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Communications.

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FOR THE PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE.  
ON CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

(Continued from p. 296.)

I before observed, that a complete enumeration of all the offices, which the members of the church sustained, must be collected from several partial catalogues. From these, I think it evident that the ordinary and occasional officers of the church were four, which are stated in the 169th page.

As no systematic and full account of them can be found in any one place, no inference can be drawn in favour of any particular views, from the *position* of these officers in any of the scripture catalogues. But in the examination and comparison of all the accounts, in connexion with the practice of the apostles, and the instructions of Paul, we come fairly and conclusively to the conviction, that pastors and lay elders are invested with the government of the church.

To support this doctrine I further introduce Rom. xii. 6—8: “Whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.”

“He that ruleth, with diligence,” is a sentence which conveys the idea of a distinct class of officers, who are invested with authority and power to rule in the church. The primary signification of *προϊσταμενος*, rendered “ruleth,” is to place in authority, as a ruler. Whatever interpretation, therefore, may be given of the other officers in this account, “he that ruleth,” is evidently a distinct officer. And the apostle must, I think, on the soundest principles of exegesis, intend lay elders. The character of their administration favours this conclusion. They are to rule, *in σπουδή*, with diligence. The original signifies care-

of speculating metaphysicians. The inspired use of any term is paramount authority. A better definition of faith in Christ cannot be given than that in the Shorter Catechism: "Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation, as he is offered in the gospel." In connexion with these remarks it is proper to inform the reader, lest he should misapprehend the views of our author, that he distinctly states that "we are brought to exercise this (holy) faith by the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit in governing our minds; and" that "the effects of it will always be such feelings, volitions, and conduct as correspond with the testimony believed."—P. 174.

"Every natural man," Dr. E. correctly observes, "ought sincerely to desire and ask for those influences of the Holy Ghost which will bring him to the exercise of acts of holy faith; and he may, while unrenewed, have many naturally, though no morally good motives, for willing to pray for such a blessing. Such prayers we have before shown, may be, and often are, answered by the God of all grace."—P. 174.

J. J. J.

(To be continued.)

*A Dissertation on the Importance of Biblical Literature, by Charles Hodge, A. M. Teacher of the Original Languages of Scripture in the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church at Princeton. Trenton, printed by George Sherman, 1822.—pp. 51.*

This dissertation was delivered before "a society formed in the Theological Seminary, at Princeton, for improvement in Biblical Literature." The author was induced to publish it at the suggestion of gentlemen to whose opinion he pays the highest deference. In giving this advice these gentlemen consulted the reputation of Mr. Hodge. How correctly they acted will appear to any one who reads the dissertation, and especially, if he recollect the youth of the author.

In this dissertation Mr. Hodge discusses the two branches of Biblical Literature, *Criticism* and *Interpretation*. In the first division, he sketches a history of Biblical criticism from the time of the celebrated ORIGEN, with whom it originated in the third century, down to the present day. In this brief history he notices JEROME, the astonishing industry of the MASORITES in taking care of the Hebrew text, MAIMONIDES and other Jews in the twelfth century, CAPELLUS, and WALTON, &c. down to GRIESBACK.

Having given this historical sketch, he shows, in reference, first to the OLD, and then to the NEW TESTAMENT, that this branch of literature comprehends a history of the sacred text—an inquiry into the sources of the errors that have affected its purity—a consideration of the means of their correction—and

lastly, a knowledge of the application of those means for restoring to the text its original purity. To this branch of Biblical Literature belongs whatever relates to *manuscripts* and their *classification*, *ancient versions* and their authors, and the various *quotations* of scripture to be found in the writings of the Greek and Latin fathers.

Under the second branch of *Biblical Literature*, the INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE, Mr. H. shows that the interpreter ought to understand the original languages in which this book was written;—to “be acquainted with the character and history” of the inspired writers, and “the state of opinion in the age in which they lived;”—to be discriminating and cautious, humble and teachable, depending on divine instruction;—that he should become familiar with the general principles of language and understand the meaning of words;—that he should attend to the various circumstances that affect the signification of particular terms and phrases, and study the means by which the language of the New Testament is to be illustrated.” In relation to one of these particulars, Mr. H. justly observes :

“Of all qualifications the most important, are piety, and a firm conviction of the divine origin of the Scriptures; without these we can never enter into the feelings and views of the sacred writers, nor have any proper impressions as to the design of the Bible, and therefore cannot be prepared to expound it.”

The author proceeds to state that it is necessary for an interpreter to investigate the meaning both of the literal and the figurative language used by the inspired writers, and to know the rules by which the different figures of speech employed by them are to be understood.

Besides what has now been mentioned under this branch of Biblical literature, as Mr. H. observes, are included the rules for interpreting the historical and doctrinal, and especially the typical and prophetic portions of Holy Scripture. And to this department belong, likewise, a knowledge of those systems of interpretation that have been applied to the whole Bible; such as the *Cabalistic*, the *Allegorical*, the *Mystical*, the *Dogmatical*, the *Papal*, and the *Philosophical*. “The history and claims of these several systems, and their respective influence on the church,” says our author, “open to us as instructive a field of investigation, as any which ecclesiastical history affords.”—P. 29.

This general exhibition of the nature of this branch of Biblical Literature, he closes by stating that “the immediate study of the word of God,” is the most important and interesting duty which it enjoins.

“With this we are to be occupied from the commencement, to the close of our course. The object of Biblical Literature, is to enable us to do this with the best advantage. Not contented with prescribing rules of Interpretation,

and furnishing the various means for the illustration of the Bible, it is a great part of her duty to oversee our actual application of them. It is therefore to the delightful employment of studying the Scriptures that she invites us."

And again :

"The importance of a course of study, whose object is to fix with certainty the Sacred Text, and exhibit the evidence that the Bible we now have, is the Bible which God delivered to his church; to assist us in discovering and exhibiting its meaning, by prescribing the principles by which it is to be explained, and bringing within our reach the various means of illustration; and, above all, which leads us so much to the immediate study of the Word itself:—the importance of such a course, is surely a subject on which diversity of opinion is impossible. It is my intention, therefore, in the remainder of this discourse, merely to make some remarks, intended to impress on our minds, the necessity of paying particular attention to this subject, the importance of which we must all admit."

Four considerations are submitted and illustrated by Mr. H. to produce the effect contemplated in the close of the preceding quotation. "First, *the difficulty of the subject*;—secondly, *the great and prevalent ignorance of the Bible*;—thirdly, *that this course of study would result in our increased knowledge of the doctrines of the Bible and conviction of their truth*;—and fourthly, *the present state and future prospects of our country*."

The reader will be gratified with the following passages, which we select from Mr. H.'s illustration of these considerations.

Speaking of the first :

"This difficulty, however, is slight, compared with that of *explaining* the Sacred Volume. The Scriptures are hard to be understood. This assertion is perfectly consistent with the cardinal doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture. As to their general import, they are perspicuous: it is easy to learn from them the path of duty and the way of life; but so to understand them as to enter fully into their meaning, and to be able "rightly to divide" them, is exceedingly difficult. This difficulty arises from many different sources; as from the antiquity of the Books; their being written in languages which have been dead for ages; being composed by individuals, and addressed to persons whose situation, habits, laws, &c. were so different from our own; containing frequent allusions to opinions and circumstances familiar to the writers and their immediate readers, of which we are ignorant. Besides, the nature of the subjects, and the manner in which they are treated, give peculiar difficulty to the interpretation of the Bible."—p. 32.

He says under the second :

"Without dwelling on this subject, it is sufficient to satisfy our minds of the extent of this evil as it regards ourselves, by asking how far we really understand the Bible? Do we understand the law of Moses? the system of government and religion it prescribed; the connexion between the two; its ceremonial institutions and their typical character? Could we undertake to explain the book of Job, or the writings of Solomon? Which of the Prophets is it, with the origin, design, and fulfilment of whose predictions, we feel ourselves sufficiently acquainted? If we turn to the New Testament, will the case be in any great degree altered? Apart from those truths which blaze on every page, which every man knows, and by which we live, should we like to be called upon to explain any one solitary book, unfolding its design, tracing the relation of its parts, entering into the spirit of the author, understanding his peculiarities, and removing his difficulties? Let it not be supposed we mean to intr-

mate such complete understanding of the whole Bible, to be within our reach; it is more than any man ever has accomplished, and is doubtless far beyond the compass of our powers. All that is intended, is to show that our ignorance of the Bible is much greater than we might at first imagine; and that a consciousness of it should rouse us to endeavour to gain all the knowledge of the Sacred Volume which well directed study, with the divine blessing, may secure.

"It may be proper here to remark that this ignorance of the Bible, results as much from our studying it improperly, as from not studying it sufficiently. We study the Bible too much in detached passages, as we find it quoted in different authors, or as it becomes necessary for the duties of the pulpit:—whereas we should study the entire Books, as continued discourses. We should learn the particular occasion of each; the immediate purpose it was intended to answer; and endeavour to enter into the spirit and design of the writer, following the course of his argument, marking the manner in which his exhortations arise out of his doctrines, and duty springs from truth. It is admitted that we here enter on a field which is boundless; but it is all important that we learn how to study the Scriptures."—p. 35.

Again :

"All that is expected of us here, is that we gain correct, and if possible enlarged views; that we adopt right principles, and learn how to apply them; and then go on to the end of life, when we shall find our feet are just entering on this ever widening field of truth and glory."—p. 37.

Under the third particular, after admitting the importance of writings containing doctrinal discussions, supported by appropriate quotations of scripture, Mr. H. judiciously observes :

"In all doctrinal discussions, the testimony of scripture must be imperfectly adduced. From the nature of the case, it is only detached passages, or single assertions of the truth, that can be advanced. But when we turn to the scriptures themselves, and study the books in connexion, we find that these doctrines are not merely taught in single sentences, but by the whole discourse; that it is evidently the great object of the sacred writer, to exhibit and confirm them; that for this purpose he adduces arguments from different sources, presents his subject in different aspects, anticipates and answers objections, draws inferences and infers duties, which presuppose the doctrines. This is a testimony which cannot be quoted; yet it is one of the strongest kind. We feel that our faith does not rest on the interpretation of particular texts; that its foundation is broad as the Bible, and sure as God's testimony."—p. 38.

After noticing the influence of the clergy in society, and remarking that this influence depends on their knowledge, the author says, under his last consideration :

"If we wish, therefore, that society in some of its most important departments should be kept within the saving influence of the truth, and not resigned to the influence of cheerless infidelity, or the power of those who are fatally erroneous, we must keep pace with the country in its advances in knowledge. This is not only an argument for learning in the general, but also for attention to this particular department, because it embraces in its range many of the subjects which men of the world value, and the knowledge of which they respect. That a minister is a sound divine, they consider a mere professional attainment; but if he be a classical scholar, and acquainted with the ancient history of society and philosophy, the general principles of literature, and other subjects with which this department is more immediately connected, he is secure of their respect, and consequently better prepared to do them good."

Pursuing this argument, Mr. H., referring to that conflict which has commenced between the orthodox and the advocates

of that destructive system, which is likely to become the grand heresy of the present age, says :

"This battle is not to be with an individual, nor in a day, but constantly and every where. Our opponents are wise and learned; and they have devoted themselves particularly to this subject. If we expect, therefore, to acquit ourselves to God and his church; if we intend to discharge the solemn obligation of handing down to the generations which follow, the truth, pure as we received it from our fathers, we must prepare to meet them upon equal terms. Shall error, and in its train destruction, triumph over truth and salvation, through the ignorance of truth's defenders?"—p. 42.

In the close of his discourse, Mr. H. notices two objections that may be urged against Biblical literature as explained by him: one derived from its result in the German universities; the other from its supposed unfriendly influence on piety.

In regard to the first, he remarks, that the unhappy prevalence of false doctrines in Germany, by no means proves that this is the natural result of the course of study recommended in this dissertation; and then observes, that,

"This fact may have arisen from a multitude of causes. It may, in a measure, have arisen from the circumstance that in the numerous Universities of that country, there are chairs allotted to the various departments of Theology; that the only requisites for these chairs, are talents and learning. But what would be the natural consequences of such men having it as their official duty through life to teach Theology? Need we wonder that they would prefer to direct their attention in a considerable degree to the externals of the Bible; to the philosophy of its language; to the history of its text, its manuscripts, and versions; to the illustration of its facts, and statements, by a reference to the history, manners, and opinions of the East? and is it to be expected that they would devote lives of laborious study, to these subjects, without collecting much that is valuable in illustration of the Sacred Scriptures; without opening a large field of inviting study, and furnishing materials, which the friends of religion may employ for the illustration and defence of the Word of God?"—p. 43, 44.

In p. 48, the author further remarks, that the errors of the German teachers of Theology, may be attributed to the fact, that, "in their expositions of scripture, they have proceeded on principles fundamentally erroneous," by adopting "the *philosophical* mode of interpretation," which elevates their preconceived opinions in authority above the word of God. He justly observes,

"But this abuse of reason and learning, does not prove that neither are to be used in the exposition of Scripture; nor does the fact, that many, who have possessed great external advantages for understanding the sacred writings, have shamefully abused them, prove that these advantages are dangerous or worthless. It does indeed prove, that something more is requisite, to make a good Interpreter of Scripture, than mere human learning. And this is most cheerfully acknowledged. The man whose heart is most like those of the sacred writers, and who enjoys most of the influences of the same all-teaching Spirit which wrought in them, will best understand the records they have left. This of all qualifications is beyond comparison the best; yet no one will deny, that human learning, is useful in interpreting the Scriptures."—p. 49.

The following passage, in which Mr. H. has indirectly and modestly expressed his opinion in regard to the impropriety of

leading young men, whose attainments are slender, and whose minds are not yet fortified by experience and reading against the seductive influence of error, to the study of writings filled with poisonous matter, we quote with pleasure :

"Though it be admitted, that these works may contain valuable matter, yet it is questioned, whether the young have sufficient skill, in all cases, to separate the poison from the food : whether it is possible to read able misrepresentations of the truth, without being in some measure affected by them : whether every young man, at the very commencement of his course, is a fit antagonist for the most learned and powerful of the enemies of the Gospel; and whether experience does not teach that the opinions of young men are in a good degree formed by the books they most frequently consult. It is thought, too, there is a great difference between coming to these books, as to the writings of the professed enemies of our religion, to learn, what they can advance against the doctrines we believe; and approaching them as friends, for the purposes of instruction. It is thought that the mind is imperceptibly put into a very different state; that our respect for the talents or erudition of the writer, prepares us too readily to acquiesce in his conclusions. But, if this danger be imaginary, is it possible to read without injury, works, in which the Bible and its doctrines are most irreverently treated? to see the Sacred Volume placed on a level with the uninspired writings of profane antiquity?—the "*Mythology of the Jews*" and Greeks, discussed precisely in the manner; to hear the account of the creation, called the cosmogony of a weak and foolish people; the intercourse of *Moses* with God, explained as a mere device to obtain authority for his laws; the predictions of the Prophets, as the dictates of a heated imagination? And, especially, is it possible to hear uninjured, the adorable Redeemer, irreverently spoken of? to be told that in the performance of his most solemn miracles, "*ductus hilaritate,*" he pretended to perform them? Is it possible that blasphemy here, should not produce the same effect upon the mind, that *voluntary* intercourse with profane persons, has always been found to produce? By what influence is the effect prevented in the one case, which is acknowledged in the other? It is thought that all experience teaches that every work sends out an influence of the same character, with its pervading spirit; that those which are imbued with piety, tend to promote it; and that those which teem, either with immorality or profaneness, cannot be read with impunity. It is hence inferred, that whatever philological knowledge may be buried in these writings, it is little worth the risk to moral health, which must be encountered to secure it."—p. 45, 46.

In regard to the second objection, Mr. H. shows that the effect of this course of study must depend on the manner in which it is pursued. He says,

"If we could come to the Bible in some measure as we would enter God's presence, and read its pages as we would hear his voice; the oftener we approach it the holier and happier we should be. But if we come to the Scriptures, as to the works of men, without reverence, and without prayer, trusting in ourselves, our rules, or our learning, the result will be disastrous. Whatever destroys our reverence for the Sacred Scriptures; or leads us to treat with careless familiarity the oracles of God, will lead not only to a decrease of piety, but to an amount of evil to the church, for which all human learning would be an empty compensation."—p. 50.

Two cautions, in our opinion, ought to be given to students of Biblical literature. One is, not to attend too much to the *critical* department. The history of this subject, and the publications of those who have been extensively engaged in the study,

would alone be sufficient to occupy almost the whole time usually spent in the Seminary. The principal portion of time that can be fairly taken from other branches of study that demand their attention, should be applied to the other department, the *interpretation* of scripture. This caution too they may carry with them, when they leave that valuable institution, and engage in the active duties of the ministry.

An acquaintance with *Biblical criticism*, how important soever on some accounts, is not necessary to determine the questions, whether the Bible be the word of God, or whether its texts be genuine. The *genuineness* of its texts has been settled by the labours of men far better qualified to judge than noviciates in theological science; and of this fact *they* may be fully satisfied by general arguments that can be reduced to a small compass. Of the *divine authority* of the Bible any person may be convinced by arguments founded on its heavenly contents and on historic testimony. The Bible, like every other work of God, bears the impress of his image; and no one can examine it carefully, with humility and prayer, and not see this divine image. Besides, every theological student, who enters the Seminary, if he is what he avows himself to be, has felt the *power* of revealed truth on his heart. He has been regenerated and sanctified by the Bible; and, therefore, he knows by *experience* that it is the *word* of God. He "has the witness in himself;" the Bible has made him a new creature.

A temperate study of the *critical* department in Biblical science may result in much satisfaction; may arm him for the conflict; may enable him to answer objections which he cannot at present: but it is by no means necessary in order to determine either of the questions stated above. We refer not to unimportant points; we consider the questions in their general bearings.

The other is, that when they shall have become pastors of churches, they understand the *legitimate* use to be made of their *critical* knowledge. It is not designed for conversation in promiscuous companies; an imprudent display of it may only result in exciting doubts in the minds of the ignorant. Even in the pulpit it ought to be used *sparingly*. We cannot approve of that free and unrestrained manner in which some exhibit their *critical* knowledge in discourses delivered before a popular assembly. We forbear to say of what in our opinion it savours; but we may openly express our doubts whether it does any good. Complaints against the common translation of the Bible ought to be avoided. The translation is excellent; and its claims, as being faithful and judicious, should always be maintained. Let preachers, in imitation of the great apostle, learn to practise self-denial, and be willing to conceal a part of their attainments. Let

them reserve their critical skill for the vindication of the truth when assailed in company, or for those publications which the writings of errorists may demand.

With these cautions, in which we believe Mr. H. will cordially concur, we adopt the sentiment and the prayer expressed in his concluding sentence :

“Fully persuaded however, that the course of study of which we have been speaking, is not only extensive, and delightful; but in its nature, calculated to enlarge our views of divine truth, and to purify the heart; it is with confidence, I commend this Society formed for improvement in Biblical Literature, and in the knowledge of the Bible, to the diligence of its members, and to the benediction of the Great Head of the Church.”

We have only to add, that this discourse is written in an easy and perspicuous style; that it is highly creditable to so young a man as the author; and that it bears the marks of fervent piety, as well as the impress of a clear and discriminating, a judicious and comprehensive mind. It is gratifying that a youth of so much promise has been recently chosen to fill the third professorial chair in the Theological Seminary, and that he has now devoted his life to a department in theological science in which he has already made such hopeful attainments.

J. J. J.

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#### MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

We are gratified with the style in which the minutes of the General Assembly have been printed this year. The minutes of last year were presented in a style disreputable to the character of our highest judicatory. The page was rather crowded; but the principal ground of complaint was, the *badness of the type* and the *inferiority of the paper*. The types in which the minutes of this year are presented to the public, as well as the paper, are such as they ought to be. The page is full, and discovers, on the part of the stated clerk, a just regard to economy in the use of the Assembly's funds.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, met agreeably to appointment in the Seventh Presbyterian Church in the City of Philadelphia, May 16th, 1822, at 11 o'clock, A. M.; and was opened by the Rev. William Hill, D. D. Moderator of the last Assembly, with a sermon from Rom. xvi. 17: ‘*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.*’

This text certainly contains an important scriptural direction; and it ought to be understood by Christians. The learned and pious, yet liberal, Doctor Doddridge, paraphrases it thus :