject of church order and discipline in the clearest possible light. Spiritual authority, intrusted by God through Christ to his gathered church, and having its ground in the word of God, is to be executed by those to whom the Government of the Church is, by a lawful calling, committed: this authority is divided into *potestas ordinis* and *potestas jurisdictionis*, the *several* and the *joint* powers of which I have had occasion to make such frequent mention, both of which are exercised by men only in the way of a ministry under, and a service for, Christ the Lord. (*See ch. I. throughout.*) The second chapter treats at large of the powers of the spiritual commonwealth as they are divided into “doctrine, discipline, and distribution,” and committed to “the ministers or preachers, elders or governors, and deacons or distributors”—all of whom are “called by a general word, ministers of the Kirk:” and the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary offices is pointed out, and “the four ordinary functions or offices in the Kirk,” are set down as “the office of the Pastor, minister or bishop—the doctor—the *Presbyter or Elder*, and the Deacon.” The third chapter treats of the mode of admitting persons who bear ecclesiastical functions to their office;—from which having before cited such passages as show the necessity of calling and ordination, and what they are, it need be only repeated here, as involving the immediate point at issue, that “the ceremonies of ordination are fasting, earnest prayer, and *imposition of the hands of the eldership.*” The only question then is, to ascertain who this “*eldership*” is: and here there is no room for mistake, since the VII chapter treats expressly “of Elderships, Assemblies, and Discipline.” “Elderships and Assemblies are commonly constituted of pastors, doctors, and such as we commonly call elders:” (Sec. 1.) “Assemblies are of four sorts, . . . they are of particular Kirks one or more, or of a province, or of a whole nation, or of all and divers nations professing one Jesus Christ,” (Sec. 2.) In Sec. 14 it is said, that by “the elders of the particular congregations, we mean not that every particular parish-kirk can or may have their own particular *elderships*, especially in landward; but we think three, four, more or fewer particular kirks may have one *eldership* common to them all, to judge their ecclesiastical causes.” The power of *election* of all who bear ecclesiastical charges within the bounds of particular elderships—and also their *deposition*—belongs to them, constituted of many pastors and elders as just expressed (Sec. 21 and 22.) “Provincial Assemblies we call lawful conventions of the pastors, doctors, and other elders of a province, &c;” (Sec. 25) and they also have “power to depose office bearers of that province, &c;” (Sec. 28) and all other powers of the particular Elderships. (Sec. 29.) The General Assembly is the convention of all the Kirks of the realm, and seems to have the amplest powers belonging to them.” (Sec. 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100.)

* See Baillie's Letters, (edition of 1842) Vol. II. p. 505, and p. 182, and Hetherington, p. 182.

† Sir Peter King's Inquiry into the Primitive Church, ch. iv.

‡ See its chapter headed “of Classical Assemblies.”

§ Form of Gov. of the Westminster Assem., third paragraph of the division entitled “Touching the power of ordi-

and to celebrate marriages"—but that "*being an elder*, as is said, he should assist the pastor in the government of the kirk, and concur with the elders his brethren, in all assemblies," (ch. V. sec. 5 and 6.) The pastors are said to be called "presbyters or seniors, for the gravity in manners which they ought to have in taking care of their spiritual government." (ch. IV. sec. 7.) And of elders it is said, "Their *principal office* is, to hold assemblies with the pastors and doctors, who are also of their number," (ch. VI. last section.) There is no direct statement in the instrument as to *which* eldership, it especially appertains to ordain all persons who bear ecclesiastical functions: perhaps, it might by its terms appertain to every church Assembly lawfully called and constituted. But the evident burden of the whole places this power in the hands of the *particular eldership*. But let that be as it may; seeing that Elders with pastors, and doctors constitute them all; seeing that it is the principal duty of the elder to hold assemblies in which both pastors and doctors unite, not because they are pastors or doctors, but because they also are elders; seeing that imposition of hands is by the *eldership*; seeing that the ordination of pastors, doctors, elders and deacons, is put on the same general ground; seeing there is no intimation of an ordination in any other manner; and seeing that elders—seniors, are emphatically Presbyters; it does seem to me to be the very height of absurdity and an absolute contempt of common sense, for any one to contend, that according to the principles and the very terms of this instrument, Ruling Elders are not permitted to impose hands in the ordination of ministers of the word.

I proceed to the Standards of the Westminster Assembly—the most noble monument of the seventeenth century. That I may avoid the imminent danger of expatiating upon a subject so precious and so glorious, as that furnished by the labours of this immortal body; I will confine myself strictly to the point at issue. At least three of its formularies throw light upon it. These are its *Directory for Ordination*, *Directory for Church Government*, and *Confession of Faith*; which, according to *Hetherington** were presented to the English Parliament, the first on the 20th April 1644, the second about the middle of November 1644, and the third on the 3d of December 1646; a sequence which it is of some consequence to observe. The citations I shall make from these three instruments, are from the copies contained in *Duncan's Collections*, edition of 1771. In the first of the three instruments it is declared that "Every minister of the word is to be ordained by imposition of hands, and prayer with fasting, by those preaching Presbyters to whom it doth belong." (Duncan, p. 176.) It is added that he ought, when ordained, to be assigned to some particular church or other ministerial charge; and that he ought to be examined and approved by those who ordain him. (p. 177.) This, if it is to be taken without further examination of the sentiments of the body, is in the last statement exactly in accordance with our system; in the second principle it is utterly contrary to our whole practice; and in the first, and as gentlemen on the other side suppose conclusive definition, it requires us to go much further than has yet been contended for; for not only imposition of hands, but ordination itself is explicitly declared to belong to "preaching presbyters." Is that, sir, the doctrine of our church? If not, let us beware. As yet they only quote this Directory to prove that imposition of hands belongs to "preaching elders;" how long will it be before they quote it to prove—what it plainly asserts,—that ordination also belongs to them? As we proceed we find this definition, "The power of *ordering* the *whole work* of ordination is in the *whole* Presbytery;" and a few paragraphs afterwards, it is repeated that "The preaching

presbyters . . . are those to whom the imposition of hands doth appertain." (p. 177). The business of the *Presbytery* is only to *order the work* of ordination,—and in this *the whole* Presbytery must act; but as above defined and here again, the *preaching presbyters* must *ordain*. I demand again, sir, is this our system? The two heads of *Doctrine* and *Power*, under which the foregoing statements occur, are then thrown together; and under the 11th and 12th sections of this united head we have these two important propositions, "In *extraordinary cases something extraordinary may be done*." ". . . *There is at this time . . . an extraordinary occasion for a way of ordination for the present supply of ministers*." (p. 179). True enough, sir; but it sets the whole matter on a new foundation. Are we in a state of civil war? Have we no church courts in America, as there was not one in England when this Directory was drawn up? Do our fifteen hundred ministers and two thousand churches, furnish no *present supply* of persons to constitute a single Presbytery? If not, there is indeed "*something extraordinary*"—and we may, perhaps, lawfully do the extraordinary things allowed by our last Assembly. Next comes the practical detail, which is minute, and in most respects admirable. "The Presbytery shall come to the place, or *at least* three or four ministers of the word shall be sent thither from the Presbytery, &c." (p. 181). "The Presbytery, or the ministers sent from them *for ordination*, shall solemnly set him apart . . . by laying their hands on him." (p. 182). "In the *present exigencies when we cannot have any Presbytery formed up to their whole power and work*"—thus it concludes,—adding a mournful description of the times;—and therefore recommends that "some godly ministers in or about the city of London, be designed by *public authority*"—to ordain ministers. (p. 184). What public authority? The Long Parliament, of course, for that time, and all other civil authorities in all other places, when the like necessities justify it. Is this our system, sir? But, passing this by, is it not obvious, that we have in these extracts four several modes of ordination? Namely, 1. by ministers spontaneously met; 2. by Presbytery, not fully formed; 3. by committee of ministers sent from Presbytery; 4. by a permanent committee of ministers appointed by the state. And is it not equally manifest, that the whole Directory contemplates the extraordinary posture of affairs then actually existing around them, to meet which the Parliament asked the advice of the Assembly, and to provide for which, in the best manner they could under the circumstances, they responded, in this Directory?—During the seven months which elapsed between the sending up of this Directory for Ordination, to the Parliament, and the giving in of the Directory for Church Government, the subjects most fully discussed in the Synod were the officers and the assemblies of the Church; and the whole ground covered by the Independent and the Erastian Controversy was thoroughly examined. In the Directory for Government therefore we have the more matured decisions of the body; their advice, for a permanent and not for an extraordinary church state; and in it, we have every principle I could desire in the maintenance of my present argument. We have the supreme headship of the Lord Jesus clearly asserted; the *jus divinum* of church government distinctly held forth; that government in the hands of Assemblies and those assemblies composed of officers, all instituted by Christ; those officers declared to be teaching and ruling elders; the classical Assembly, which is our Presbytery, defined to consist "of ministers of the word and such other public officers as are agreeable to and warranted by the word of God to be church governors," (Duncan, p. 173) and many congregations defined to be under this "*Presbyterial government*." (p. 174). Here, sir, is every thing. The power of

of jurisdiction or that of order: it must be a joint or it must be a several power. If the Westminster Assembly held in its matured judgment, with all the reformed churches of the world, that this power is where the regimen of the church is,—in Bishops if the regimen is in them according to the Prelatists,—in the Brotherhood if the regimen is in them according to the Independents,—in Pastors if the regimen is in them according to Calvin,—in the Presbyters of each congregation if the regimen is in them according to Owen,—in Assemblies if the regimen is in them according to the general doctrine of Presbyterianism; then by defining doubly that elders are the governors of the church, and that they form *jure divino*, a part of the governing assemblies,—they decide, *ex vi termini*, that they must unite in ordinations. But, if they held with the Papists, that ordination appertains to the power of order, and is a sacrament in the proper sense, then having adopted the absurdity, which upon this hypothesis it obviously is, that a Presbytery could ordain at all,—which it could no more do than it could preach or baptize as a Presbytery—still the elder must upon the hypothesis, have power to ordain; for he is defined to be *by order*, entitled *jure divino* to membership in the body, to which, *by order*, ordination appertains. That is, he is *in ordine*, of the Presbyters; he is of their *ordo*; he can aid—*ordinare*—that is in putting another person into the *order* of Presbyters. So that these principles and definitions cannot stand, without, upon every conceivable hypothesis, drawing after them one of two consequences; namely, that an elder is no elder, which is absurd—or that, when a member of the ordaining body he can impose hands in all ordinations.—At the end of more than two years and a half from the completion of the Directory for ordination, the assembly finished its noble Confession of Faith. In the 6th sec. of its 1st ch., it declares that the word of God is our complete rule of belief; and thus sends us at once to it, for our church order, and stamps with its reprobation the outcry about the practice of the church. Or if it supposed, contrary to its decisions, that the points now discussed are only matters common to human actions and societies; in that case, it bids us go to the light of nature, Christian prudence and the general rules of the word; neither of which, I believe, sir, will carry us very far in the theory that ordination is more or less than an act of solemn ecclesiastical authority, by which the church through her ordinary tribunals, confesses, attests, and records a calling which is, not of her, but of God. In the 3d section of ch. xxv. it declares that the *ministry*—all the official servants of Christ in the church,—as well as the oracles and ordinances of God, were given by Christ to the Catholic visible church; a glorious truth. The church has servants—but on earth she has no masters—no fathers—no head. The offices are appointed of Christ; the men qualified to fill them, are not begotten from father to son, as was the Aaronic priesthood—nor fitted by a corporate descent as contended for by prelatists,—nor magically and indelibly stamped by means of incantations after the dreams of Rome;—but they are chosen, anointed, and sent of God; and the spouse of the Lamb, when she discerns the evidence of their heavenly mission, seals it by her willing and joyful attestation. Strange work would it be, indeed, if three deserters of the ministry could discern Christ's work more clearly, and attest it more faithfully, and seal it more precisely to the church—than the whole multitude of our ruling elders put together. In sec. 1 and 2 of ch. xxx. the doctrine laid down is, that the divinely ordered government of the church in the hands of divinely instituted church-officers, has been invested with the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and its power to open the kingdom to penitent

ing at the ordination of ministers, how is it possible for them to open the kingdom by sending forth a ministry of the gospel? And thus their power with these keys, in the way of mercy, is simply to relieve backsliders from censures; but to go beyond that, is—*ultra vires*. Why, sir, are elders church officers, forming any part of the church government? Then they are of those who send ministers: and then if any part of the vocation or mission of any part of the ministry, is imposition of hands, they must impose hands; or they must lay down the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And here, sir,—though other portions of this confession are equally clear to my purpose—I am content to rest the argument as to these standards. The conclusion is as affecting as it is obvious: let the elder surrender his office, or let him vindicate its sacred rights and duties. If his office is of man, he has no warrant to be here; if it is of God, let him beware how he permits it to be shorn and dishonoured in his hands. I speak, sir, as one who ought to know the heart both of the ruling and the teaching elder; for I have served, however unworthily, in each class. I think I speak—I feel—with a profound impartiality—when I say there is no danger in our day of the ruling elders engrossing the peculiar functions of the teaching elders; but that there is an imminent hazard of the opposite result. Alas! sir, when you shall have settled it as the law of our church that jurisdiction in general is complete without ruling elders—and the right of ordination in particular is irrespective of them; there will remain little else to settle in order to divest them of all real authority in the assemblies of the church.*

The effect of the decisions at Westminster upon the previously existing standards of the Kirk of Scotland, which is the next point to be considered, was much less than is commonly supposed. It is well known that "unity and uniformity in religion amongst the Kirks of Christ in the three kingdoms" of England, Scotland and Ireland, "was propounded as a main article of the Large Treaty:" and was "afterward with greater strength and maturity, revived in the solemn league and covenant" by which, all the parties stood, "straitly obliged to endeavour the nearest uniformity in one form of church Government, Directory of Worship, Confession of Faith and form of Catechising." The Scottish Assembly of 1645, in its act of Feb. 3, for establishing the Westminster Directory for the public worship of God—from which act I have made the preceding quotations, distinctly asserts that the obtaining of this unity and uniformity was "in point of conscience the chief motive and end of our adventuring upon manifold and great hazards, for quenching the devouring flame of the present unnatural and bloody war in England, though to the weakening of this kingdom, within itself, and the advantage of the enemy which hath invaded it, accounting nothing too dear to us, so that this our joy be fulfilled."† In point of fact, the uniformity so ardently desired was never attained, however great may have been the sacrifices and even changes which Scotland was willing to make in its pursuit; and until it should be attained all the acts of the Scottish Assembly had only a provisional force, dependent upon that event—and not one of them repealed any existing standard of the Kirk. In the very act cited above, it is provided that even in regard to this

* They who desire to go behind the record and examine the process by which the Assembly at Westminster arrived at the conclusions contained in their authorized standards—will find ample materials in the XIII. Vol. of Lightfoot's Works, the II. Vol. of Baillie's Letters, the III. Vol. of Neal's History of the Puritans, Hetherington's Hist. of the West. Assem., &c. &c. Upon mature examination of the whole case, I feel no difficulty in saying, that I think I shall be able to maintain the ground here asserted by the following examina

Directory for Worship which was fully set up by law in England—the Books of Discipline and even the acts of Assembly should receive no prejudice in such particulars as were not otherwise ordered in the Directory; and in regard to two points touching the Lord's supper—namely, coming to the table or not—and the distribution of the elements by the minister or by the communicants amongst themselves—the doctrine of the Directory is denied. In the Act of Assembly of August 27, 1647, approving the Confession of Faith,* the doctrine of the Confession is denied in one important particular, and its silence in another is noted with protestation. Both these points throw light on the question now under discussion. In ch. xxxi. article 2 of the Confession, a power is conceded to the civil magistrates to call Synods; and to "ministers of Christ, of themselves, by virtue of their office," to hold them: but the Scottish Assembly says, expressly, these doctrines are true, "only of Kirks not settled or constituted in point of government," and that "neither of these ought to be done in Kirks constituted and settled;" for in them, the magistrate may consult the regular church courts, which are free to assemble and constitute "of ministers and ruling elders meeting upon delegation from their churches." The same principle, manifestly controls every sort of church court, which by this comprehensive and well considered caveat, can neither meet nor act—and of course can not ordain, except they be composed of ministers and elders, and meet by delegation from their churches. It is worthy of all consideration that the doctrine of this part of the Westminster Confession, explained away by the Church of Scotland, was totally rejected by our Church, and the whole article containing it omitted, as will be seen on comparing the two Confessions. The other point called in question in the adopting act of the Scottish Church, relates to the supposed want of sufficient explicitness in the Confession, on the subjects "of ecclesiastical officers and assemblies"—which, adds the act, "shall be no prejudice to the truth of Christ in these particulars to be expressed fully in the *Directory for Government*." This act, I have before said, was adopted in August, 1647; but on the 10th of February, 1645, two years and a half before, an act was passed, "approving the propositions concerning Kirk Government and ordination of ministers"†—the latter of which had been laid before the Parliament of England, in April, and the former in November, 1644, as I have already shown. This act of 1645 has also its caveats; first, it denies the doctrine taught by the Westminster Synod, that Doctors or Teachers have the power of administering the sacraments; secondly, "as also of the distinct rights and interests of *Presbyteries and people in the calling of ministers*," it protests, that its present approval "shall be no ways prejudicial to further discussion and examination;" and thirdly, the whole result is to depend on the act that this Westminster Directory both for Government and Ordination, "shall be ratified, without any substantial alteration by an Ordinance of the Honourable houses of the Parliament of England." This event never happened, according to the terms of this act; and the Scottish Kirk was so far from considering its work ended by this committal, that we find the Assemblies of 1646, 1647, 1648, and 1649, successively occupied with earnest endeavours to perfect that part of the covenanted uniformity which related to church government; and in the last named year, after the Westminster Assembly had finally dispersed, a separate "Directory for Election of Ministers" was adopted.‡ By this Scottish Directory of 1649, the whole superintendence and work of calling, placing, admitting, and ordaining ministers, is plainly and expressly laid upon the *Presbytery*,—the

Presbytery of the Scottish standards; and not a word is said of the extraordinary methods, allowable because of the extraordinary times, held forth in the Westminster Directory for Ordination. None here, sir, can be ignorant of the calamities, which for so long a period, commencing about the time to which this examination has brought us, overwhelmed the Church of Scotland. The events which followed the execution of Charles I. and the rise of Cromwell to supreme power; the sad disorders attendant upon the controversy between the Protestors and the Resolutioners, the Covenanters and the Malignants; the long intervals during which the higher judicatories of the church were not permitted to assemble;§ the frightful persecution under Charles II; the woful condition of the church under the Revolution Settlement under William and Mary, and the corrupting influence of the acts of comprehension;‡ the subjugation of the church to the civil government during the reign of Queen Anne, and the long and fatal supremacy of the moderate party;‡ these sad events, placed the Church of Scotland, from 1650 down to 1833, a period of 183 years, in a position which renders her written testimony valueless compared with her early and glorious acts; and gives to all arguments drawn from her practice during her subjugated, her suffering, and her corrupted periods, an air of bitter irony or deliberate reproach. The illustrious men, who in 1843 have stood for the ancient and sacred liberties of the Scottish Church, are worthy of our sympathy, admiration and love; but even they see but dimly many truths which have been familiar to our church for a century and a half, and have, if I may say it with becoming modesty, more need, by far, to learn of her, than she of them, many things touching questions like those it has been my duty to submit to this Synod.

We are now brought to the last link in the chain of this protracted deduction. During the latter part of seventeenth century and the first years of the eighteenth, the Presbyterian emigrants to this continent began to gather themselves into those societies which formed the nucleus of our present wide spread organization. We have the minutes of our first Presbytery as far back as the year 1706. Upon a careful examination of the Volume of Records published by our Board of Publication, which as you know, sir, contains the proceedings of this Presbytery up to 1717, and from that time onward to 1738 the proceedings of our first Synod up to the organization of the General Assembly; I find repeated declarations of the faith of the church. To mention no others, I may refer to the years 1729, 1736, 1741, 1745, 1751, 1758, 1786, and 1788,§ as having been signalized by very formal declarations in this regard, made under various circumstances of great importance and solemnity. On all these occasions the Westminster standards are referred to as containing, substantially, the faith of the church both as to doctrine and order; but they are always so spoken of as to show that it was those standards as connected with and controlled by the standards and acts of the Church of Scotland, to which allusion was had; and, generally, so as to be taken rather substantially than rigidly as the standards of the American Presbyterian Church. Though approved by the Church of Scotland, the Westminster standards did not supersede in that church, her own more ancient plat-

* The Assembly of 1690 was the first regular and legal one that had assembled for about forty years: Hetherington, Hist. Church of Scotland, p. 554.

† For a clear account of the state of the Kirk at the period of the Revolution of 1688, and the influence of the settlement then, see Hetherington's History of the Church of Scotland, pp. 544 and 555—60.

‡ For the general character of Moderatism, and its influence upon the Kirk and the Eldership, see Hetherington, Hist. Ch. Scotland, pp. 703—4, and 669—70.

§ See these Minutes, pp. 92, 105, 155, 159, and 229, 286.

* See the Act p. 351—3, of printed Acts of the Church of Scotland.

† See it in the printed Acts, pp. 269—70.

forms of faith, order, and discipline, which were made the basis of her most formal acts and of her legal settlement as a national church, once and again—long after the Westminster Assembly had been dissolved and the Presbyterian Church of England had been subverted. These are important facts, not vital to my present argument, but needful to be borne in mind in order to a correct understanding of the whole subject. Our early Presbyterian ministers and population, were chiefly from Ireland and Scotland; they came bearing with them the standards of the Scottish Church, and they came, so far as they were Scotch, from the bosom of that church, virtually disorganised under Cromwell—persecuted almost to extermination by Charles II—corrupted by the revolution settlement—or torpid under the sway of Moderatism; and they brought with them an ecclesiastical practice modified by all these adverse circumstances. Their condition here was, moreover, in all respects extraordinary, and they were obliged to do as they could, rather than as they would have preferred; a fact recognized by themselves in every movement during the first ninety years of their existence as an organized church, up to the formation of our present constitution. I do not, therefore, wonder to see in their records a gradual development of the principles which now distinguish our system; a continual strengthening of the great truths of Presbyterianism; a steady movement from a condition of incipient life and irregular action, upwards to a firm, settled, and well ordered strength—such as the careful student cannot fail to discern as he traces them from 1706 to 1788. From the beginning we find no recognition of that principle of the Westminster Directory for Ordination, that the civil power could designate a standing body of ministers to ordain; none of that which teaches that a Presbytery imperfectly constituted may ordain; none of that which asserts that it appertains especially to the ministers of the word to impose hands; none of that which declares that ministers casually met may regularly ordain. The first ordination recorded is one by the Presbytery itself; but the mode afterwards practised seems to have been by a committee of ministers appointed by the Presbytery, or by the Synod. If either branch of this fact should be thought important, it may diminish the significance of the exclusion of Ruling Elders from these ordaining committees to know that it does not appear that any Ruling Elder was ever appointed on any sort of committee during those eleven years whose records we have, although it is certain they sat in every Presbytery, except the first, and highly probable they sat in it;* and the influence of ordination by committee upon the present question is altogether with me—for the constitution which abolished the practice, can hardly be supposed to confirm the principle on which that practice rested. As soon as we find the Synod called to consider questions connected with ordination, we find the distinctive principles of the Scotch, and not those attributed to the Westminster, standards, every where taken for granted; ordination by church courts, and by committees appointed by them—concurrent powers of Presbyteries and Synods in ordination; but nothing at all about assemblies of ministers by virtue of their office ordaining other ministers—nothing of a permanent body of ministers distinct from a church court or independent of it, appointed either by civil or ecclesiastical authority for this purpose. As we advance we find the present features of our system more clearly developed; the claims of the Presbytery as the proper ordaining body distinctly asserted, and even vindicated as exclusive,

* The commencement of the old MS. record is lost; the

and virtually conceded by the Synod.* At length we come to the termination of what may be called the forming state of our church. In the year 1785 a large committee at the head of which was the great *John Witherspoon*, and amongst whose members were the leading men who had for years before represented what some may call extreme Presbyterian opinions, was appointed to "take into consideration the constitution of the church of Scotland and other Protestant churches, and agreeably to the general principles of Presbyterian government, compile a system of General rules for the government of the Synod, and the several Presbyteries under their inspection, and the people in their communion." During the years 1786, 1787, and 1788, this subject occupied the earnest attention of the church, the Presbyteries and the Synod; and at length resulted in the formation of our present Form of Government and Discipline. Synchronously, the subjects of the Confession of Faith, the Catechisms, the Directory for public worship, the division of the Synod and the erection of the General Assembly, were happily concluded; and the church placed in the condition which she has occupied till the present time.† Here, sir, is our system. A system compiled by men of great learning and abilities—men known in this and other countries for their devotion to the Presbyterianism of the sixteenth and seventeenth, rather than that of the eighteenth century: a system founded upon the great and general principles of Presbyterian government—with all the light which a thorough survey of the state and laws of all Protestant churches could elicit, and especially modeled with a reverent consideration of "the constitution of the church of Scotland;" a system pondered during years of careful study and observation and embodying the ripe fruits of the experience of almost a century of successful effort in new and extraordinary circumstances, by a church wonderfully raised up of God in this new world; and at last adopted with a common consent, as a rule revealed of God, illustrated and confirmed by an immense experience, and commended by all the lights of reason and knowledge. Sir, it is a glorious system—worthy to be better known by those who profess it—to be more carefully observed by those who administer it.

So far as the provisions of this Form of Government bear upon the present question, I have already largely expounded them. It only remains to compare its actual definitions with those of the various platforms which I have passed in review, and especially with those of the Westminster Assembly and the church of Scotland. To do this in detail would require much time, and seems to be needless. Every form of expression found in the Forms of Government adopted by other churches, which can be tortured into a rejection of Ruling Elders from the work of ordination, is excluded from ours. Every principle which looks in that direction is omitted. Every form of words needful to invest them with this authority is inserted—and that not unfrequently in the place of words more or less doubtful in other forms, or where other forms are silent. Every principle upon which this divine right reposes is set forth with perfect distinctness. If it belongs to the great and general principles of Presbyterian government that ordination is in the hands of church rulers, then ordination is here put into their hands; for upon those principles this constitution was avowedly formed. If it was ever taught by

* See a remarkable instance on pp. 443—5 of printed Records, year 1773, growing out of the question of the reception of foreign ministers. Many ministers with *Francis Allison* at their head call "the duties of ordaining and admitting ministers"—"essential rights" of Presbytery: others with *Matthew Wilson* at their head, say these powers belong only to Presbytery: others headed by *Dr. Rodgers*, simply dissent from it.

other Protestant churches,—if it was ever held by the church of Scotland—if it belongs to the church order divinely revealed—if it can be vindicated from the general rules of the word: then upon all and upon each of these conditions—it must be found here; for so did our fathers compile this instrument and set up this government. Yes, sir, it is here. And the more thoroughly we comprehend the whole subject—the more largely we contemplate the principles which govern the case—the more minutely we examine the opinions and the actions of past generations—the more manifest it is that in the nature of the case it cannot be otherwise. Why, sir, upon the very arguments most pressed on the other side, and upon those principles considered the most forcible against my view of the subject; it seems to me that it is only necessary to state the matter plainly in order to end the dispute. Gentlemen say, it was the habit of our church to ordain by a committee of ministers only, for nearly a century: grant it,—and the answer is that half a century ago this practice, which never had law to support it, was prohibited. Now, sir, how far does such a state of the case go to prove, that ministers only ought to ordain? Gentlemen contend that by the definitions of the Westminster Synod—it belongs to teaching elders to impose hands in the ordination of other teaching elders, and that the standards of that Synod are essentially ours; grant it—and grant even that these definitions were meant to exclude ruling elders, to apply to a permanent and not to an extraordinary church state, and that the standards containing them were strictly adopted, as they stood, by our early church—neither of which propositions can be proved; and the answer is, that more than fifty years ago our church upon mature examination adopted a constitution, which declares that the imposition of hands in such ordinations is in—not the teaching elders—but the Presbytery, and that the Presbytery is composed—not of teaching elders, but of teaching and ruling elders. And how far, sir, does this state of the case go towards excluding ruling elders from the exercise of the disputed power? Why sir, look at this logic. When ordination was by committee, ministers only ordained; now, the law requires ordination to be by Presbytery composed of ministers and elders: therefore, ministers only must still ordain! Again: The Westminster Directory says the *Preaching Presbytery* must impose hands in ordination; our constitution says the *Presbytery* must do it, and says moreover the Presbytery is composed of ministers and ruling elders: therefore, the ruling elders must not impose hands! Truly, sir, we are fallen upon disjointed times, when a learned ministry is carried away by fallacies like these.

Moderator, there are two things which I have sought, in vain, throughout the entire history of Christianity. I can find no pure prelatical church; I can find no Presbyterian church that continued pure, without a pure and honoured eldership. Sir, these are portentous truths: or if I err in regard to them, I will bow in thankful docility to any one, who will condescend to set me right—and thus remove a frightful danger from the church of Christ. Prelacy, sir! Look at the bloody track of the church of Rome: look at the centuries of deadness and superstition which have blasted the Greek and the Oriental churches: look at the whole history of Anglican and Anglo-American Episcopacy, its worldliness, its formality, its hereditary subjugation to an unconverted ministry, rendered more glaring, by a very small remnant of God's dear children who have been always found in her to save the whole mass from putrefaction.

a church kept pure almost without ministers of the word, for years—nay for generations: look at the history of the Covenanters—since 1660. But can you show me any church of ours, or any church at all which continued long pure without a pure and honoured eldership? All the glory and all the spiritual power of Calvin and of Geneva—have ended in an Arrian church. Centuries of persecution found the church of France, at their close, a Socinian church. In the Scottish church the whole reign of Moderatism has been attended with a subjugated and an unconverted eldership. In England, without an eldership to breast the storm of the restoration, the puritan churches perish like Jonah's gourd. In our own land the period of strength and of the power of sound doctrine in the churches of New England, was the period of their elderships; and since they passed away, every absurd and idle thing has found a resting place in the churches the pilgrims. In our very bosom, for six and thirty years, the churches of the *plan of union*—the church of committee-men, were the nursery of every disorder and when the time of reform came by the good hand of our God over us—it was by the power of the elders most emphatically, that it was accomplished—and was the region without a pure and an honoured eldership that having fallen from the truth, fell away from the church. Oh! Sir—let us not deceive ourselves regard to a matter so vital to us all. If Jurisdiction general be complete without an eldership—that eldership is superfluous: if the power of ordination in particular is too sacred for the eldership—then the eldership is dishonoured before God and in the sight of his church. And think you, that a superfluous and a dishonoured eldership can stand before God, or continue faithful to church? And we, sir, what more do we preaching elders need, after having usurped exclusive jurisdiction and exclusive ordination? What more has the church to render to us? What other barrier to erect against “Limitations, cautions, triennial parliaments, may much”—said that great, calm, wise, far-sighted man *Alexander Henderson*;* “but we know that fear perjury, infamy, excommunication, and the power of a national Assembly, which was in Scotland as terrible a Bishop as a Parliament, could not keep our men from rising to be Prelates.” And what, sir, shall “keep men from rising to be Prelates”—after engrossing essential powers of prelates, imbibing the fundamental doctrine of prelates, and overthrowing the firmest mark against prelates? Alas! sir, was not the primitive church once free? Were not the men who ruptured and betrayed her—men of like passions ourselves? Are not these priests of Oxford at Rome, as good by nature, as the best of us? Why shall we be blind to the terrible lessons of the past sensible to the sublime uniformity with which all the causes operate—deaf to the humiliating proofs of our own weakness and depravity which cry aloud to every hand? Bear with me, sir, if my emotion carries me too far. It is my deep conviction that I should trust myself—which so emboldens me to implore brethren, not to remove this great safeguard of a church which our Redeemer has purchased with most precious blood.

Moderator, my duty is done: a duty which the circumstances around me have made one of the most painful and embarrassing of my whole life; a duty in faithfulness to my own character and position, interests of the church, and to the cause of truth

be in regard to these propositions, so must your vote be upon this minute, which, in the fear of God, I submit to you.

According to the explicit faith of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, the Lord Jesus has given to his visible church "the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world" (Confess. Faith. ch. xv. sec. 3); this "ministry" consists, in a settled church state, of "Bishops or Pastors, the representatives of the people, usually styled Ruling Elders, and Deacons," who are "the ordinary and perpetual officers in the church;" (Form of Gov. ch. III. sec. 2); the two first named classes of officers, to wit, Pastors and Ruling Elders, constitute the "congregational, classical and Synodical Assemblies," by which, in accordance with the Scriptures, the church is to be governed (Form of Gov. ch. viii. sec. 1; ch. ix. sec. 1; ch. x. sec. 2, ch. xi. sec. 1; ch. xii. sec. 2); to this government, in the hands of the aforesaid officers, the Lord as king and head of his church, has committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven, (Confession of Faith, ch. xxx. sec. 1 and 2)—to be used expressly, amongst other ends "for the gathering and perfecting of the saints," as before set forth: to this end, the ministry of the word, a part of that general ministry given by the Lord Jesus to the visible church, is to be perpetually kept up therein, "to the end of the world," and it particularly appertains in our church to "classical Assemblies"—called Presbyteries—and not to other sorts of Assemblies, and especially not to one or more ministers of the word individually considered or casually met together, "to ordain, install, remove, and judge ministers" of the word (Form of Gov. ch. x. sec. 8);

which classical Assembly—or Presbytery is rightly constituted of Ministers and Ruling Elders, and cannot legally act except when at least "three ministers, and as many elders as may be present belonging to the Presbytery" constitute "a quorum competent to proceed to business" (Form of Gov. ch. x. sec. 2 and 7); and which said Presbytery in the ordination of ministers of the word, is to lay its hands—that is the hands of all its members, or of any part thereof on behalf and as the act of the whole, and so of the Presbytery itself—that is of the same Presbytery to whom the power of ordination appertains—upon the candidate in his ordination [Form of Gov. ch. xv. sec. 14].

But inasmuch as the General Assembly of 1843, did on the 25th day of May last, decide by yeas and nays 138 to 9, *non liquet* 1, and excused from voting 2, to adopt an overture No. 14 declaring that the constitution of our church does not authorize Ruling Elders to impose hands in the ordination of ministers [printed Minutes, p. 183]: now this Synod, believing the said decision to be wholly erroneous in itself, and most injurious in its practical tendency, as well as inconsistent with the fundamental principles of our church government, does hereby, and in virtue of its inherent powers [Form of Gov. ch. xi. sec. 4] propose to the General Assembly in the way of Overture, the Repeal of said Overture No. 14, adopted by the Assembly of 1843, and the adoption of a minute stating,

1. That the whole work of the ordination of ministers of the word belongs regularly and properly to a Presbytery composed of preaching and ruling elders;

2. That the Presbytery which should impose hands is the same as that which performs all the rest of the work of ordination.