

THE
UNION SEMINARY MAGAZINE

NO. 2—NOV.—DEC., 1893.

I. LITERARY.

BENJAMIN MOSBY SMITH.

The Rev. Benjamin Mosby Smith, D. D., LL. D., Professor *Emeritus* of Oriental Literature in Union Theological Seminary, died at the home of his son-in-law, Rev. John W. Rosebro, D. D., Petersburg, Va., on Tuesday, 14th March, 1893. He had attained the ripe age of eighty-one years and six and a half months. He was venerable for his years, abilities, attainments and great usefulness, and his death removes a familiar and conspicuous figure from the history of our church.

Dr. Smith was born the 30th of June, 1811, at Montrose, Powhatan County, Virginia, the family seat of his father, of an ancestry honorable and useful. Bereaved of his father at a tender age, he found in his mother a wise and helpful friend and counsellor as well as a loving pious parent. The struggles of the lad for an education, the self denials of those early years, form an interesting preface to the story of a laborious and efficient life, and give promise of the successful career with which the church is familiar. His early instruction was secured at home at the hand of various tutors. His diligence attracted the attention of Rev. Dr. John Holt Rice, who afterwards took the profoundest interest in the young student, a near relative by marriage. He graduated at Hampden-Sidney College with the first honors, and at the age of eighteen took charge of an academy at Milton, N. C., where he taught successfully for two years. Then entering Union Seminary, before completing its course he was chosen Assistant Instructor, serving from April, 1834 to April, 1836. Licensed in April, 1834, and ordained in October, he supplied during this term

JOHN CALVIN AND DIOCESAN EPISCOPACY.

One of the curiosities of controversy is that John Calvin should be seriously cited to sustain the claim that there were "three distinct orders" in the ministry of the apostolic church ; that an intelligent speaker should declare upon a public and important occasion that while Presbyterians now deny this claim they did not formerly do so, that Calvin did not deny it, but on the contrary admitted it! Before discussing Calvin's views, it is well to observe in advance that though Presbyterians admire and revere him as a very able and on the whole a very sound expositor of Scripture, they are very far from adopting all his views but in some very important particulars differ decidedly from him ; moreover, and with emphasis, that they are still farther from regarding John Calvin as the founder of the Presbyterian Church.

With these two preliminary observations, we predict that to all who are familiar with Calvin's place and influence in history, the assertion will seem most remarkable ; for while in the popular conception of the man the chief impression conveyed is that of the theologian whose eminence has definitely associated his name with a systematic presentation of the great doctrines of grace, yet to the *historian* John Calvin's chief claim to distinction lies in his wonderful, original and lasting impress upon government ; he is regarded as the pioneer of all modern representative, republican government. In theology he was in the main simply an illustrious follower of Augustine, as the latter was of Paul ; philosophic history honors Calvin not for his theology but for his civics ; and his republicanism the historian traces directly to the influence of his views of Scriptural Church Polity. So that a writer like Bancroft in the first volume of his great history of the United States says, p. 266 :

"A young French refugee (John Calvin) skilled in theology "and civil law, in the duties of magistrates and in the dialectics of religious controversy, entering the republic of Geneva, "and conforming its ecclesiastical discipline to the principles "of republican simplicity, established a party of which Englishmen became members and New England the Asylum."

When Calvin's well known and characteristic veneration for Scripture is taken into account, the alleged admission on his part seems simply incredible; we discredit it utterly upon general principles just as we would a claim that the pope of Rome had admitted the right of private judgment; we would not need to examine papal documents, the whole character, influence and history of the papacy refutes such claim. In like manner Calvin's position and influence in history, when viewed in the light of his reverence for the Word of God, renders it absolutely impossible for him to have admitted that there were "three distinct orders" in the Apostolic Church; to admit such a claim would have been simply to stultify his whole course.

Beginning with this tremendous presumption against the alleged admission, we shall find it greatly strengthened by some examination of his views finding expression in his commentaries when passages are under consideration which suggest the claim of the "three distinct orders."

Commenting on I. Tim. 3:1, he says:

"At the same time it is necessary to observe what it is that 'Paul calls 'the office of a bishop;' and so much the more, 'because the ancients were led away, by the custom of their 'times, from the true meaning; for while Paul includes generally all pastors, they understood a bishop to be one who 'was elected out of each college to preside over his brethren. 'Let us remember, therefore, that this word is of the same 'import as if he had called them ministers, pastors or presbyters."

On Philip. 1:1, he comments:

"We may, however, infer from this that the name bishop is 'common to all the ministers of the Word, inasmuch as he 'assigns several bishops to one church. . . . Afterwards 'there crept in the custom of applying the name of bishop 'exclusively to the person whom the presbyters in each church 'appointed over their company. (*ordounoyent conducteur de 'leur congregation*). It originated, however, in a human custom, and rests on no Scripture authority."

On Acts 20:28.

"Concerning the word 'overseer' or 'bishop,' we must briefly 'note this that Paul calleth all the elders of Ephesus by this 'name as well one as other (*indifferenter*). Whence we gather, 'that according to the use of the Scripture, bishops differ

“nothing from elders. But that it came to pass through vice and corruption that those who were chief in every city began to be called bishops. I call it corruption, not because it is evil that some one man should be chief in every college or company; but because this boldness is intolerable, when men by wresting the names of the Scripture unto their own custom doubt not to change the tongue of the Holy Ghost.”

Titus 1:7.

“This passage plainly shows that there is no distinction between a presbyter and a bishop; for he now calls indiscriminately, by the latter name, those whom he formerly called presbyters; and farther, in conducting this very argument, he employs both names in the same sense, without any distinction; as Jerome has remarked both in his commentary on this passage and in his Epistle to Evagrius. And hence we may perceive how much greater deference has been paid to the opinions of men than ought to have been paid to them; for the language of the Holy Spirit has been set aside, and the custom introduced by the arbitrary will of man has prevailed. For my own part, I do not find fault with the custom which has existed from the very beginning of the church that each assembly of bishops shall have one moderator; but that the name of office which God has given to all, shall be conveyed to one alone, and that all the rest shall be deprived of it, is both unreasonable and absurd. Besides, to pervert the language of the Holy Spirit—in such a manner that the same words shall have a different meaning from what He intended—is excessive and profane hardihood.”

These extracts prove conclusively that John Calvin did not believe that there was divine authority for “the three distinct orders.” The language needs no comment—it speaks for itself and it speaks unequivocally and with great vigor.

The question then arises, what authority could any speaker have for the assertion that Calvin admitted the existence of “the three distinct orders” in the Apostolic Church?

In answer to just this question the following paragraph was cited:

“As we have stated that there are three kinds of ministers recommended to us in the Scripture, so the ancient church divided all the ministers it had into three orders.” *Inst. Book IV., Chap. IV., Section I.*

In that sentence is contained the alleged admission. It is

to be noted that in the very paragraph itself, the author distinguishes between "the Scripture" and "the ancient church;" the two are different; moreover, in the former there were "kinds of ministers" in the latter there were "order"—whatever he means by the term; he does not state that three orders of ministers were recommended in the Scripture.

The force of the paragraph, and its aptness to the subject in hand, depend upon two points:

1. To what period did Calvin refer in the words, "the Ancient Church?"

2. What did he mean by "orders?"

The sentence cited is taken from the first section of the fourth chapter. In this chapter the author is plainly tracing the *post*-apostolic developments in the church that paved the way for the rise and growth of the papacy. As has been said, the sentence is taken from the first section of the chapter; this section begins with these words:

"Hitherto we have treated of the mode of government in the church, as it has been delivered to us by the pure Word of God, and of the offices in it, as they were instituted by Christ. Now, that all these things may be more clearly and familiarly displayed, and more deeply impressed upon our minds, it will be useful to examine what was the form of the ancient church in these particulars."

Evidently, then, the ancient church, however venerable and worthy of study, is different in its government from that delivered to us by the pure Word of God, and its officers are not those instituted by Christ; *these*, Calvin says, have already been treated of in his preceding discussions; now, for further instruction, he proposes to examine how the ancient church (*i. e.* the *post*-apostolic church clearly) compared with the Scriptural or apostolic church in these particulars, and *this post-apostolic church* was the one which "divided all the ministers it had into three orders." So much for the first point.

2. What did Calvin mean by "orders" in the sentence cited?

Did he use the term in the same sense in which the defenders of Diocesan Episcopacy use it?

In this same paragraph, which contains the words quoted to prove his admission of the three distinct orders, he goes on immediately to say "Therefore Jerome, after having mentioned five orders of the church, enumerates bishops, presbyters, deacons, the faithful or believers at large, and catechu-

mens or persons who had not yet been baptized, but had applied for instruction in the Christian faith."

So that according to his use of the term in this immediate content, believers at large were an "order" and even those who had not been baptized, but were only applicants for instruction in the Christian faith! Is that what our Episcopal friends mean by "orders in the church?"

Moreover Calvin's reference to Jerome is significant as indicative of the period discussed in this chapter. Jerome was born between 340 and 342, he was baptized in 360, he was ordained a presbyter in 379. This reference to him is, therefore, incidental but very strong confirmation of our claim that Calvin in this paragraph is discussing the post-apostolic period.

As bearing further on Calvin's use of the term "orders" we quote again from the immediate context; the very next section begins as follows:

"All those to whom the office of teaching was assigned were denominated presbyters. To guard against dissension, the general consequence of equality, the presbyters in each city chose one of their own number, whom they distinguished by the title of *bishop*. The bishop, however, was not so superior to the rest in honor and dignity, as to have any dominion over his colleagues; but the functions performed by a consul in the senate, such as to propose things for consideration, to collect the votes, to preside over the rest in the exercise of advice, admonition, and exhortation, to regulate all the proceedings by his authority, and to carry into execution whatever had been decreed by the general voice;—such were the functions exercised by the bishop in the assembly of the presbyters. And that this arrangement was introduced by human agreement, on account of the necessity of the times, is acknowledged by the ancient writers themselves. Thus Jerome, on the Epistle to Titus, says, 'A presbyter is the same as a bishop. And before dissensions in religion were produced by the instigation of the devil . . . the churches were governed by a common council of presbyters. Afterwards in order to destroy the seeds of dissension, the whole charge was committed to one. . . . So let the bishops know that their superiority to the presbyters is more from custom than from the appointment of the Lord.'—"
Inst. Book IV., Chap. IV., Sect. II. From which it appears

that it was not so much an "order," in the modern ecclesiastical sense, as it was an office, corresponding very closely to that of a moderator in a Presbyterian church court; far more nearly akin to the position of bishop in the Methodist church than to that in the Episcopal. Most evidently the terms, used by Calvin in designating the functions of the bishop of which he writes, do not apply to the modern Diocesan bishop.

Furthermore; even of this bishop described by him, he says expressly that it was "an arrangement introduced by human agreement," and he asserts that this fact was admitted by the ancients themselves, one of whom (Jerome) he quotes to prove his assertion.

Such then is the setting of the sentence containing John Calvin's alleged admission of the claim made by the high church party in behalf of the "three distinct orders." We have examined the context immediately preceding and immediately following. This examination demonstrates beyond a doubt:

1. That the period referred to was one long subsequent to the apostles and the form of church government then in vogue, not the form received from the Word of God.

2. That the word "orders," as he used it, is manifestly something different from the term when employed by the defenders of Diocesan Episcopacy; the bishop being altogether different, denoting rather an office than an order, the word being clearly the title of the presiding officer, *primus inter pares*.

3. Finally; that even in this comparatively late period the office of bishop, such as it was, was a human arrangement, so admitted to be by the ancients themselves, as Jerome himself says that a presbyter is the same as a bishop and that the bishop's superiority is more from custom than from the appointment of the Lord.

This examination of the alleged admission, quoted to borrow the influence of Calvin's great name to support a claim which he himself has vigorously characterized as *excessive and profane hardihood*, vindicates the great reformer from such absurd inconsistency as the misuse and perversion of the paragraph would fasten upon him.

Doubtless the reader is ready to inquire how could any candid, intelligent man be guilty of such a manifest blunder. The probable explanation is that the sentence was taken from some work written in the interests of the high church theory,

whose author quoted it because it had a plausible sound and, isolated from its context, seemed serviceable. Such compends are untrustworthy ; the author is too often more interested in establishing his point than in being fair and candid. The moral of the mistake is this, viz : *Always go to original sources, never trust to quotations.* If the reading of this article impresses and emphasizes the importance of this course, the time will have been well spent.

SAMUEL M. SMITH.

