

ARTICLE II.

[by Thomas Smyth]

THE DEACONSHIP : *A Treatise on the Office of Deacon, with Suggestions for its Revival in the Church of Scotland.* By the Rev. JOHN G. LORIMER, of Glasgow. Edinburgh: 1842.

The above work is by the author of a valuable treatise on the Eldership, and is very timely and important. It is an index to the sentiment now prevailing, that the revival of the office of Deacon is of vital importance to the increase and prosperity of the Presbyterian Church, in all its branches. We have concluded, therefore, to bring this matter before our readers in such a plain and practical method as may conduce to this end.

On the question of the Divine institution, authority and perpetuity of the office of Deacon, there is no difference of opinion among Christian Churches of every age and denomination. So far as there is any faith in an organized visible Church, and in Divinely appointed officers in that Church, there is but one sentiment among Oriental, Papal and Protestant Churches, on these points. The office of Deacon, in some form, has been maintained, as of Divine authority, in every Christian Church, from the beginning of the Christian era until the present time. This uniformity of opinion and practice arises from the clear and explicit manner in which the Scriptures speak concerning Deacons. The original appointment of Deacons is given at length in the 6th chapter of the book of Acts. In the enumeration of the officers of the Church, by the Apostle Paul, in Romans, ch. 12, he mentions this office where he says, (v. 7,) as it is in the original, “let those who hold the office of Deacon (διακονιαν) give themselves to the Deaconship, or to the duties of the Deaconship.” In his first epistle to the Corinthians also, (ch. 12: 28,) the Apostle says: “God hath set some in the Church;” and, in enumerating the officers thus set in the Church by God, he mentions “helpers”—by which, as has been generally understood, he means Deacons. The epistle to the Philippian Church—and through it, be it remembered, to all Christian Churches,

is addressed to “the Bishops,” or Ministers, “and Deacons;” thus teaching that every Church must have these officers. (1.) The Apostle Peter also is believed to refer to them, (1 Pet. 4: 11,) in the words, “ if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth.” And still further; in the directions given to all Churches, to the end of time, in the epistle to Timothy, the qualifications of Ministers, or Bishops, and of Deacons, are given at length. 1 Tim. 3 : 1-15. In this epistle we learn also that female, as well as male Deacons, were appointed under Divine authority, whose character and qualifications, and, therefore, their perpetuity, are clearly laid down. And we agree most cordially with those Churches of the Reformation, and with many of the most learned Divines, (2) in believing that the Church at large loses very much, in not appointing suitable females to attend, under official sanction and authority, to all those various interests of female members of the Church, which they, and they alone, can properly superintend and promote. And we cannot but express the hope, therefore, that our Churches in this country, will see the advantage of following the example of the Reformed Churches in France and elsewhere, who are now availing themselves of the services of females, in the accomplishment of many labours of love which are now neglected or very partially performed.—(3.) Of how much service would many of our devoted female disciples be, were they consecrated by an open and formal request of the Church, to the furtherance of “ every good word and work,” which might be found compatible with their sex and their opportunity.

While, however, as has been stated, no difference has ever arisen as to the *Divine origin and perpetuity* of the office of Deacon, there have been, and there now exist, differences as it regards the functions or duties of Deacons. In the Romish, Oriental, Prelatical, and some other Churches,

(1.) Some also suppose, as the original word would admit, that Epaphras and Tychicus were Deacons. See Col. 4: 12, and Col. 1: 7, and 4: 7; and Dr. Winter's Sermon on the Office of Deacon. Lond. 1822. p. 4, 5.

(2.) See the authorities from Scripture, the Fathers, and the Reformers, given at length in Voetius Polit. Eccl., torn. 3 : § 508, &c. See also the North British Review for Nov., 1847, p. 160, and the whole article.

(3.) See an article containing an account of all the existing institutions of Deaconesses in France, Germany, and England, and of a projected one in this country, in the Edinburgh Review for April, 1848.

Deacons are considered a lower class of their various ministerial orders. But for this theory there is manifestly and avowedly no warrant whatever in the Scriptures. This, indeed, is admitted, and can be proved, by the primitive Fathers, by the leading authorities in the Romish Church, and by the most able and capable writers of the Episcopal Church, as, for instance, Lightfoot, Riddle, Bishop Croft, Hadrian, Sarava, Archbishop Wake, Archbishop Whately, Dr. Hinds of Oxford, Mr. Palmer, Archbishop Potter, and Mr. Bingham. (4.)

There is, however, an opposite extreme of opinion and practice on this subject, by which this office is merged into that of the Ruling Elder, so as to admit of only one class of officers besides the Minister. This is now the case in Congregational Churches in which these officers are called Deacons, (5) and in many Presbyterian Churches where they are called Ruling Elders. This practice, however, as

(4.) See these quoted in the work, by Dr. Smyth, on Presbytery and not Prelacy, the Scriptural and Primitive Polity of the Churches. B. 1, ch. 12.

(5.) This will be evident from the following quotations from a recent paper on the subject of Deacons adopted by the Manchester and Salford Deacon's Association, in England, and published in the London Christian Witness for July, 1848, p. 231:

“ It is presumed that the Deacons of our Churches do, in the main, perform these or corresponding duties, and many others supplementary to them, which differing circumstances render necessary, and some of which, in the lapse of time, have become established usages; such as those connected with —

1. The general interests of the Churches to which they respectively belong, their places of worship, and the times and arrangements of Divine service.

2. The right management of all the religious and benevolent institutions connected with the several Churches, for which the Deacons are chiefly responsible.

3. The examination and encouragement of young converts previous to admission.

4. The distribution of the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper.

5. The visitation of backsliders with a view to their restoration.

6. The keeping and rendering an account, when necessary, of the money committed to their charge. To which may be added, as the duties of Deacons —

7. To note the attendance of the members at public and social worship, and at the table of the Lord :

8. To visit at regular intervals the seatholders in their places of worship at their own dwellings, for religious purposes; with some others which might be mentioned.”

There is here an evident amalgamation of the duties of the Eldership and Deaconship in one.

it is in open contrariety to Scripture, so is it also an innovation upon the long continued and established order of both these Churches. The Waldenses, Wickliffe, Tyndal, the Lutheran Church, the Genevan Church, the Swiss Churches, the French Protestant Church, the Belgic and Dutch Churches, the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, Ireland, and England at every period, the Puritans and Nonconformists, the Independent or Congregational Churches in England and in this country, until within a comparatively recent date—all these concurred in recognizing the distinction between the office of Deacon and the office of Ruling Elder ; in laying down both offices in their form of government, as of Divine institution, and in employing both in the actual management of their Churches. (6.)

Why then, it may be asked, have these offices been to so great an extent merged into one to the confusion of their respective functions, and to the great neglect of many duties designed to be accomplished by both. This confusion I attribute mainly to the want of a definite and clear discrimination between the sphere of duty and the ecclesiastical relations of these two classes of officers. And it is to their ambiguity and indefiniteness of opinion the practical difficulties experienced by many Churches, who are now re-establishing the office of Deacon, are to be traced.

Let us then endeavor to define the relative position of Deacons in relation to the Pastor, Minister, or Bishop, and to the Ruling Elders.

THE PASTOR OR MINISTER,* has, in Scripture, obtained different names expressive of his various duties. As he has the oversight of the flock of Christ, he is termed “ Bishop.” As he feeds them with spiritual food, he is called “ Pastor.” As he serves Christ in his Church, he is styled “ Minister.” As it is his duty to be grave and prudent, and an example to the flock, and to govern well in the house and kingdom of Christ, he is termed “ Presbyter or Elder.” As he is the messenger of God, he is denominated “ the Angel of the Church.” As he is sent to declare the will of God to sinners, and to beseech them to be reconciled to God, through

(6.) See quoted in Lorimer on the Office of Deacons, ch. iv. and ch. v, Edinb., 1842.

* See Smyth’s Ecclesiastical Catechism.

Christ, he is named “Ambassador.” And, as he dispenses the manifold grace of God, and the ordinances instituted by Christ, he is termed “Steward of the mysteries of God.”

It is made the duty of the Pastor, according to the Scriptures, to preach the Gospel, and to explain and enforce the Scriptures; to conduct the different parts of public worship; to dispense the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper; to administer Church discipline; to oversee the religious state of persons and families; and thus to rule in the Church according to the laws of Christ.

The essential character of the Pastor, is, therefore, that of public authoritative teaching, together with the general superintendence and watch of all the interests of the Church, and hence it is obvious that, in order to be qualified to discharge these various and constant duties, he must be wholly and permanently devoted to the studies and to the practice of his profession. And it is equally plain, that in the manner of his introduction, and his responsibilities while in the office of the Ministry, he *ought* to be, as he is, subject to a body not directly and immediately under the control of the people, since otherwise the whole truth, and order, and interests represented by him, would be subjected to mere popular opinion. As a Minister, he stands *primarily* related to the Church at large and to the Presbytery of which he is a member. A man, therefore, may be a Minister and yet not a Pastor, and can become the Pastor of a particular Church and discharge acceptably his duties to that Church, only by the free and prevailing good-will, affection, and respect of the great body of the members of that Church.

Were there, however, only Ministers in the Church, or were only Ministers allowed to sit, deliberate, and vote in all the conventions, conferences, councils, associations, or, as we call them, judicatories of the Church, then that Church in its government, would be a hierarchy, and would be *essentially*, whatever it might be *practically*, a ministerial or spiritual despotism. (7.) Christ, however, has constituted His Church a Commonwealth or Republic, in which “all are brethren,” and over which none are to have irre-

(7.) “It is,” says Chevalier Bunsen, “on this union of the laity the popular strength of the Church rests. If the Church of the Pays De Vaud had been a Church organized as a whole, and not as a mere Clergy-Church,

sponsible dominion. Power, therefore, is given by Christ to His people, in accordance with the constitution, charter, and rules prescribed in His word, to govern His Church, appoint its officers, direct its order, enforce its discipline, and secure its efficiency. The essential feature of a republic is representation—that is, in a republic as distinguished from a monarchy, power is exercised by the people. But in distinction from a pure democracy the people exercise this power, not directly and in mass, but through their chosen representatives, to whom it is delegated in trust, and by whom it is directly and immediately enforced. In a republic, therefore, the people make use of their power directly and in person, only in their elections and at no other time.

Now, as it regards the whole doctrine, order, government and discipline of the church, which is a spiritual republic, these representatives of the members of the church, who are chosen by them, and who are empowered to represent them, are RULING ELDERS. These “representatives of the people,” so named in our standards, are called *Elders*, not on account of their age, since Ministers are also called Elders, who ought certainly in every point of view to be of an age more mature and established than Ruling Elders, and yet are ordained at a very early age. The name Elder is, in both cases, one of dignity and not of age; and these officers are called RULING ELDERS, because they are appointed to assist the Bishop, who is the Teaching Elder, in the government of the church, from which therefore they are distinguished by being called *Ruling Elders*. This name was derived from the order of the Jewish synagogue, in which, besides a Bishop, who was also called Presbyter or Elder, there was a bench of Elders, who were associated with the Bishop in authority, and to whom were committed the general powers of government and discipline. The importance of this office of Ruling Elder is founded in nature, reason and necessity. The power of the church was vested by Christ in the whole body of its members; but as these cannot all meet together to transact business,

and governed by a general mixed Synod instead of the classes of the Clergy, she would have been able to resist with a very different result the brutal force of godless radicalism.”

or all act as officers, there must be Ruling Elders or Delegates appointed by them for these purposes.

The general duties of Ruling Elders are these—To act with the Bishop or Pastor, as “helps and governments,” in the exercise of ecclesiastical authority; to watch over the flock, assist in the admission or exclusion of members, warn and censure the unruly, visit and comfort the afflicted, instruct the young, and exhort and pray, as opportunity may be given. Ruling Elders possess authority, equally with the Bishops or Pastors, as rulers, though not as teachers : for as the Bishop is ordained not only to rule, but also to teach, Elders are equally bound, with the other members of the church, to obey him in the Lord, and to receive his instructions, so far as they are agreeable to the word of God. The qualifications for the office of Ruling Elder are sincere piety, sound principles, prudence, zeal, and unblemished reputation. Ruling Elders therefore represent the people in all the general interests of the church; and as they are many in every single congregation, while the Pastor is but one and acts only as Chairman or President, it is evident that every Presbyterian congregation is, to the greatest possible extent and in the strictest possible manner, a republic, *analogous* to our civil municipal constitutions ; and as the number of Ruling Elders *must* always equal and *may* almost always outnumber that of Ministers in every other judicatory of the church, as they *necessarily* do in the Church Session, and as in all these judicatories they sit on a perfect equality with the ministers, the whole government of the Presbyterian Church is manifestly and entirely republican. (8.)

DEACONS stand related to the Pastor and Ruling Elders, as the magistrates or other local civil officers of the city do

(8) “ We may notice here,” says the N. British Review, “ by the way, the somewhat cavalier manner in which Bunsen,” in his *Church of the Future*, there reviewed, “occasionally treats systems with whose practical working he is evidently but little acquainted. Thus, throughout, he speaks of Presbyterianism as a government of self-election in the hands of a self-renewing corporation, without once noticing the leading feature of that polity as it exists, not fettered as perhaps it is in Switzerland, but free and unembarrassed, as in America and elsewhere,—we mean the principle which secures a thorough popular representation in the ruling body, as well as a large measure of liberty in each particular congregation, through the power of choice vested in the body of the Christian people.”

to the Mayor and Council. The Pastor and Elders constitute the Church Council, are made responsible for the general government and direction of its spiritual concerns, and represent therefore these interests as well as those of the church at large, in all its various judicatories. Deacons, on the other hand, are local officers, charged with local interests, and called upon to discharge local duties. Their field is bounded by a particular church, and by particular interests in that church. They are *ecclesiastical* officers, in distinction from such as are merely appointed by the congregation (9) for purposes limited to the legal, fiscal, or territorial arrangements of the church. Deacons are of *divine* institution, under divine sanction and blessing, and are intended to promote directly the welfare of the body of Christ. In these respects they resemble the Elders, and are, therefore, nominated, chosen and ordained like them. But, in distinction from the Elders, Deacons are *executive* and not legislative officers, designed for practical efficiency and not for deliberative counsel. They carry out and accomplish what is thus determined by the session. To the session belongs whatever pertains to the ministry of the word, and to the doctrine, order, discipline and government of the church; and under their direction, superintendence and **controul**, Deacons cooperate in the promotion of “ every good word and work.” To the Deacons pertains the actual management and practical discharge of every duty not included under the head of doctrine, Order, or discipline, which the prosperity of the church and of every member of the church demands, and which are not provided for by some other arrangement of the church. As, however, no buildings were possessed by Christians in Apostolic times, it is not *necessary* to suppose that the erection, the repairs, the chartering, the holding and the directing of these and other church property, should be given exclusively to the Deacons, as most assuredly they cannot, in consistency with their functions, be given to Ruling Elders or to the session as such ; and since Deacons can only act under the direction and in cooperation with the Elders, it would seem that every church is left to manage the business

(9.) On the different modes of electing Deacons, see Voetius, tom iii, p. 507.

of erecting, repairing, paying for and holding in legal trusteeship, the property of the church, by officers of its own independent appointment. In this way, the possibility of an ecclesiastical hierarchy and of a close spiritual corporation is prevented, while the opportunity of awakening deep personal interest in the affairs of the church is more widely extended. (10.)

On the other hand, since the whole theory of the church, as understood by Presbyterians, supposes that no body or association of ecclesiastical or spiritual officers can exist

(10.) The vital principle of Presbyterian Church government is the subordination of every court of the church to one above it, up to the Supreme Court or General Assembly, so that there is and can be no irresponsible authority. As, therefore, the Session is the only authorised court in a *particular* church, for government, Deacons must be in subordination to and under the *controul* and direction of the Session, just as the Session is to the Presbytery, and so on. No important business ought to be undertaken by the Deacons without the concurrence of the Session, with whom they ought to consult, and to whom, at a regular quarterly or special meeting, they ought to submit their records, their Treasurer's account, and their plans or suggestions. In this way their proceedings are brought under review and come up before the higher courts, to whom the Deacons can refer any doubtful case, by the usual modes of *reference, appeal, or complaint*.

By not keeping this principle in view, as appears from the following extract from *The Banner* of Canada, the Free Church of Scotland have already encountered much practical difficulty:

“ He then alluded to the extraordinary demands of Deacon's Courts,” that is, a court independent of the Session, and also of any temporal officers, such as Trustees or Committees appointed by the congregation, “ *which was an excrescence on the constitution of the church, never heard of, till after the disruption*, and which was continually, through misunderstanding as to what was its province, involving them in discussion.”— *Proceedings of Free Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, from the Scottish Guardian, 19th Oct.*

“ The words within inverted commas, fell from a member of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, and the speaker was no other than the Rev. Andrew King. Less than three years appear to have made a great change on the views of our reverend friend, on that subject. The Deacon's Court is declared to be an excrescence on the constitution of the church, unknown till after the disruption : the very thing we told Mr. King when he was here, and published in the *Banner*, and which he was so grievously offended at that he sent a bull from Montreal, as he was about to embark, abusing us for our presumption. It might have been scarcely worth while to notice this subject, and, as far as Mr. King is concerned, we would not have done so, if we had not regarded the Deacon's Court as a dangerous invasion on the rights of the Presbyterian people in every church really desirous to be “free.” It is because, under the shelter of that court, the whole temporalities of the church are thrown into the spiritual courts, which conveys a Popish and Prelatical and Methodistical power to these courts, which will injure their spirituality and may ultimately bring ruin on the church.”

within it, independent of the review and **controul** of the several judicatories of the church, it is evident that as the sessional records and proceedings are all submitted to the review and **controul** of the Presbytery, and those of the Presbytery to the Synod, and those of the Synod to the General Assembly, so ought the Records and the whole business of the Deacons to come under the review and controul of the session; and so ought the direction of the property of the church, when placed in other hands than those of the Deacons, to be so ordered as not in any way to interfere with *that controul* given to the church of all such buildings and property, for the sole and exclusive use of a Presbyterian Church, when its standards were adopted as its form of government. In the organization of the church, and in the ordination of its Pastor, such a consecration of the buildings and property, for such purposes, is formally made to the Presbytery, as the proper representative of the church, and therefore to the session also, who are the proper representatives of the Presbytery : and while, therefore, the management of these buildings and property may, as we have said, be properly and wisely entrusted to Trustees or to the pew-holders generally, their use and controul—*for the spiritual purposes of the church*—cannot with any possible consistency be in any degree alienated from the direction and **controul** of the only divinely instituted judicatories of the church.

But to return. To the Deacons belong all the duties coming under the general term “serving tables”—“daily ministration”—“the Apostle’s fellowship, that is, systematic contributions for charitable and religious purposes (κοινωνία) (11)—ministering and “helping”—in short, to all duties relating to the temporal, rather than to the spiritual concerns of the church. The old distinction, current from the time of the Reformation, refers the term “tables” to three separate departments—THE TABLE OF THE LORD, THE TABLE OF THE PASTOR, AND THE TABLE OF THE POOR.

The word *table* is very commonly used to signify that for which a table is employed, and to include therefore the

(11.) See this subject discussed, in an Essay on “Collections for Charitable and Religious purposes, a means of grace and a part of the divinely instituted worship of God,” by Dr. Smyth, of Charleston.

whole mode of living, or whatever kind of business is transacted upon a table. To serve a table, therefore, often, in classic writers, has reference to a money table, and signifies to take care of money affairs, and to have charge of making collections and distributing alms ; (12) and hence, according to the general concurrence of all the reformed churches, it is a part of the Deacon's office to take charge of THE LORD'S TABLE. This implies that they are to take care that suitable preparation should be made for the celebration of the holy ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as often as the church, through its session, appoints the administration of these ordinances. (13.) To "the Lord's table" belongs also whatever is necessary to the proper celebration of divine worship, and of all the services for the social and public duties of religion. These constitute the spiritual provisions of Christ's house, provided for and offered to His guests through the instrumentality of His appointed servants. Whatever, therefore, respects the place in which these services are held, all matters of arrangement and decorum connected with them, and the appropriation of seats to those who unite in them, devolves properly on the Deacons. To them also are properly committed the care of the sacred vessels of the Lord's house, the baptismal and communion apparatus,—the supply of the bread, the wine, the water, and the napkin,—the arrangements for their use, and whatever personal attention is required in order to secure the proper and timely introduction of the parties to whom these ordinances are to be administered.

To "THE TABLE OF THE LORD" belongs also the accommodation of those who might be induced, or have a present wish, to attend upon the services of the sanctuary.

Strangers often feel embarrassed in finding their way into a Church, and are very much influenced in their choice of a Church by the kind manner in which they are introduced, and in which they are assisted in accomodating themselves with a seat suitable and agreeable to them.

The Lord has also made special provision in His Church for "the poor," to whom, in a most emphatic manner, "the

(12.) See abundant proof in Robinson's Greek Lexicon of the N. T., improved by Negris & Duncan, under the word *τραπέζα*.

(13.) See 1 Cor. 10 : 16, 21.

Gospel is to be preached.” And while it is *necessary*, in order to meet the expenses of the Church, to have a system of pew-rents, yet FULL AND AMPLE provision should be made for the accommodation of those who, from a variety of causes, may be unable to meet the expense of a rented pew. To this matter the attention of Deacons should be particularly directed. Some persons again are anxious to pay what they can afford to the support of the Church, but are not able to pay the full amount of the ordinary pew rent. Now such parties ought to be in every possible way encouraged, and it would be a most grateful service for the Deacons to make an arrangement with other individuals, so as, *among them*, to assume the rent of a whole pew, and thus at once to please and accommodate all concerned. Sometimes again, persons in moderate circumstances have such a difficulty in hearing as makes it necessary that they should sit as near the pulpit as possible, and are, nevertheless, unable to pay the rent assessed upon a pew in that position. Here then is another case, in which the Church, through her Deacons, should manifest “the tenderness of Christ,” in adapting the arrangements of His “TABLE” to the circumstances of His people—“the strong bearing the infirmities of the weak, and “every man pleasing his neighbor to his edification” and comfort.

And where persons are *really* unable, while in spirit willing, to contribute to the expenditures of the Church, in this case Deacons and others should manifest the greatest solicitude to make them feel at home in the Church, to provide for them suitable and convenient seats, and thus to prove that in Christ’s Church there is equal regard for the poor and the humble as for the rich and elevated, and that as “Christ is the head” of all, so are all “members one of another.”

To the Deacons belong also, it has been said, THE TABLE OF THE PASTOR, Bishop, or Minister. It is the law of Christ’s kingdom, that “he who is taught in the Word should communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things,” “the Lord having ordained that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.” As Ministers give to their work their whole time, energy and devotion—as that work requires, for its accomplishment books and other

apparatus to an indefinite extent, and as it occasions an outlay of actual expenditure in a variety of ways—it is at once evident that this law of ministerial support is reasonable, necessary, and designed to secure in the most effectual manner invaluable benefits to the parties concerned. These benefits are found not merely in the equivalent which is enjoyed in pastoral oversight and instruction, but also in the working of that universal law by which we value and give attention to any object in proportion as we make efforts and sacrifices to secure it.

It is, therefore, undoubtedly for the interest of members of the Church, as it is their imperative duty, to “communicate to Him that teacheth in all good things.” And it is a very important part of the Deacon’s office, where the duty is not otherwise efficiently provided for, to facilitate, systematize, and certainly secure, a full provision for “the table of the Minister.” It is in the power of prudent, active and liberal-minded officers, whether Deacons or otherwise, to render the performance of this duty a cheerful and affectionate tribute of respect and esteem on the part of the people, and an encouragement to confidence, perseverance and fidelity on the part of the pastor. In Churches wholly unendowed, as ours generally are, the dependence of Ministers upon the exertions and considerate sympathy of such officers, is necessarily great, and by well-timed applications, and a wise and impartial division of labor, such officers may place their Minister in a state of respectable freedom from worldly embarrassment; supply him with all needful apparatus, so that out of a full and well garnished storehouse he may “bring forth things new; and old,” “a portion always in season” for the edification and comfort of his people; and, at the same time, put it in his power to shew forth his hospitality. And, as there is a deep-seated law of our nature, which awakens lively and peculiar emotions of grateful regard, when benefits are conferred, which are purely voluntary, and not included in any stipulated agreement, the way is further open for greatly enlarging the kindly sympathies of pastor and people, by such acts of unsolicited and unlooked-for liberality.

But the Deacons are appointed to take charge, also, of THE TABLE OF THE POOR. “The poor shall never die out of the land”—“Ye have the poor,” says Christ, “always

with you, but me ye have not always.” “ Whatsoever, therefore, ye do for them, ye do it unto me.” Such is the purpose and providence of God, and such the tenor of that rule of judgment by which our future award and proportion of happiness shall be determined. The poor to whom the benevolent efforts of the Church are to be directed, are, *primarily*, the members of particular Churches; the aged, infirm, diseased, and in any way impoverished, members of “ the household of faith,” for whom, if the Church does not provide with liberality, “ she has denied the faith,” and is worse than those societies which, without exercising *as such* any faith in the Church, or in Christ, its institutor, shew forth their charity in providing, more or less plentifully, for all who have claims upon their bounty. But the Church at Jerusalem never thought of limiting their bounty to *resident members* of their Church, but embraced all of every country and language who came within the reach of their charitable efforts; and nothing is more evident in the Apostolic narrative than the “ readiness” with which the Apostolic Churches were willing, “ to the full extent of their power”—aye, and “beyond their power,” to aid the necessities of Christian brethren and sisters elsewhere, as well as within their own sphere.

The poor, therefore, to whom the Deacons are to “ give heed,” are Christ’s poor—*primarily*, those of their own immediate Church, and, *secondarily*, all other “poor saints,” wherever they are found, and so far as there is ability and opportunity “ to communicate with them in their necessities.”

But it is not for these poor Christians merely, that Christ claims attention and regard. The poor generally, whether believers or not, are the objects of Christ’s special compassion. Among these He chose to become incarnate, for “ He had not where to lay his head.” From these He chose His disciples; to these He manifested most of His mighty works, and for them He performed most of His miraculous cures. To every one of them, in the person of the wounded traveller, He points us as a neighbor to whose wants we are bound to attend, and in the good Samaritan, in contrast with the Priests and Levites, Christ depicts the character and conduct of His *true* and approved disciples. Christians are, in an eminent sense, the guardians of the poor, and

whatever will promote their comfort and well-being, ought to be devised, advocated, and supported by them. Every Church, therefore, is, and ought to be, an association for the temporal, the moral, and the spiritual improvement of the poor. This should be one leading and prominent object, for which there should be united, systematic, and vigorous effort.

For this purpose are Deacons instituted by Christ, and clothed with authority, and invoked by a solemn sense of duty, to “devise liberally” and wisely for “this heritage of the Lord.” The office of Deacon is undervalued by many, only because this great function of the Church is little known and little felt. The Church is suffering greatly because she has so long, and to so great an extent, “passed by on the other side,” and left the poor to perish in neglect, or to be taken up by other associations formed “to supply her lack of service.” The injury done to the cause of Christ, by this neglect, is, beyond calculation, great.

There ought to be in every Church, therefore, a large bench of Deacons, including men of prudence, piety, wisdom, and great liberality—say eighteen or twenty. Among these, “the region round about” the Church should be divided into small sections, so that “two by two” they might visit and become personally acquainted with all the poor in their respective districts. By visiting these poor families, their character, condition and wants would be known, and by availing themselves of the resources within their reach, their immediate wants could be relieved, the education of their children provided for, habits of industry and economy be promoted, by introducing them to the Savings Bank, and encouraging them to live within their means, and a spirit of love, reverence, and attachment, be cherished among the poor, towards their wealthier neighbours.

Depend upon it, the severance of the poor from the bounty and oversight of the Church, is a fatal policy, both for the Church and the community. This policy is fatal to *the Church*, because the poor have been the friends and supporters of the Church, when higher parties have been hostile; because “to the poor the Gospel is preached;” because “the poor God has chosen to be rich in faith and heirs of the promises;” because, therefore, the blessing of God is made to depend upon the attention of the Church

to the poor; and because, if the poor are alienated from the Church, they will be found—as in England, in Ireland, in France, and wherever they are supported by poor laws, or not provided for at all—the greatest enemies of truth and righteousness, and the greatest hindrances to all moral and social improvement. Let the poor, however,—as to some extent is the case in many parts of Scotland—be provided for by the, church, and they will be found the greatest friends, supporters, and patrons of the church—be elevated and ennobled in their own character, and become industrious, moral, and peaceable in their whole deportment. Their policy, therefore, of leaving the poor to legal assistance, will be found equally fatal, to the *community at large*. It introduces the poor-law system with all its gigantic evils. It severs the provisions for the poor from all moral and religious influences. It destroys self-respect, degrades moral character, multiplies a thousand-fold the evil it attempts to meet, fosters pride and dissatisfaction, and by sanctioning the idea of a *legal right* to such provision, paves the way for the spirit of agrarianism, and of hatred and dislike to all the distinctions of society. (14.)

(14.) On this subject see a very able work, Bosarquet on the Poor. Mr. Lorimer, of Glasgow, in his work on Deacons, has the following remarks, which are of great weight. “The world holds that it deals in substantial kindness, while the Christian contents himself with faith, as distinguished from morality. To meet this common charge, it is most desirable, for the honour of Christianity and the Christian Church, that they be seen in their true character as the patrons of the poor, especially the pious poor: and how can this be better done than when it appears that a court of officers, to watch over the interests of the poor, in the spirit of Christianity, is an essential part of the constitution of the Christian Church? So long as the Church cannot point to these officers in living operation under her authority, she wants the full answer which she may and ought to have it in her power to return to the charges and insinuations, whether of worldliness, or superstition, or infidelity. It is not enough to say that Christians are charitable—far more charitable than others — unless it can be shown that the poor are so important in their eyes, and dear to their hearts, that they have a regular official provision in the very structure of the Christian Church for attending to their wants, and that men are failing in Christian duty where this, in one form or another, is wanting. Let, however, the Christian Church be fully equipped with a large staff of laborious tender-hearted Deacons, watching over the poor from week to week and year to year, ministering to their wants out of the donations of the Church, and treating them with the kindness of brethren and sisters; and what is there in any occasional charitable bequest, any regular and extraordinary deed of benevolence, on the part of the men of the world, which could bear any comparison, with such friendship? Tried by this test, Christianity would not only

From what has been said, and from the other passages of Scripture in which the office of Deacon is described, it is evident that while this office is local, and while, for the sake of order and unity, it must be under the direction of the session and auxiliary to it, it is one in itself most important and honourable, and in its influence most beneficial to the church and to the community. It is equally evident that the field of duty opened to the Christian efforts of Deacons is of incalculable value. Indeed, there is no other limit to it than the benevolent desires and active zeal of those who fill the office. In many ways, not now pointed out, Deacons might, in a silent and indirect manner, contribute to the personal, social and business prosperity of those who are connected with the church ; recommend them to those who might need their services or their goods; put those who wish employment in the way of finding it; introduce those who are strangers, to the acquaintance of each other; procure subscribers for those periodicals of our church, whose circulation is deemed advisable; promote the establishment of parochial schools, under the watch and care of the church: and in numerous ways, incapable of distinct mention, build up, strengthen and beautify Zion. (15.)

be acquitted of indifference—its genuine liberality would be established and rendered conspicuous. We can conceive few things more dishonorable to Protestant Christianity, or more fitted to impair its progress, than to be able to say, with apparent truth, that it is careless of the interests of the poor—more careless than the men who make less pretension. And, on the other hand, we can conceive few things more fitted to propitiate the good will of the world, which, at all events, admires benevolence, than to be able, in a way which does not admit of cavil, to show that the same religious system which alone can provide for the welfare of eternity, is the most active and unwearied guardian of the poor man's interest in time. This is an argument which must always be powerful, but particularly in such a day as the present, when it is to be feared irreligion and infidelity prevail to a considerable extent among the humbler classes of society — classes which were once happily strangers to the poison, and which are naturally led, from their very circumstances, to make comparisons of men and systems in connection with their care for the poor, and to consider this as almost the exclusive standard of character."

(15.) In depicting his Church of the Future, Chevalier Bunsen says— " We found the most startling and important signs of this in the help afforded to the church in her care of the poor, the sick and the prisoners. We were here met by a zealous company of men and women, who had founded institutions of helpful love, for the reformation of those who have gone astray, for the maintenance of homeless and orphan children, for the comfort of the sick and the prisoner; we were met by operatives full of

But in no other way can Deacons do more service than by carrying out a plan of systematic contribution, by which every member of the church and congregation shall have the opportunity of giving what they *should* give to the several objects of Christian benevolence, to which the attention of the church is directed. In this way, every one may know, with certainty, when and how they shall be called upon—may be enabled to “set apart” their “gifts” and have them ready—may become habituated to give, from principle and “from a willing mind,” and therefore prayerfully and cheerfully.

Such is, undoubtedly, the divinely appointed order for faith, and by a holy band of deaconesses, performing the works of the merciful sisters of the clergy-church, without vows, in the full freedom of the gospel, and in the might of free, because thankful, love. Now every one who considers the way in which the diaconate first decayed and died, and how it is especially wanting in the clergy-church, because it requires its free development the full communion of the laity, and the full acknowledgment of the universal priesthood, will readily comprehend the historical significance of the fact, that amongst the vigorous offshoots of the church-life of the present day, the diaconate is the most distinctly and gloriously prominent. *This is the ministry of love, and in an especial manner the ministry of the Church of the Future.* We may here behold coming to the birth the new elements of that Church of the Future, whose birth-throes we all feel, of that free congregation of faithful men, to which the groaning of the creature, and the ever more fearful revelations of the misery of mankind are pointing. Here is that ministry which is open to all; here is that approval of our faith to which everyone is called; here is that exercise of the priesthood for which every constitution of the church gives liberty. Here is that centre from which the constitution of this Church of the Future must proceed, if it is to be partaker of an inward and spiritual life.”—*Bunsen, pp. 302-205.*

“All hail,” says the N. British Reviewer, “to such a Church of the Future! The world yearns for it: creation groans for it. Society is sick at heart; sick of sore maladies which politics can scarcely cure; sick of many empirics and few physicians. And Christ’s church alone has the *panacea*—the universal cure. Deacons and Deaconesses. Brothers and Sisters of Charity,—with Christ’s love in their hearts and no Pope’s yoke on their necks—Priests and Priestesses, self-devoted to the High Priest’s own work of going about to do good—such is the ministry, the age, and the church, and the world, all demand. Otherwise, churches are self-consuming; light and life go out in a cold vacuum. Pastors, Elders, Deacons, Schoolmasters, People, eat in on themselves and on one another. Forms of polity and worship stand; rights of rule and rights of choice are balanced; but love dies; and with love all peace and joy. An earnest, outgoing ministry, in all who are the Lord’s—in Dorcas as in Paul—is the grand want of the times. What church will realize this? That is the church of the Future! Bunsen, Arnold, Vinet, Chalmers, all are one here. For, at the last, intellect, humanity, piety, are always one.”

raising charitable and religious contributions, and one special and primary object for which the church is instituted, and for which every Christian is "called and chosen of God." Such contribution is a part of Christian discipleship, a test and evidence of our sincere love and devotion to the Saviour. It is a prominent part of Apostolic institution, precept and practice. It is an integral part of the worship we may acceptably render to God, and to withhold which is to "rob" and dishonor "God" and to put Him to an open shame before the world. A systematic plan by which all the members of the church may be reached, and by which such collections might be made to contribute to the spiritual benefit of all concerned, was framed by the Apostles, and is given for our instruction and example; and as, therefore, the church is returning to the scriptural order of Deacons, let the Deacons direct their special attention to the restoration of the scriptural plan and method of raising collections, for all those purposes to which the church is devoted.

From what has been said, it will be further seen that, while Deacons are only officers in a particular church, their office is essentially connected with every interest of Christ and His cause. Their qualifications, therefore, cannot be too spiritual or too high; nor should any provisions by which the purity, the efficiency, and the spirituality of the Eldership are guarded, be omitted in the case of Deacons. Our standards, therefore, make the mode of nomination, election and ordination, the same, both for Deacons and Elders; and while they allow their election to be made by the members of the church, limit their nomination to the session.

In conclusion, we would say, that the church cannot too deeply feel the obligation under which she is laid to those who undertake and endeavour faithfully to discharge the duties of these several offices, nor too "highly esteem them in love for their work's sake." And as the efficiency of a session, and of deacons when appointed, depends upon the perfect harmony and unison of views and feelings which prevail among these officers, so that they may ALL be "co-workers" and "fellow laborers," it follows, that for this reason, even if there was no other, the nomination of any"

additional members, to either office, is wisely given, by our standards, and the practice of our best regulated churches, to the session; and that, in their election, great regard should be paid by the members of the church to the conviction and wishes of the session, as manifested in their nominations. Could parties, uncongenial or antagonistic, be introduced into either body, the consequence would be inevitably injurious to every interest of the church, and be a certain means of preventing it from enjoying the gratuitous services of its most valuable members. (16.)

(18.) “ Where the Pastor and the Deacons act independently of each other,” says Dr. Winter,* “they are generally mutual hindrances; but where they strive together, they are mutual helps.”

“ Christian brethren,” said my friend Dr. Newman, who preached on this subject more than fifteen years ago, at the Monthly Meeting of the Baptist Ministers and Churches, in this city and its vicinity, “Christian brethren! give to the Minister I love, for a Deacon, a man in whose house he may sit down at ease, when he is weary and loaded with care; into whose bosom he may freely pour his sorrows, and by whose lips he may be soothed, when he is vexed and perplexed; by whose illuminated mind he may be guided in a difficulty, and by whose liberality and cordial co-operation he may be animated, and assisted in every generous undertaking.”†

* Mr. Jay’s friend, in his Sermon on the Office of Deacons. See also an elaborate discourse on this subject, by the Rev. Mr. Wilson, of the Reformed or Secession Church in this country, not at this moment at my hand.

† See “The Work and Reward of Faithful Deacons;” a sermon, addressed to the Baptist Monthly Association, August 21, 1806. By William Newman, D. D. Second Edition, 1820.

NOTE.

The following paper was adopted by the Session of the Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston, in view of the appointment of Deacons:

The Bible and our standards have made the office of Deacon, in distinction from that of the Pastor and the Ruling Elder, plain, obvious and imperative. And the General Assembly, together with our Presbytery, have called upon every church where the office has fallen into disuse, to have it restored. The Ministry and the Eldership have relation to the doctrine, discipline and government of the church; and the Deaconship to the general interests of the poor, to collections made for pious purposes, and, generally, to all matters relating to the interests of the church, in which the session may desire their cooperation.

It is thus manifest that the duties assigned to Deacons, need not interfere either with those of the session, on the one hand, or of such officers, on the other hand, as are appointed by the congregation, for the exclusive management of its fiscal affairs, its buildings, and its burial ground.

Resolved, therefore, that this session do now proceed to nominate as many Deacons as may be at present expedient, to be recommended to the church for their election.

Resolved, that, in doing this, the following rules be adopted, for the better understanding of the mutual duties of Deacons and Elders:

1st. The session, consisting of the Pastor and Ruling Elders, constitute the supreme and only authorized body in the church, for directing (in accordance with its spiritual rules) every thing pertaining to the spiritual order, government and discipline of the same.

2nd. The Deacons, therefore, are appointed to act only in accordance with the views of the session, and within that field to which session may direct their labors; and all nominations for that office shall be made by the session.

3rd. It shall be the duty of the Deacons to appoint a Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, and to keep minutes of all their proceedings, which shall be submitted to the session for review and approval once a quarter.

4th. Within the field assigned to them, it shall be the duty of the Deacons to devise and employ every proper means for furthering the objects entrusted to their care.

5th. Once a quarter, or oftener, if necessary, the Deacons shall meet with the session, when they shall make their report and receive directions and advice, and when appropriations to the regular beneficiaries of the church shall be made.

6th. In regard to the specific duties of the Deacons. *Resolved*, that to them be committed, under the aforesaid direction and superintendence of the session—

I. The poor, and every thing pertaining to their temporal comfort and advantage.

II. The collections for all religious purposes, to be made in the congregation as appointed by the session, and the means of rendering them more general, more equal, more liberal, and therefore more systematic.

III. The arrangements for the accommodation of strangers and others, at all the meetings of the church.

IV. It shall be the duty of the Deacons also to use every proper and practicable means for inducing strangers to attend the church,—for aiding and assisting young men and others in procuring situations or employment,—for promoting, as far as practicable, the temporal welfare, business and prospects, of members of the church; and in every other way for furthering its interests.

V. It shall be further the duty and business of the Deacons, to assist in promoting the circulation of such periodicals as, in the judgment of the session, it is desirable to circulate in the congregation.

Finally, as it regards the election and ordination of Deacons. *Resolved*, that they be conducted in the same manner as those of Ruling Elders, according to Rules 1 and 2 of this church.

[In *The Complete Works of Thomas Smyth*, vol. IV, pp. 361-382, cf. "The Office and Functions of Deacons in relation to those of the Pastor and Ruling Elders, defined and distinguished"]