

3

THE
OFFICE OF DEACON:

ITS

NATURE AND IMPORTANCE AS TAUGHT IN THE WORD
OF GOD, AND THE STANDARDS OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI,

BY THE


REV. L. A. LOWRY,

PASTOR.



JACKSON, MISS.:

PRINTED AT THE OFFICE OF "THE TRUE WITNESS."

 THE following discourse has been written out from rough notes used on the occasion of its delivery. The only apology we have to offer for presenting it to the public in its present form, is to be found in the high pretensions so often made, in certain quarters, to apostolic authority and usage, in support of the relics of Popish superstitions; and, in addition to this, the shameful indifference that is manifested, in every branch of the church, to the great duties and responsibilities that belong to the office under discussion. We commend the subject to the patient, the candid, and impartial judgment of the reader.

THE
OFFICE OF DEACON.

“AND IN those days, when the number of disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of disciples unto them, and said: it is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually, to prayer and the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenus, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles. And when they had prayed they laid their hands on them.”—ACTS vi: 1--6.

THE SUBJECT presented to us for discussion in the above passage, relates to the nature and duties of the office of deacon. It belongs to that class of doctrinal subjects too much neglected, in the Presbyterian church, both by the pulpit and the press; and because of this neglect, many of her most vital interests are left to suffer, greatly to the prejudice of her doctrinal position and her permanent prosperity. There is great need at the present time of sound and conservative views, of church offices, widely diffused; and a clear understanding of the relative duties that belong to each, in its appropriate sphere, together with a faithful application of the same to all the ends and purposes for which the church of Christ was ordained. And, among these, we regard as by no means of secondary importance, the office of a deacon, as will appear from the sequel.

In the discussion of this subject, we shall be compelled to notice the different views of other denominations of Christians, widely separated from us in many of the non-essentials of a com-

mon faith. We shall do it, however, in a spirit of kindness; avoiding, if possible, everything that may be calculated to wound, unnecessarily, the feelings of those for whose piety and zeal, for Christ, we have the highest regard, and for whom we wish, at all times and in all places, to cherish the warmest feelings of friendship and affection. We have no fault to find with those who may not be able to subscribe, in every particular, to the sentiments we shall advance, in accordance with the principles of our doctrinal standards, as drawn from the teaching of Christ and his apostles. God forbid that we should deny to others either in theory or in practice, the privileges and blessings of the gospel, excluding them from the covenanted mercies of God, because of any departure from what is revealed concerning the mere externals of church organization, or the administration of church ordinances, so long as there is no compromise of any important principle. This we can no more do, than we could deny to the subjects of a commonwealth the name, the honors, and the privileges of freemen, so long as they embody in their cherished form of government the great cardinal principles that belong to such—of liberty, justice and equality. We live, however, in an age in which great stress is laid upon the mere externals of religion; an age in which a great and growing importance is being attached to symbolic rites, of a specious and imposing character; an age in which the mint, anise and cumine are being tithed, as in the days of the Saviour, while the weightier matters of the law are, in a measure, wholly neglected. In our daily walks, we meet with those who claim to be a peculiar people, above all other people, and the only people whom God recognizes upon earth; those, whom we meet at every turn in our path, in the synagogue, in the temple, and in the market, saying in the fullness of the pride of their hearts, "Stand by thyself; come not near to me, for I am holier than thou;"—those, indeed, who substitute the forms of godliness for its power—who grasp after the shadow instead of the substance—who strain at gnats and swallow camels; while infidelity is laughing in its sleeve, and a fire is being kindled upon every altar, that is an offence and an abomination both to God and man.

In such a state of things, at which the heart sickens and revolts, heavy drafts are necessarily being made upon christian charity and forbearance; and the world must pardon us if, at times, we are compelled to take up the lawful weapons of our warfare, in defence of the truth, against the impudent audacity and arrogance of those who are eternally sounding it in our ears, that the vitality of religion consists in certain ordinances and forms of its worship, and that all others but themselves are *aliens in the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise.*

There is a time, it is said, when forbearance ceases to be a virtue. That time with us has already come. Standing here upon the watchtowers of our beloved Zion, I see upon the tented fields around the belligerent hosts, with pop-guns and penny whistles, fierce and furious in the threatening aspects they assume—living upon the spoils of the weak, the ignorant, and the defenceless—and whose brightest trophies are from the scattered and wandering sheep of other folds—whose loudest shout of exultation is heard, from hill-top to vale, when but one such is added to their ranks, more than when ninety-and-nine, of other communions, are saved from the gaping jaws of a burning hell. For all such, I have but little sympathy or respect, and there can be no compromise between us, till they have ceased their wrangling and their strife, and learned to exercise that charity “which suffereth long and is kind,” which “envieth not,” which “vaunteth not itself,” and is not “puffed up.” Men may cry, peace, peace; but there is no peace, but in contending manfully for the truth.

While a large portion of the christian world are thus contending for the mere forms of religion, feeding upon the dry husks of a wilted and blighted faith, the Presbyterian church, thank God, has a higher end and a nobler purpose to fulfill. She has a witness to bear to the truth, which but few are qualified to give—a work to do and a harvest to gather in, touching the vital interests of society, and the kingdom of Christ, to which she has ever been called and commissioned of God. And while upon her heavenly march, in the fulfillment of her divine commission, she looks down from the cloud-rimmed summit of her

faith, with pity and compassion, upon the divided hosts of Israel that are marching under the same banner, yet grappling and contending for the shadows, the symbols, and forms of the living and life-giving substance. In such a position, called to such a work, and surrounded by such influences, it is a matter of great satisfaction, though of no vital importance for us to know that, even in the outward administration of church order and church discipline, we are traveling in the footsteps of the apostles themselves. This fact we shall endeavor to establish in the arguments to be adduced, so far, at least, as the particular office under consideration is concerned.

The subject is one that strikes at the root of many of the forms of error with which we have to contend; while, at the same time, it has a practical and important application, to some of the most vital interests connected with the permanent prosperity of the church. We claim for it, therefore, a patient and attentive hearing—confident in the belief that, in the clear light that is revealed, you will be able to reach the conclusions at which we have arrived.

We shall assume in the outset of the discussion, as incontrovertible and indisputable facts, that for the permanent prosperity and success of the kingdom of Christ on earth, it was necessary that it should assume an external and visible form;—that certain offices, setting forth certain principles of government, of perpetual obligation were instituted by the apostles;—that among these is to be found the office of deacon;—and that its first introduction, in the christian church, is recorded in the passage before us. These propositions, which under other circumstances, it would be necessary for us to establish by a formal proof, will be readily conceded, on all hands, by the various denominations of the christian world. They differ however very widely, in many instances, as to the *nature and duties* of the office—the *qualifications* requisite in one who is called to discharge the duties enjoined—and also the *mode of induction* into the office. We shall confine our remarks therefore, within the limits of these differences.

As regards the nature and duties of the office, which we wish more particularly to notice, there are four prominent views, differing more or less from each other, as held by the different branches of the church of Christ. We commence with those which we conceive to be farthest removed from the truth.

In the Episcopal and Roman Catholic churches the office of deacon is made an order of the clergy—a stepping stone to the priesthood;—the lowest round in the ladder, that leads, in its ascent, to ghostly power, through robes and gowns, of various patterns and divers colors, as the necessary and prescribed insignia of “apostolic” office and rank—leading up, upon its graduated scale, through priests, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and popes, the last and the topmost pinnacle of human pride and arrogant presumption. Our Episcopal friends, however, do not ascend *quite* so high. Henry VIII., to gratify his ambition and his lusts, sawed off this clerical ladder at the second joint above, leaving only three distinct orders with their various subdivisions and ranks. “It is evident unto all men,” says the Prayer-Book of the Episcopal church, “diligently reading Holy Scripture and ancient authors, that from the Apostles’ time there have been three orders of ministers in Christ’s church—Bishops, Priests and Deacons. Which offices were evermore had in such reverend estimation, that no man might presume to execute any of them, except he were first called, tried, examined, and known to have such qualities as are requisite for the same.” And again, in the form of ordination as therein prescribed, the ordaining Bishop, in defining the duties of the office, is made to say:

“It appertaineth to the office of a Deacon, in the church where he shall be appointed to serve, to assist the Priest in Divine Service, and especially when he ministereth the Holy Communion, and to help him in the distribution thereof; and to read the holy Scriptures and Homilies in the church; and to instruct the Youth in the Catechism; in the absence of the Priest to baptize Infants; and to preach, if he be admitted thereto by the Bishop. And furthermore, it is his office, when provision is so made, to search for the sick, poor, and impotent people of the parish, to intimate their estates, names, and places where they dwell, unto the Curate, that by his exhortation they may be relieved with the alms of the parishoners, or others.”

According, then, to the form here prescribed, a deacon is one appointed "to assist the Priest," subject to the command of the Bishop; and duly qualified to discharge the most important duties connected with the ministerial office—such as teaching, preaching, and the administration of the ordinances of the church.

The framers of the Methodist Book of Discipline have incorporated into their form of government pretty much the same general view. It is, so far as the nature and duties of the office are concerned, simply a transcript from the Episcopal Prayer-Book, with some slight modifications and verbal alterations. The following is the language used by the ordaining Bishop, as found in the Book of Discipline :

"It appertaineth to the office of a Deacon to assist the Elder in divine service. And especially when he ministereth the Holy Communion, to help him in the distribution thereof, and to read and expound the Holy Scriptures; to instruct the youth, and in the absence of the Elder to baptize. And furthermore, it is his office to search for the sick, poor, and impotent, that they may be visited and relieved."

Such is the view presented in the doctrinal standards of the Methodist Church. It is due, however, to say that, as a church, she does not contend that this was the original and *scriptural* office of a deacon. The ground upon which it rests is rather that of expediency and the example of the Mother Church.

Still farther removed from the Romish and Episcopal view is the Congregational—including the various denominations of Baptists. With some minor and unimportant differences, the nature and duties of the office of Deacon as held by these are the same. To embody, then, the important features of each, I am compelled to make but a single extract. The following is a summary of the duties of the office, as found in the Constitution of the Congregatioaal churches, prepared by Professor Upham of Bowdoin College :

1. "Deacons are to be, in various respects, assistants to the Minister. Duties, not only of a high, but of a religious nature, are to be performed by them; something more than merely giving their attention to the church's temporal concern.

as moderator. Where there is more than one present, the discharge of this duty seems naturally to come upon the elder, unless it be otherwise arranged between them.

3. It is the business of the Deacons to take charge of the sacramental vessels and of other property—to prepare the elements for the Communion, and to distribute them to those who partake. They are likewise to inquire into the number and circumstances of the indigent members of their respective churches, and to distribute to them that provision, which it is incumbent on the churches to make for such persons.”

The office as here defined, approximates in some respects to that of Ruling Elders with us. The delegated powers of the former are, however, more limited; and some of them different in kind from those of the latter.

Still another, the fourth, and the last view we shall notice, is the one which we find in the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church. The office of Deacon, as there defined, includes, simply, the care of the poor in the limits of the congregation, together with the management of its temporal affairs. The following from our Confession of Faith—Form of Government, Chapter VI.—is a clear and pointed summary explanatory of the nature and duties of the office :

“THE SCRIPTURES CLEARLY POINT OUT DEACONS AS DISTINCT OFFICERS IN THE CHURCH, WHOSE BUSINESS IT IS TO TAKE CARE OF THE POOR, AND TO DISTRIBUTE AMONG THEM THE COLLECTIONS WHICH MAY BE RAISED FOR THEIR USE. TO THEM ALSO MAY BE COMMITTED THE MANAGEMENT OF THE TEMPORAL AFFAIRS OF THE CHURCH.”

It is this view we wish here to present, in the searching light of apostolic practice and apostolic teaching—carrying with us, at the same time, the different views already noticed, and measuring them by the same infallible rule.

1. The first argument to which we would call your attention, in support of the view of the office of a deacon, as presented in the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian church, is derived from the meaning of the word itself—a word which is used in the scriptures, and by common consent, as expressive of the nature and duties of the office. It excludes every idea of power and all permanently delegated authority, that belong both to rulers and teachers in the church of Christ. Strictly speaking a

deacon—which is but an anglicism of the Greek word *diaconos*—means a servant, an attendant, a messenger, an agent, indeed, of any kind, who is appointed to any kind of work; and, in its ultimate analysis, is derived from the Greek words *dia* and *konis*—a preposition and noun which, when brought together as dependent parts of speech, signify literally, *through dust*. From this, it may be inferred, that the office of a deacon is an executive and subordinate one—an office in which the incumbent is set apart to discharge certain duties, in carrying out the wishes of the congregation, as expressed in their collective or representative capacity. In this general sense, it is often used with reference to any one who ministers in God's service; as Paul, in 2 Cor. vi. 4, speaks of himself and others as the ministers, or, as in the original, *deacons* of God; and of himself in Eph. iii. 7, as a minister, or *deacon* of the Gospel. In all such cases, however, it will at once appear, that reference is made not to office, but to character—not to any earthly or social relation, as office-bearers in the church, but simply to duties and obligations in their relations to God, and the requisitions of the Gospel they are called to preach. In this general sense the term is also applied to Christ himself, who is declared by Paul, in Romans xv. 8, to have been “a minister or *deacon* of the circumcision, for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.” According, then, to the scriptural use of the word, in its broadest sense, a deacon is one called and appointed to discharge the special and specified duties connected with the relation in which he serves. A deacon of Christ, for example, is a servant of Christ; a deacon of the gospel is one called to carry out, so far as human instrumentality extends, the requisitions of the gospel; a deacon of the circumcision, in the sense in which the term is applied to Christ, is one called to establish “the truth of God,” as revealed in the Old Testament scriptures, and “to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.” A deacon of the church of Christ is, therefore, one who is appointed, by the church, to execute its will in the particular sphere in which he is called to labor. And we may here add that, if the term can be used in an Episcopal sense,

of the *Bishop* and *not* of the *church*; such an office, however, is no where to be found in the scriptures.

Taking this, then, as the only possible etymology and scriptural use of the word, which no one can reasonably dispute, every degree of power, both of rulers and teachers, is necessarily excluded from the office. There is, therefore, not the shadow of a foundation here for the claims either of Episcopacy or of Congregationalism.

2. This view of the subject is confirmed by the fact that, during the ministry of the apostles, and subsequent to their day, in the early history of the church, females were found discharging the duties of the office. These female deacons, or deaconesses as they were called, were rather supplementary to those of the other sex, and were continued in the Greek church till the twelfth or thirteenth century. They were excluded from the office, however, at a much earlier date in the Western church.

Among the Gentile christians of every class, especially in the oriental countries, in the days of the apostles, where females lived almost entirely secluded from the other sex in social intercourse, such an organization was found to be absolutely necessary. And even now, were the calls as numerous and as great upon the charities of the church, for the relief of her poor and dependent members, it would no doubt be necessary, in many instances, to revive the ancient and apostolic practice—or, at least, to substitute something else in its place that would answer the same purpose.

Be this as it may, there can be no doubt of the existence of such a class in the apostolic church. Paul in his epistle to the Romans speaks of Phœbe, a sister, who was a deacon of the church of Cenchrea, and commends her to the kind attentions of the christians at Rome. He salutes, also, in the same connection, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and “the beloved” Persis, who “labored” probably in the same capacity in the Roman church. In one of his epistles to Timothy, he lays down the qualifications requisite and the age at which a certain class of females were eligible to the office: “Let not a *widow*,” says he, “be taken into the number under *three-score years old*, having been the

brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed any good work."—1 Tim. v. 9, 10. Those who were married, however, were eligible to the office without these qualifications, and perhaps also those who had not been, if such were, at all, eligible in any case. It was required of these, simply, that they should be "grave, not slanderers, sober, and faithful in all things."—1 Tim. iii. 11. It is true, however, that these and such like passages are susceptible of a different application; but, upon a careful examination of the original text and the connection in which they are found, the propriety, and even the necessity, of referring them to the office under consideration can be easily established. Such a discussion, however, is not called for here. It would be entirely superfluous. There is no doubt, and can be none, as to the general and universally admitted fact, that females were called to serve in the apostolic church as deacons, and were acknowledged and commended as such.

Again, it will not be denied that females, of every class, were forbidden the exercise of any authority as rulers and teachers in the apostolic church. Paul has removed every chance of establishing a platform of "woman's rights," according to the modern sense of the word, upon a scriptural basis: "I suffer not a woman," says he, "to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."—1 Tim. ii. 12. And again: "Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak."—1 Cor. xiv. 34.

But it is unnecessary for us to dwell upon these points, which no one can possibly dispute. The argument before us, here, is simply this: Females in the apostolic church were, in no instance, permitted to exercise any authority as rulers and teachers—the duties of such, in their *official* capacity, were confined exclusively to the other sex; they were, nevertheless, appointed to the office, and called to discharge the duties of deacons, and were recognized and commended as such. The inference, therefore, is clear and irresistible, that ruling and teaching did not belong to the appropriate duties connected

3. This view is also confirmed by the qualifications and certified character required of those who were appointed to the office. When the church of Jerusalem was assembled, at the call of the apostles, for the election of deacons, instructions were given as to the character of the men to be selected. The record is before us, and speaks for itself:—"Wherefore, brethren," say they, "look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." What business? Preaching?—teaching?—governing?—an assistant oversight of the spiritual interests of the church? Surely, none of these. The language of the record is, "*Seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.*" In other words, they were to be men of reputed and acknowledged honesty—men of piety—men of prudence and discretion, of sound practical wisdom—just such men, indeed, as you would wish to employ, if necessary, for collecting and disbursing a large amount of funds for charitable or other purposes. The same is true of the qualifications for the office as given by the apostle Paul. The prominent and leading features in the character of a deacon, as drawn by him, in 1 Tim. iii. 8—12, are these:

1. Gravity.—"Likewise," says he, "must the deacons be grave."
2. Sincerity.—"Not double-tongued."
3. They must be temperate—"Not given to much wine."
4. Free from avarice—"Not greedy of filthy lucre."
5. Sound in the faith.—"Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience."
6. Men of tried integrity.—"And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless."
7. Free from polygamy—a prevalent vice in the days of the apostles.—"Let the deacons be the husband of one wife."
8. Having an orderly and well-regulated household.—"Ruling their children and their own houses well."

The character here drawn is precisely such a one as would be suited to the discharge of the appropriate duties of the office,

church. No more, and no less, could be required. But for any other special and appointed duties, as an officer of the church, the character is sadly deficient. There is nothing here that looks forward to the position of a public teacher of the congregation, and nothing that would warrant us in the belief that the government of the church was, in any way, to be committed into the hands of those who were installed in the office. It will be observed, however, that in the qualifications of a Bishop or Pastor of a congregation there is a marked difference. Among the first, as found in *the same connection*, it is required of one who desires the office of a Bishop or Pastor, that he should be *apt to teach*—and, elsewhere, that he should be *able by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers*.—Tit. i. 9. Moreover, it will be found that in Paul's instructions to Timothy, as to the character of one who is called to teach, *particular stress* is also laid upon his qualifications *as a ruler*. He is to rule well in his own house—he is to have his children in subjection—he is, in a word, to give satisfactory evidence, either in his family or some other of the relations of life that he has, at least, some of the elements of a grave disciplinarian, in order that safely may be committed to him *the care of the church of God*.—1 Tim. iii. 5. No such emphasis, however, is laid upon the qualifications of a deacon. The duties of the office are made to conform to another standard, as we have already seen. It is a legitimate inference, therefore, from these facts, in addition to those which have preceded, that neither ruling nor teaching belonged to the appointed duties of the office.

4. As a positive and direct argument in support of the same view—and one which to our mind is conclusive upon the subject—we may refer to the circumstances which surrounded the church, in the days of the apostles and also at a subsequent period. They were such as rendered just such an office, as that for which we contend, indispensable, almost, to the very existence of the church. The storm of persecution had already commenced its fearful ravages—the sword had been drawn—the fire had been kindled—the torch had been lighted—and

sweep from the limits of the Roman Empire every vestige of the doctrines of Christ. The church was gradually enlarging its boundaries, and in numbers was rapidly increasing beyond all expectation. Three thousand were brought in at one time—five thousand at another—and daily additions were being made from all classes and ranks. And though most of these were poor, there were none that suffered for the necessaries of life; “for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold and laid them down at the apostles’ feet; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.”—Acts iv. 34, 35.

Who now shall disburse this accumulating fund? Who now shall attend to the pressing wants of the despised and persecuted disciples of Jerusalem, of Judea, and Samaria? Shall the Apostles? Surely not. Any attempt, under such circumstances, to constitute themselves the permanent almoners of the church, to receive and disburse such a fund, would in a measure, have, ultimately, destroyed their influence and their usefulness. They would, at once, have exposed themselves, upon all hands, to the charge of partiality, of selfishness, and of avarice. Moreover, it would have been utterly impossible for them, without a perpetual miracle, to have undergone the labor of such a work in connection with the appropriate duties of their apostolic office. It was estimated by Chrysostom, one of the early fathers of the church, that, in his day, there were no less than three thousand females in the city of Antioch that were dependent upon the charities of the church for their daily bread; and at the close of the second century, there were in the city of Rome as many as fifteen hundred who looked to the same source for means to supply their daily and pressing wants.

Now I ask, in all candor, with such facts as these before us, could the church have been blessed with continued prosperity without just such an office as that for which we contend, call it by what name you please? Could she have maintained even a nominal existence, in such a state of things, which commenced with the labors of the Apostles and followed them wherever they went, without a regular board of officers, whose exclusive duty it

the temporal affairs of the congregation in which they were installed. Close up the channels of christian benevolence, and you may as well close up your Bible—burn down your churches—and declare the solemn ordinances of religion an unmeaning farce.

The argument then is simply this: Without a regular system of benevolence, the apostolic church could never have prospered, and could never have maintained more than a nominal existence in the world; and such a system could never have been efficiently and satisfactorily carried out, without a board of competent officers appointed for the special work; and again, such a board of officers is no where to be found in the scriptures, if it is not embraced in the office of deacons. It is a legitimate inference, therefore, from these admitted facts that the care of the poor and the management of the temporal affairs of the church were the appointed and only appropriate duties of the office.

5. A careful examination of the passage before us will be sufficient to satisfy us as to the correctness of the inferences we have here drawn. The circumstances narrated in the exigency of which the office of deacon was instituted, are sufficient, it would seem, to satisfy the most prejudiced mind that the view we have presented of its nature and duties, is the only possible one that can be given in accordance with sound reason and the teaching of the Scriptures. Here was the necessity laid upon the apostles: It was not possible for them to attend in person to the various objects of charity that were accumulating upon their hands; it was impossible, moreover, for them to give satisfaction through agents of their own appointment. They seem to have tried it, but failed, and were compelled, therefore, to resort to some other means.

The circumstances as narrated by the sacred historian, were such as might have been expected. The language of the record is as follows: "And in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." The difficulty was simply this: The church

dent—all things were in common—and upon every side there came up the clamorous cry of partiality and injustice. What, now, is to be done? Shall the apostles continue on as they had commenced? Shall they disregard the complaints that are being made in every quarter? Shall the matter be investigated, and the complainants rebuked as the nature of the case requires? Shall new agents be appointed to receive and disburse the proceeds of houses and lands which are brought and laid at the apostles' feet? Or shall the apostles take the management of the business into their own hands—withdraw from their other labors—throw up, for the time, their ministerial office—and devote themselves exclusively to the temporal interests of the church? Such measures they did not and could not sanction. Nothing of the kind could ever have remedied the evil. There was but one alternate left—there was but one course for them to pursue—and this they wisely adopted. The facts are plainly stated in the passage before us; so that he that runs may read, and the wayfaring man though a fool need not misunderstand them. When the dissatisfaction as stated above became manifest, the plan agreed upon by the apostles was proposed to the church assembled in solemn council: “Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them and said, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables; wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word.” Mark the different steps in the proceeding: The disciples are convened—the case stated—reasons adduced—and instructions given to the effect that they should select of their own number seven men of honesty, piety and discretion, who should be made the permanent almoners of the church.

Comment is unnecessary, and we will only add in this connection, that with these facts before us, the evidence is clear and conclusive, as to the correctness of the view of the nature and duties of the office as presented in the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church; and the man who can make anything else out of such facts, so plain and so pointed, is well-nigh beyond

the reach of all argument: The care of the poor and the management of the temporal affairs of the church in such a way as that the apostles might give themselves "continually to prayer and the ministry of the word," is all that the most ingenious criticism, when prompted by the love of truth, can possibly find; anything beyond this must have some other than a scriptural basis upon which to rest.

The result of these deliberations was highly satisfactory to all parties: "The saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch." The names of these persons indicate a Grecian descent. This, in connection with the fact that the immediate object of their election was to silence the "murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations," goes still farther to confirm the view we have presented of the nature and duties of the office. The great mass of the church, we may reasonably suppose, were at that time of Jewish descent; and no reason can be assigned why all these men should be selected from the minority, if the duties stated as belonging to the office were only of a secondary character.

Two of these persons, however, Stephen and Philip, afterward became somewhat celebrated in another capacity. The former died a martyr at Jerusalem, in his zeal and devotion to the truth; but there is no evidence that he performed any of the functions of a minister of the Gospel as one duly authorized. The eloquent discourse delivered by him before the Jewish "council," and recorded in the same connection, was in defence of himself, upon the charge of blasphemy, which had been brought against him, and for which he was arraigned—a privilege which every private member of the church has a perfect right to exercise under similar circumstances in any age. The latter, however, we find, subsequently to his ordination as deacon, teaching, and preaching, and baptizing those who came to him with a profession of their faith in Christ. This, however, was after the church at Jerusalem was scattered by the hand of persecution to which Stephen had fallen an early victim. His services were no

longer required there in the office in which he had been installed. Called to a different work, not by man, but by God himself, with miraculous gifts and powers bestowed upon him, he is now in Samaria, in Gaza, Azotus, Cæsarea, and other places, teaching, preaching, and baptizing as opportunity offers and occasion requires. But mark: it is not Philip the *deacon* we see and hear, but Philip the *evangelist*—an important distinction which should not be overlooked, and one which is made by the sacred historian himself.—Acts xxi. 8. An evangelist, even according to “the judicious Hooker,” is to be ranked as “a presbyter of principal sufficiency.” The work to which he is called is the same as that of the pastor, and his ecclesiastical position the same, only he is compelled, for the time being, to lead an itinerant life, and is consequently subjected to greater hardships and self-denial. Hence it is that Timothy himself is exhorted by Paul to do the work of an evangelist, that he might make full proof of his ministry.—2 Tim. iv. 5.

In the absence of any direct evidence or positive proof to the contrary, upon the subject, we are forced to the conclusion, that Philip was elevated to this position not in virtue of the fact that he had served the church acceptably, as a deacon, but because of his extraordinary qualifications for the work of the ministry. I might point you to parallel instances in the Presbyterian church, where persons have served in the capacity both of deacons and elders, and afterwards have been ordained as pastors or evangelists. This, however, does not prove that two or more orders in the ministry are recognized in the Presbyterian church; and that a man must be a deacon before he can be a presbyter, a pastor, a teacher, or an evangelist. A hundred, or a thousand such examples would not amount to the dignity of an argument in proof of such a position—no more would they were they to be found in the Scriptures themselves. What shall we say, then, of those who have only one to present? What of such an argument? Nothing, here, but that it is characteristic of the logic that belongs to the system in support of which it is adduced; and if we had no better we should decline all appeal to the Scriptures, deny the right of private judgment, and with the Ro-

mish church would pin our faith and our conscience to the decrees of councils and the opinions of the "Fathers."

Here, then, are the facts in the case: The church was rapidly increasing in numbers—a storm of persecution was gathering in fierce and frowning aspect on every side—the channels of christian benevolence were deepening and widening in every direction—a corresponding liberality was exhibited upon the part of the church—the proceeds of the sales of houses and lands were brought and laid at the apostles' feet—these they were unable to disburse to the satisfaction of those who were in need—complaints were made, and the elements of discord and strife discovered where national feelings and prejudices were brought in conflict; the multitude of disciples were therefore called together—a plan for receiving, collecting and disbursing the charitable funds of the church was proposed, discussed, approved, and adopted; a board of officers were appointed to the work; seven competent and respectable men, in whom the utmost confidence could be placed, were selected from the dissatisfied and disaffected portion of the church—not by the apostles—not by a Bishop or a college of Bishops; nor yet were they self-appointed and presented by a "priest," in sacerdotal robes, as is required in one of the standards from which we have quoted. No such aristocratic and monarchical element was introduced into the government of the church in the selection of these men; but, according to the true democratic principle, they were chosen by the popular voice of the church, and by the church presented to the apostles for ordination: "whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed they laid their hands upon them." Thus called, and thus ordained, they entered upon their work—DEVOTING THEMSELVES IN THEIR OFFICIAL CAPACITY EXCLUSIVELY TO THE CARE OF THE POOR AND THE MANAGEMENT OF THE TEMPORAL AFFAIRS OF THE CHURCH.

The wisdom of these proceedings is strikingly illustrated in the subsequent fact, recorded by the sacred historian: "And the word of God," it is said, "increased; and the number of disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." It is well to remember that the

how encouraging to us! The laws which regulate the kingdom of Christ are the same now as in the days of the apostles. And as then, according to all the light that we have upon the subject, so far, at least, as human instrumentality extends, there is nothing of more importance to the present and permanent interests of the church than a clear understanding of the nature and duties of the office of deacon, and a practical application of the same to all the purposes for which it was intended. There is a deficiency and a growing evil here which must be met with promptness and energy. Upon this, however, we have not time to dwell at length. A summary statement of the duties belonging to the office in the altered circumstances which surround the church in its present position, is all that we shall offer—leaving you to fill out the suggestive topics at your leisure.

1. *The collection and punctual payment of the minister's salary.* It is here stated that one object in the creation of the office was that the apostles might give themselves "continually to prayer and the ministry of the word." In this view of the subject, it comes within the appropriate duties of the deacons of the church punctually and promptly to collect and pay over to the minister his salary as it may fall due, that he may be relieved from all temporal want and care. I know of no one cause that is working more evil in all branches of the church of Christ, than the neglect of this one duty. The minister's mind is thereby often greatly harrassed; his family are in want, perhaps, for the comforts and conveniences of life; his debts are falling due upon an empty purse; his reputation is suffering in consequence of his inability to meet his engagements; while the people are waiting for times to become easier, a crop to be gathered in, or the profits of a speculation realized, before they comply with the pledges they have made—feeling that what they give to the gospel in the way of ministerial support is rather a charity than a just debt, which they have contracted under the most solemn obligations before heaven and earth. It is bad enough for a minister to be compelled to live on such a salary as is usually tendered him; but when this is poorly paid—received perhaps in small dribblets without any system or care—while a part, perhaps, is uncollected at the end of the year, and remains so indefi-

nately beyond, it is painful—it is mortifying—it is withering to one's social and religious feelings beyond all conception. Life itself, under such circumstances, is, at times, almost indurable. Do not think that we are dealing in fiction, to round off a period, or to make emphatic the closing sentence of a paragraph. Before God, who is my Judge, I speak the sentiment of an honest heart, that “knows its own bitterness,” and that has sickened and bled a thousand times, in view of the blighting curse that is thus hanging over the churches throughout the land. More, much more, I might say, but forbear. And I will only add here, that it is, to a certain extent, within the power, and made the solemn duty of, the deacons, in connection with the other officers of the church, to remove this growing evil, and to see that the pledges made to their minister in his installation, are faithfully and promptly met, that he may devote himself exclusively to his work—GIVING HIMSELF CONTINUALLY TO PRAYER AND THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD.

2. Another specific object within the range of the duties connected with the office of a deacon, upon which we would wish to lay particular stress is, *the care of the poor*—a class that is sadly neglected in all our churches, and whose claims upon us are of the strongest possible character. It seems to have been a part of the divine plan, that there should ever be in society, in the church, and in the world, those who are dependant upon public and private munificence for their daily support. The poor ye have *always* with you, said Christ to his disciples upon one occasion—not as a curse, nor as a necessary evil, in the organization of human society; but as the greatest blessing which, under the circumstances, could be provided. For by such means alone is it possible to strengthen those feelings of the human heart, upon which its happiness materially depends. There is a depth of philosophy and of wisdom here upon which volumes might be written—depths that are inexhaustable to the limited and feeble intellect of man. It was this view of the subject that induced Laurentius, one of the deacons of the primitive church, when commanded by a Roman officer to deliver up the treasures supposed to be in his possession, to collect together the poor, the lame, the blind, and others, who were dependent upon the regu-

lar and charitable collections for their daily subsistence: "Behold," says he, "the treasures I promised you. I add to these the widows and orphans—they are our pearls and precious stones, the crown of the church. Take this wealth for Rome, for the Emperor, and for yourself." In order, therefore, to carry out more efficiently the divine plan, which heaven has ordained for our own good, a permanent board of officers is established in the church; and it is made their solemn and imperative duty to search for the poor and the outcast, and to remind us continually of our obligations to them and to ourselves, that we may learn by experience the truth of the divine maxim, "IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE."

3. Another important duty which we may consider as belonging, in a measure, at least, to the office of deacon, is, *the regular collection of individual contributions for the benevolent objects of the church.* I do not mean by this simply the carrying round of the bag or the plate at the monthly concert, and other occasions; but an active and energetic devotion to the work as time and opportunity offer. The heathen world are now the poor that lie at our gates perishing with hunger, and pleading with us for the bread of life; and as yet they have received only the crumbs that fall from our tables. The outward machinery of the church organized for their relief, is well-nigh perfect, as far, at least, as is possible for human instrumentalities to attain—except in the system of agencies to which she has been compelled to resort under the pressure of her engagements. There is greatly needed, therefore, at the present time, an active, a competent and energetic board of officers in every church whose acknowledged duty it shall be to attend to this business—*men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom.* And with the existing facilities for labor, and the numerous channels of benevolence that are opened to us, as never before, every deacon, every elder, every pastor, and every private member of the church should consider themselves as authorized and responsible agents in the great work of the world's conversion to God. THEN, AS IN THE DAYS OF THE APOSTLES, WILL THE WORD OF GOD BE INCREASED, AND THE NUMBER OF DISCIPLES AT HOME AND ABROAD BE MULTIPLIED GREATLY.