

THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

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I. THE NEGRO IN ECCLESIASTICAL RELATIONS.

THE negro question, as it is called, presents one of the most perplexing problems of our age. Every phase of it, social, political, and ecclesiastical, involves difficulties sufficient to tax the wisdom and philanthropy of the most enlightened. The difficulty is increased by the malign influence of sectionalism. Both sections of our common country essay the attempt, and each embarrasses the other. The North would speedily settle it were it not for the South; and the South would have settled it long ago but for the North. The conscientious convictions of each party stand in the way of the best intentions of the other, so that the well meant efforts of both fail, to the scandal of religion and the sorrow of philanthropy. Two opposing policies are presented by the two sections. This want of harmony was at first explained and excused by the heat of passion lingering like smoke around the recent battle fields, and there was confident prophecy of its speedy disappearance. The passions of war, however, have long since subsided, and the hostiles have "shaken hands across the bloody chasm," and the lines of opposition, like those of breastwork and battle-field, have been long ago obliterated, while this conflict still rages. These policies have confronted each other now for a quarter of a century, and they are as unreconciled if not as irreconcilable in 1889 as in 1865. There is something very significant in this.

Moreover, whatever suggestion is offered by either fails of influence on the other, each being discounted—the South by the North upon the allegation of prejudice, the North by the South upon that of ignorance.

III. PRIMARY PRINCIPLES OF PRESBYTERIAN POLITY.

THE word Presbyterian suggests rather a system of doctrine than a system of government. In the world's thought, the name covers a much wider field than its etymology warrants. Pronounce it in the ear of the first man you meet and probably the thought awakened in his mind will be a thought about election and predestination. The explanation of this is that the Presbyterian Church has come to be the recognized champion of that system of doctrine labelled Calvinism. It was not so from the beginning. In the early years of the Reformation, Calvin was the theologian of Protestant Christendom. His exposition of doctrine was universally regarded as Augustinianism purified and carried up into closer conformity with the word of God. It must never be forgotten that in those days when men often had to choose between truth and life, the truth which they chose in preference to life was truth cast in the logical mould of Calvinism. Whatever may be the state of the case now, the time has been when truth stated in Calvinistic phraseology was held so dear by the Christian heart that life was held cheap in the comparison. When persecution and the prospect of martyrdom made men think soberly and profoundly on what they believed, they thought that Calvinism was true. Whatever increase of light has been thrown on the teachings of Scripture by the subsequent development of knowledge, whether along the line of biblical and textual criticism or along the line of physical science, has had no effect on the Presbyterian Church in the way of modifying its conception of the great doctrines of grace or their logical relation to each other. No increase of light was needed to reveal those doctrines in their proper proportions and relations. The devout soul of the sixteenth century, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and with the Bible before it, had all the facilities that one can ever have for the understanding of the leading doctrines in the plan of salvation. The only reason that Presbyterianism has come to be so intimately associated with

Calvinism as to be identified with it in the popular mind is that the Presbyterian Church still occupies the ground which was once the common ground of Protestantism. It occupies this ground still because it sees no outlet from it except an outlet that leads away from the word of God. Presbyterians are sometimes twitted with being afraid to preach what they profess to believe. The reason this charge is made against them is that their creed harmonizes so perfectly with the Bible that when the truths of both are thrown into popular form for pulpit use, the most practiced ear cannot detect any difference. When they preach their creed the critic asserts with confidence that they are preaching the Bible, and when they are preaching the Bible, he asserts with equal confidence, that they are preaching their creed.

When, however, we look for that which has ever been distinctive of Presbyterianism, we must look beyond its system of doctrine to its system of government, and it is this latter which it is our present purpose to expound.

Leaving out of view the Papacy, there are only three radically different theories of church government, viz.: the Episcopal, the Congregational, and the Presbyterian. These correspond very nearly to Monarchy, Democracy, and Republicanism in the civil sphere. Episcopacy lodges the exercise of power in the hands of one man; Congregationalism puts it in the hands of the whole brotherhood; while Presbyterianism places it in the hands of representatives chosen by the brotherhood. These representatives are called elders or presbyters, from the Greek word *presbuteros*, hence the name Presbyterian. This name, however, is not given to the church which bears it because it is the only church that has the office of elder. All denominations of Christians have officers to whom they give this title. But the Presbyterian Church gives much more prominence to the office of elder than do the other churches, and for this reason the title of the office came to be used as a descriptive title of the church. The Baptists are not the only people who baptize; but they ring the changes on *baptidzo* so constantly, rolling it as a sweet morsel under their tongue, that it is only a proper concession to their zeal and affection to allow them to wear this word as a denominational name. Episco-

papalians are not the only people who have *Episcopoi*, or bishops; but no other denomination loves a bishop with so much fervor, nor bows to him with such lowly homage—hence it is nothing more than their due to let them enjoy a name that is musical with the sound of *Episcopoi*. In like manner the Presbyterian Church has earned a right to its name by the honor which it has ever placed on the office of presbyter.

I. The Presbyterian Church lodges the exercise of power exclusively in the hands of its elders. All its governing bodies are composed of elders alone. It is as an elder that the preacher sits in the Session, the Presbytery, the Synod, and the General Assembly; and he sits in these courts merely as the peer of the elder who does not preach. The most distinguished D. D., LL. D., with Ph. D. thrown in, and the most illiterate back-woods elder meet together as official equals. No matter how splendid one's natural gifts, nor how many provinces of knowledge he may conquer, he can never climb to a higher rank than that of elder. No matter how humble one's natural gifts, nor how meagre his attainments, if he has been exalted to this rank he has reached the summit of official dignity. Two questions now demand an answer—

1. Can this estimate of the eldership be justified from the Scriptures? The first officer bearing the name of elder of which mention is made in the Bible, was Abraham's servant, "the elder of his house who ruled over all that he had." (Gen. xxiv. 2.) The next elders mentioned were the elders of the land of Egypt who went up with Joseph to bury his father. The next were the elders of Israel to whom Moses was sent when God appeared to him at the burning bush. From that time forward elders are mentioned with great and growing frequency. They were associated with Moses during the wanderings in the wilderness. The office continued after the Israelites entered Canaan, and was preserved intact amid all the great changes and political revolutions through which the nation passed down to the day of Pentecost. Elders are referred to during the time that the nation was governed by judges, afterwards when it was governed by kings, and still later, when it was captive under the power of Babylon. They are frequently mentioned during the Saviour's lifetime, and also

after his death. This brings the history of the church down to the time when it passed from its Jewish to its Christian form. This transition involved great changes both in the government and in the worship of the church. Many old things passed away, and nearly all things pertaining to outward structure and form became new. What became of the time-honored institution of the eldership? Did it vanish? A negative answer is given by Acts xi. 29, 30. Soon the church took on another marked feature. From the days of Abraham it had been confined to the Jewish nation. Now, its borders are enlarged, and it is commissioned to go forth and gather into its fold every tribe and kindred and tongue. Does the eldership pass over from the Jewish into the Gentile church? An affirmative answer is given by Acts xiv. 23. If anything further were wanting to show the continuity and perpetuity of the eldership, it could be found in the fact that when the heavens were opened to John's vision on Patmos he saw elders seated round about the throne in the glorified church above. Thus elders are found everywhere from Genesis to Revelation—in Abraham's household, in Egypt, in Canaan, in the Jewish church, in the Christian church, in the church below and in the church above.

2. What is the nature of the office as indicated by these references? Manifestly the elder of Abraham's house was a domestic officer. The Egyptian elders were state officers. Among the Jews the office had a wider scope. At one time the elders are representing the people in a solemn act of worship; at another time bearing with Moses the burden of government. They installed David in his kingly office, and under the reign of Solomon they are found exercising the office of civil magistrates. During the life of our Lord they belonged to the supreme tribunal of the land, and took part in the trial and condemnation of Jesus. In the Christian church they were associated with the apostles in ordaining certain decrees which were enjoined on all the churches. Paul charges the elders of the church at Ephesus to "take heed to the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers." From these various teachings of Scripture three things are apparent: (1.) The elder was an officer in the family, in the state, and

in the church; *i. e.*, in every sphere of government ordained of God, the office of elder has found place. (2.) The chief function of the office is to bear rule. (3.) The elders constitute an unbroken chain, binding together all dispensations of the church. The office took its rise in the Patriarchal church, was continued in the Jewish national church, and carried over into the universal Christian church. Now, if any other denominations think they have whereof they may boast in the way of antiquity of descent, Presbyterians more. Talk they of apostolic succession! Presbyterians are just getting fairly under weigh in tracing their pedigree when they reach the apostles. They run on back through the Babylonish captivity, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the period of the Judges, the wilderness wanderings, and sit as corresponding members in a presbytery convened by Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt. (Ex. iv. 29.) The apostles fall about the middle of the presbyterial chain which stretches across thirty-five or forty centuries. The church has always been presbyterial in its character—it has always been governed by elders. Moses, the great law-giver, was required to recognize their governing functions. David, the great king, was anointed by their hands. The arbitrary and despotic Ahab did not ignore their authority. Not even the inspired apostles presumed to usurp their prerogatives. The claim is confidently made that the Presbyterian Church is following divine precedent in magnifying the office of elder. It is but copying the example set by inspired men when it places all exercise of church power in their hands.

II. The Presbyterian Church gives prominence to the eldership by multiplying the number of elders, so as to have two or more ruling jointly in every congregation. There is nothing to which Presbyterianism is more averse than to one-man power. It holds that the normal condition of the church is one in which every congregation is presided over by a court composed of the two classes of elders, and every function of government is to be discharged by this court. Is the Presbyterian Church scriptural in this respect? Perhaps the shortest way to determine this point is to take one of the apostolic churches, and use that as the standard of measurement. In Acts xx. 17, it is said that Paul sent from Miletus and

called the elders of the church at Ephesus. In the twentieth verse is recorded the charge which he gave them: "Take heed therefore to yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops." This is the first place in Scripture where the word bishop is used as the title of a church officer. In common usage this word is restricted to churches of the Episcopal order. Episcopacy means a government by *episcopoi*, or bishops. The very name which these churches bear would indicate that they emphasize their claim to the scriptural bishop. It would awaken surprise for a Presbyterian elder to claim a right to the title. But this is confidently set forth in his behalf. It is claimed that every pulpit in the Presbyterian Church is occupied by a bishop, and every congregation is ruled over by a plurality of bishops. The Presbyterians are Episcopalians on a grand scale; they have a hundred bishops where the Episcopal Church has one. Perhaps this accounts for the difference of treatment accorded them in the two churches. A bishop is something of a rarity with the Episcopal brethren, and consequently they show great reverence and regard for him. From this it often results that he comes to entertain a fairly good opinion of himself, and disdains to associate on a footing of ecclesiastical equality with his less pretentious brethren of other communions. On the other hand, a bishop is such an everyday occurrence with the Presbyterians that they treat him as if he differed very little, if at all, from other people. But whose bishop is most like those at Ephesus? Three things are put beyond question: (1), Those Ephesian bishops were called elders; (2), They all belonged to the same congregation; (3), They were charged to take pastoral care of that congregation. Do not the familiar features of the Presbyterian bishops appear in this picture? (1), Presbyterian bishops are called elders; (2), A plurality belong to each congregation; (3), They are charged with the pastoral care of the congregation to which they belong. The likeness is so striking that it is hard to avoid the conclusion that it was drawn from life, that Paul was giving a charge to the session of a Presbyterian Church which he had previously established at Ephesus. Now, lay an Episcopal bishop by the side of this picture, and see to what extent their features correspond: (1), Has it ever been known in an Episcopal

Church that the same person who was called bishop was also named elder? Never. In all Episcopal churches bishops are distinguished in rank and office from elders. (2), Has it ever been known in the Episcopal Church that two or more bishops belonged to the same congregation? Never. Each bishop rules over a diocese including several congregations. (3), Was it ever known in the Episcopal Church that the bishops were charged with the pastoral care of any particular congregation? Never. The functions of the bishop relate chiefly to the inferior clergy, and not to the congregation. In what respect, then, do bishops in the Episcopal Church correspond with the bishops in the church at Ephesus? In no respect whatever. The two have no single feature in common. Even the doctrine of evolution cannot trace a modern Episcopal bishop back to the ancient Ephesian bishop. The difference is too great to be accounted for by difference in development of organs common to both. The chasms separating them are too broad to be bridged by "missing links." In fact, Episcopal churches do not claim that their bishops have been evolved from scriptural bishops; the claim is that they are "successors of the apostles." Why not call them apostles? Children should be called by the name of their parents. It is confusing and misleading to take a name that is used uniformly in Scripture to designate an elder, and apply it to a successor of an apostle. Because of this perversion of the title, Presbyterians have practically discarded it from their ecclesiastical nomenclature.

But how stands the matter between the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists? The latter have elders and therefore bishops if they choose to call them such. May it not be that their elders are the true successors of the Ephesian bishops? The theory of Congregationalism is that all the elders mentioned in the New Testament were preachers. Hence in Congregational churches there are none but teaching elders. Supposing this theory correct, then all the elders at Ephesus were preachers, and the Congregational churches have departed from the primitive practice, in that they have only one preacher to each congregation. If it be said that the church at Ephesus was a very large church, and for this reason was exceptional in having a plurality of elders, the re

ply is that Paul and Barnabas ordained "elders in every church" which they organized on their missionary tour; and Paul left Titus in Crete to ordain "elders in every city." If the Congregationalists have the scriptural bishop, it is evident that they are unscriptural in having only one bishop in each particular church. Moreover, they have a strong antagonist to their view in the person of the Apostle Paul, who says, "Let the elders that rule well be accounted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine," plainly implying that there were elders who only ruled, and did not labor in word and doctrine; *i. e.*, elders who were not preachers. Demonstrably there is no place in either the Episcopal or Congregational Church for these Ephesian elders. The Episcopal Church wants only one bishop for a multitude of congregations, and the Congregationalists are abundantly satisfied with only one for each congregation, whereas Paul and Barnabas ordained elders—more than one—for each church. The Presbyterian Church is the only one that can furnish accommodation for so many. It can put from two to two dozen in each congregation. True, they will not all be required to preach, but if the majority will only rule well, they will be esteemed worthy of double honor.

III. The Presbyterian Church gives prominence to the office of elder by giving him a wide field for the exercise of his official functions. Selected by one particular congregation, and charged primarily with the pastoral care of that congregation, he is in virtue of the church's unity empowered with the right of rule throughout the length and breadth of Christ's earthly kingdom. Responsible primarily for the peace, purity and prosperity of the fold that elects him, he becomes in his measure responsible for the well-being of the universal flock.

This wide extent of jurisdiction is secured by means of a series of courts, all of which are properly called Presbyteries, inasmuch as they are composed exclusively of presbyters, but for the sake of convenience they are discriminated by different names. The Session is composed of the elders of one congregation; the Presbytery is composed of elders representing several contiguous congregations; the Synod is composed of elders representing a still

larger territory; and the General Assembly is composed of elders representing the whole church. Appeals lie from each lower court to the next higher, and the proceedings of each lower court are subject to the review and control of the next higher. In this way every act of every Session, before it becomes final, has the sanction of its Presbytery, and every act of the Presbytery the sanction of Synod, and the act of the Synod the sanction of the General Assembly. So that every act of every Session, before it terminates, has become the act of the whole church. Is Presbyterianism scriptural in this respect? It is not pretended that either precept or precedent can be found in Scripture for all the detailed workings of this series of courts. It is claimed, however, that precedents and principles can be found from which these several courts legitimately take their rise. They have their source chiefly in two great doctrines of Scripture, viz., the parity of the elders and the unity of the church. If the elders are officially of the same rank and order, they must rule jointly. If the church is one, then the act of a part must be the act of the whole. That the elders are of the same rank is sufficiently proven by the fact that they all have the same official titles, and all are charged with the same duties. That the church is one is proven by such considerations as the following: (1), The figures of Scripture indicate it. The church is represented as one body, one fold, one family, one living temple, one kingdom. These figures imply that the whole church is under the same Head, the same laws, the same methods of administration, is animated with a common life and bound together by community of interest. (2), In the nature of the case, unity of faith, feeling and practice tends to resolve itself into organic unity. Where these inner affinities exist, the members will have the same care one for another, and their sympathies cannot be restricted within the limits of a single congregation. Inevitably they will seek for wider fellowship, and attempt to avail themselves of the strength which comes from interchange of helpful counsel and beneficent aid. The truth of this is illustrated in the history of Congregationalism. The churches of that persuasion group themselves into associations, and bind themselves together in bonds only a little less strong than the covenant vows by which

Presbyterian churches are bound. (3), The first serious dispute which arose in the early church was not settled by the society in which it originated. It was referred to a joint meeting of apostles and elders at Jerusalem; and when settled by them, it was settled not alone for Jerusalem and Antioch, but for the whole church (Acts xvi. 4). The Presbyterian Church claims for its elders precisely the same extent of jurisdiction that belonged to those of the primitive church, and which was exercised by them with apostolic consent and approval.

Three great distinctive principles of Presbyterianism have now been pointed out. These are primitive and formative, and are seen to rest upon the solid bed-rock of Scripture.

1. Presbyterianism is a government exclusively in the hands of elders chosen by the people, these elders being divided into two classes, but all of the same rank and authority.

2. It is a government in which the elders rule jointly, thus requiring a plurality in every congregation.

3. It is a government which realizes the unity of the church by means of a series of courts rising one above the other, each lower subject to the review and control of the next higher, and so placing the power of the whole church over the power of each part.

To say that this government is scriptural is to claim that it is the best government that the world has ever seen, better than any that the wit of man ever has devised or can devise. The great endeavor of all ages has been to establish a government which should have sufficient strength, on the one hand, to protect life and property against the depredations of lawless passion, and which should be so hedged in by restrictions, on the other hand, as that it could not itself become a trespasser on the rights of its own subjects. The great object is to secure liberty without license and order without oppression. The difficulty is to hit the golden mean where the government shall have delegated powers sufficient to prevent the aggressions of selfishness, and the subjects shall have reserved power sufficient to prevent the encroachments of tyranny. Hitherto all endeavors have resulted in failure, and consequently the pathway of history is strewn with the wrecks of empires, king-

doms, and republics. That nice equilibrium of powers between the rulers and the ruled which is necessary to the perfection and the permanence of government has never yet been secured. But it has come to be the settled conviction of the wisest statesmen that the nearest approach to it is found in a representative republic. Perhaps the theory of civil government which obtains in the United States is as nearly perfect as anything that has yet been elaborated by human thought. First, there is a written constitution, freely adopted by the people, which sets forth to what extent and with what limitations the powers of government shall be exercised. Then the people by their ballots select those with whom the exercise of this power shall be entrusted. The people say both how they shall be governed and who shall govern them. This would seem to be as much liberty as is consistent with the ends of government. It is very accurately defined as a government of the people, by the people and for the people. There is, however, one important distinction to be noted, viz., that between the will of the people as expressed in the constitution, and the will of the people as expressed in the ballot-box. The rulers are bound to rule according to the former, and not according to the latter. The constitution was framed by the wisest men of the nation, analyzed, and debated section by section, and then deliberately adopted as the highest possible achievement of political sagacity. It may be presumed, therefore, that the will of the people expressed in the constitution is a safe guide for rulers. The will of the people as it is expressed by ballot is a different thing; it is not a will acting dispassionately and under the directing influence of the "dry light of reason." Rather it is a will that easily yields to the passions of the hour, that may be excited and directed by the most unconscionable demagogue. Here is the chief danger to free republican institutions. Political power is often lodged in the hands of those who for selfish and partisan ends are ready to trample on the wise limitations of the constitution and pander to the varying caprice of the popular will. If only the true theory of this great republic could be realized in the practical exercise of power, possibly the perplexing problem of the ages would be solved.

Now, the Presbyterian system of church government, while

not the product of human wisdom, accords in a most remarkable manner with the conclusions of the wisest statesmanship. It is a representative republic. It differs from the civil government in that its constitution, instead of being the product of the highest political sagacity, is the product of divine wisdom. It is framed for the church, and given to it by the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Head and supreme Lawgiver of his people. This constitution is the Bible, which points out with a wisdom far transcending that of the loftiest human intellect to what extent and with what limitations the powers of ecclesiastical government shall be exercised. But to the people belongs the right of saying with whom the exercise of this power shall be entrusted. This is as much liberty as is consistent with a proper loyalty to Jesus the King. The people first choose him as the source of all law, and then choose those who are to administer this law.

From the foregoing exposition it is easy to see several points of superiority which this system possesses over either of the others with which it has been compared.

1. It is superior to Episcopacy because it provides more effectually against the play of unholy passions and prejudices. Ministers are subject to the same frailties and imperfections with other men, and the history of the church abundantly illustrates that a thirsting for preëminence is the besetting sin of ecclesiastics. Out of this grew the Papacy, which kept the world bound in the manacles of spiritual tyranny for centuries. To exalt one preacher above his brethren and clothe him with power over them is to put a strain upon human nature that it is hardly strong enough to bear. Servants often pay court to their master with an eye to their own advancement; but the pride of the natural heart appropriates to its own use, and feeds with delight upon, the flattering homage. The result is an overgrown self-conceit which looks with contemptuous eyes upon those whose shoe-latchets it is not worthy to unloose. It has been aptly said that "no man ought to be willing to rule alone, and no church ought to be willing to let him." For more reasons than one, "in the multitude of counsellors there is safety."

2. It is superior to Congregationalism in that it puts the gov-

ernment in the hands of those who are selected for their prudence and piety, and who are therefore the best qualified to administer it. No promiscuous assembly of men, women, and children is fit to discuss and decide grave matters of doctrine and discipline. Recognizing this fact, churches of the congregational order sometimes improve upon their system by associating with the pastor a committee of selectmen. This is a virtual abandonment of Congregationalism, and a practical endorsement of Presbyterianism. But it is still at a disadvantage, in that these selectmen have only a temporary appointment. The office of ruling should be permanent, so that those elected thereto may qualify themselves for responsibilities so great and solemn.

3. As each congregation elects its own rulers, it can not only select persons of approved piety and discretion, but of necessity it must select those who are bound to that particular congregation by peculiarly tender ties. The rulers sustain to the ruled the relations of father, brother, friend, neighbor. This ensures that the government will be mild and parental in its character, and robs submission of everything approaching to abjectness.

4. While all government begins in the congregation, yet the different courts of the Presbyterian Church are so related that every member of the church has his rights protected by the whole church. If wrong should be done the humblest disciple through the inefficiency or partiality of the lower court, the wrong can be redressed by the larger wisdom and broader impartiality of the higher court. There is only one thing about Presbyterianism more admirable than its polity, and that is the system of doctrine which it stands pledged to maintain and to propagate. It is the most powerful and the most consistent champion of that system of doctrine which crowns God with the glory of absolute and universal sovereignty, which prostrates man in the dust and bids him adore the justice that condemns, while he rejoices in the grace that saves; a system which bows the intellect of man in humble submission to God's word, and at the same time offers a support to faith by exhibiting the perfect consistency between the teachings of the inspired writers and the severest demands of logic.

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