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ARTICLE I.

THE DEACONSHIP.*

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The life of the Church, like every other kind of life, is perpetuated and invigorated by its own activities. The mode in which these activities are exercised constitutes its organization. This, of course, takes its form from the nature of its life, just as the peculiar form of each species of plant and animal is fixed by the nature and functions of its life; and the perfection of that form consists in its giving the fullest and freest exercise to those functions. For though the form springs from the life, that life may not be healthy; or its early activities may be prevented by some external obstructions from working out their appropriate effects, in which case the form that results must necessarily be defective. So a tree or an animal may, in its growth, be so obstructed in its development as to produce serious deformity, which may afterwards greatly interfere with the vigorous working of its life. While,

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therefore, the church's life does not depend upon her form—does not result from it—but her form is the outgrowth of her life; yet that form has a vast influence upon her life, in proportion as it is an exact and unobstructed expression of it, and as it affords a more or less free and untrammelled exercise to all her proper functions. Now, the mode in which these activities were exercised when her life was fresh and vigorous, under the copious effusions of the Spirit in her primitive state, and under the inspired guidance of the Apostles, may certainly be believed to be the best adapted to give to that life increasing vigor, and to secure the fullest measure of success. Hence arise these three leading inquiries: What are the great perpetual functions of the Church of Christ? What was their apostolic mode of exercise? And how may the principles involved in these be applied to all the various exigencies of the church in the varying conditions of human society? The answer to these decides all the great questions of church polity; and that, too, without implying that everything in her primitive organization is binding always and everywhere, and because it was then adopted as an iron frame work of specific and unyielding shape and dimensions. This view rather establishes those two great principles in regard to church order—definiteness of general form and official station, as necessary to secure to all her officers the authority of a Divine appointment; and yet flexibility of application, as necessary to her universal adaptation in the diversified forms of human society and stages of mental and moral development.

The great leading functions of the church may be regarded as four: the aggressive, the teaching, the governing and the charitable. The first requires the evangelist or missionary; the second, the teacher or pastor; the third, the session or bench of presbyters; these three being but different classes of the one comprehensive office of presbyter or elder; and the fourth finds its appropriate organ in the deacon. In regard to the three former, the principles and the practice of the Presbyterian Church are settled and consistent; not so in regard to the last, which is very generally viewed as unimportant. The discussion of this, therefore, cannot be regarded as

uncalled for; let us attempt it under the guidance of the principles just stated.

The warrant, the nature, and the importance of this office, and the qualifications for it, will successively claim our attention, though they cannot be kept entirely distinct, our leading design being to establish its great importance.

I. Its WARRANT. This we find in Acts 6: 1-7, compared with Phil. 1: 1, and 1 Tim. 3: 8, &c. The passage in Acts has always been regarded by most as stating the origin of this office. The officers spoken of are not indeed called deacons here, but their functions are such as to identify them with the deacons of after times; and the word used in the original, (διακονῆιν) to express their duties, bears the same relation to the word “ deacon” (διακονος), as the word “ *to serve*” bears to “ *servant*,” and though both these and other cognate forms are used to express every kind of service and servant, as in this passage we have “ the ministry of the word” διακονία τοῦ λόγου and “the daily ministration” (διακονία τῆ καθημερινῇ), they are yet in their literal and original application expressive of that service which one renders to another by waiting on him, and supplying his wants. The terms in which the office is here described, “daily ministration,” or literally, *deacon work*, and “ to serve tables,” or preserving the original form, “ *to deacon tables*” point out the word deacon as its proper designation.

That this word, though often applied in its generic sense to all the officers of the church, and even to Christ himself, was also used in a specific, technical sense as the designation of a particular officer in the primitive church, is universally granted. Paul addresses his Epistle to the Philippians “ *to all the saints, with the bishops and deacons*,” and in his first Epistle to Timothy, he states at length the qualifications of a deacon—a fact clearly showing that this office, whatever it was, was designed to be general. Since, therefore, there was in the churches established by the Apostles an officer called a deacon; since the same word in its verbal form is here used to express the specific duties of the officers here chosen; since there is no other office to which this narrative can possibly apply; and

since, too, if we have not here the origin of this office, we have it nowhere, we are safe in following the almost universal belief of the church, that we have here the institution of the permanent office of deacon. If this be granted, the nature and duties of the office can hardly admit of controversy.

It has, however, been said that the office of these Seven arose from a special exigency, which lasted no longer than that peculiar condition of things that characterized the primitive Church of Jerusalem; and hence the office itself passed away with the necessity that gave rise to it; and that the deacons mentioned in the Epistles were an entirely different class of officers, since their duties included, at least, the preaching of the Word. In proof of this last assertion, appeal is confidently made to the qualification required in a deacon by Paul, in 1 Tim. 3: 9, “ *holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience* ;” and to the further declaration that good deacons “purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” But these expressions, so far from proving that these deacons were to preach, are really not so strong as the brief language used by the Apostles, to describe the necessary qualifications of the seven: “ *men full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom.*” If this were necessary to fit these men to be almoners of the church, the qualification required by Paul, “ *holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience*”—*i.e.*, holding the Gospel truth in sincerity, is equally necessary for the same purpose, and no more implies preaching than the former. And the other expression, that “ *they purchase to themselves great boldness in the faith*” by a faithful discharge of their duties—a result that must always follow the faithful performance of all official duty—surely affords the least possible presumption that their duty was to preach the Word. These passages, then, give no ground to the opinion that the deacon of the Epistles differs from the office here instituted, but rather by the similarity of qualifications, tends to confirm the view that they are the same.

We feel warranted, therefore, in considering these Seven as holding essentially the same office as the deacons mentioned in the Epistles; and hence derive an argument at the very

outset for the perpetuity of the office here instituted. For it is evident that it was not the unique character and circumstances of the Church of Jerusalem that demanded the labor of such officers, but some exigencies in other churches also, the Church of Philippi certainly, and all those churches whose order Timothy was directed to arrange; and hence the conclusion is not very violent in nearly all churches and all ages. This conclusion as to the warrant for the office will be further established by considering its nature.

II. The NATURE of this office is manifest from the exigency which gave rise to it. That exigency was two-fold. That the charities of the church might be impartially dispensed to all her needy members, and that this important and laborious duty might not interfere with the higher and more spiritual ministry of the Apostles in supplying the wants of the soul.

So strong were the ties by which the members of the primitive church felt themselves bound together, that they regarded themselves as one family; and seeing the necessities of the poorer brethren, many even *“sold their possessions and goods,”* *“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.”* This distribution was at first made under the direction of the Apostles themselves ; but, as the community increased, and the details could not be brought under their personal inspection, some who had claims upon the church’s care seem to have been neglected. To correct this by such personal attention of the Apostles themselves as would have been required, would have absorbed a large portion of their time and energies, the whole of which were required for more important services. The election and appointment of these deacons, then, was intended to secure the proper and equitable ministration of these funds of the church, and at the same time to relieve the Apostles of all these secular cares, that they might devote themselves entirely to prayer and the ministry of the Word. This office, then, was that of almoners of the church’s bounty. No language could more effectually exclude preaching the Word, as part of its duties, than that here used. *“ Choose you out seven men whom*

we may appoint over this business—this ministry of tables— these secular matters, and *we will give ourselves to the ministry of the Word.* Could two things be more fully distinguished than this distinguishes the office of deacon and the ministry of the Word? It is but trifling to say, in opposition to this express designation of the design of the office, that Philip and Stephen both preached, and that, therefore, preaching was a part of their duties as deacons. As regards Stephen, he did not officially preach—he boldly defended the truth in argument with Pharisaic gainsayers; and when personally attacked he eloquently and powerfully defended himself, and the Gospel attacked in him, just what every private Christian of like abilities and zeal will always do. Philip indeed afterwards preached; but Philip held another office, being expressly called in another place “*the Evangelist*” the distinctive duty of which was preaching.

It is equally clear that deacons have nothing to do in the government of the church. In this narrative of their appointment, nothing of government is committed to them; and wherever mentioned, they are always distinguished from the bishops, elders or presbyters, which are but other names for the rulers. They were, therefore, the organs neither of the teaching nor ruling, but simply and only of the charitable functions of the church.

Because, however, it was the neglect of certain poor widows that produced the complaint that led to their appointment, it does not follow that they had nothing to do but to supply the wants of the widows, and others in similar suffering and depressed condition. The phrase here used to express their duties, “*servicing tables*”—however men may differ as to the mode of its explanation, as to whether “*tables*” means “*money tables*” or “*dining tables*,”—is evidently used as a familiar and almost proverbial expression for attending to and supplying mere temporal wants. No one supposes that these Seven were actually to wait on tables, or to purchase provisions for the poor, but to see that provision was made for their temporal wants from the common fund. It was, in the language of the inspired writer, “*to make distribution*” from that common

fund provided by the love and liberality of the church, “ *to every man as he had need.*” Now, there were others dependent on this common fund besides these helpless widows and their families; there were those engaged wholly in the service of the church, attending to her spiritual interests and government, the Apostles themselves, and doubtless many of the elders; for in such times, and in a community of nearly 10,000, to which the young church had already grown, others must have been associated with the Apostles in this work, and must have been supported from this same fund. They had no other support. The business, then, of serving tables, implies that they were the treasurers of the church’s funds for all the purposes for which she needed funds. If these funds were contributed that the temporal wants of every member might be supplied as he had need; and if the poor widow, in this distribution might not be neglected, surely the poor Apostle and Teacher, whose services to the church precluded them from other means of support, came equally within the provision of the church’s bounty.

Still further. The reason given for the appointment of this class of officers, that there might be an entire separation of these secular duties, from the duty of spiritual ministrations, implies not only that there was an incompatibility between these two things, such as rendered their separation expedient, but seems also to involve this further principle, that if there were any other pecuniary matters or temporal affairs requiring attention in order to the prosperity of the church, these would be the natural and proper officers to whom these things should be entrusted. Since these officers were appointed to attend to certain duties, because they were of a secular nature, it seems to follow that whatever other secular matters required attention, would with propriety be committed to them—the distinctive character of their office being to attend to such matters, that others might be left without distraction to attend to the spiritual interests of the body, and that so, no interest might be neglected, no want unsupplied.

Such was the nature of this office, as deduced from this

record of its institution; and such precisely is the nature of this office, as taught in the constitution of the Presbyterian Church. 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 properly committed the management of the temporal affairs of the church. (Form of Government, ch. VI.)

But though these are styled in our constitution (Form of Gov., ch. III), “ordinary and perpetual officers in the church,” equally with ministers and ruling elders, yet, in point of fact, they are considered as *extraordinary*, the necessity for them being regarded as only occasional, or in comparatively few churches where there are a great many poor. Now, we will not say that every church, in all circumstances, is bound to have deacons, for we do not believe it. No church is bound to elect men to an office, however important it may be, unless her Lord has given her men of suitable qualifications, and this is the case in very many of our smaller churches. A sufficient number of individuals cannot be obtained to fill the separate offices of elder and deacon; and in such cases it becomes necessary to have the duties of both offices discharged by the same individuals. Still, we think the language both of Scripture and our constitution implies a degree of importance belonging to this office, such as, in the general practice of our church, has not been attached to it. All the previous considerations in regard to the warrant and nature of the office have been designed to bear more or less directly upon this further point, its IMPORTANCE AND NECESSITY.

III. This may be briefly expressed in the following proposition : That the vigorous exercise of the charitable functions of the church is necessary to the fullest development of her spiritual life and power, and that deacons are the divinely appointed organs of these functions. The term “*charitable*” we use here not exactly in its popular, restricted sense, as merely implying duties to the poor, but as including her duty to all who have claims upon her for temporal care, whether

the poor, or ministers, or her benevolent enterprises; the funds for all which are supplied by the free will offerings of the church, given from love to Christ and His cause.

1. Among these functions, the care of the poor stands prominent. From the very first the Church of Christ seems to have accepted it as an indispensable obligation resting on her, to take care of her poor. It is an obligation which her Lord has laid upon her. "The poor ye have always with you," is not the statement of a mere fact, but of a permanent obligation. It is an obligation inseparable from that love which is the very essence of her life. It is enforced by the Saviour's example. Even from that common bag, from whence were supplied all the wants of the Apostolic company, scantily as it was supplied, a portion was dispensed to the poor. Christ came to preach the Gospel to the poor; and while he thus poured the brightness of heavenly hope over the dark hearts of these children of want, and opened to them the treasures of the unsearchable riches of His grace, He, by the exertion of His miraculous power, taught that their temporal wants are to be supplied. Still more solemn and striking is the fact, that the discharge of this duty will be made the test of character in the judgment. "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink ; I was a stranger, and ye took me in ; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me ; I was in prison, and ye came unto me," is the evidence that shall prove the adoption of his people before an assembled world. And the neglect of these duties toward the meanest and weakest of his suffering disciples for His sake, will be evidence enough to justify the fearful sentence, "Depart, ye cursed !"

This obligation rests not merely on the general duty of compassion to the suffering, and of relieving such, wherever possible, in consistency with the higher demands of justice ; but on the far stronger ground of the union of all believers with Christ, and with each other. We are all "*one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.*" "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it." The child of

God can no more look upon another suffering child of His without, as far as possible, relieving him, than a man can feel a pain in one of his limbs, and not seek to relieve it; no more than he could look upon his adorable Saviour in the same suffering, and not hasten to His relief. The care of the poor, relieving their wants and soothing their sorrows, and encouraging their crushed spirits, is, therefore, a duty entwined in the very nature of the Christian life—springing naturally and necessarily out of the believer's union with Christ. A man cannot be a Christian without seeking to assist, comfort and elevate, all that are Christ's, to the extent of their wants and his ability. Accordingly we find that Paul gave remarkable prominence in his Epistles, and his visits to the churches of his planting, to this matter of collections for the poor saints. He dwells upon it with a depth and fervency of feeling that shows how large a space it held in his large heart; and he insists upon it, as the proof of the sincerity of their love to Christ, and holds up the degree of their benevolence as the measure of the blessings they should receive. “ *He which soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.*”

Accordingly we see that in that brief but bright period when the church was in the freshness of her first love; when her consecration was most complete, and her unity most marked; when the throbbings of the life of her Divine Head seemed so thoroughly to pervade her body, that the most obscure member was made to feel a vital and effective connection with it; then his regard for the poor seemed to burst forth with a vigor that at once bore down all the barriers of human selfishness, and manifested itself as a natural and necessary, and spontaneous out-growth of the spiritual life, leading to sacrifices such as the world never before witnessed, and which must stand forever as the most triumphant vindication of the power of Christian love, when suffered fully to develop its effects.

Never, perhaps, in the history of the church might the care of the poor have been more safely left to individual exertion. When every heart was overflowing with love to all around; when every one felt that all he had was Christ's, and to be

used for the good of his suffering members, surely no one would have been permitted to suffer, no tear would have been unwiped, no sorrow unsoothed, no want unsupplied, that human skill or love could have found a remedy for. But even then this matter was not left to take its chances among individual sympathies. From the very first it was recognised as a church duty, a matter of public arrangement by the whole body. Just as their abundant and spontaneous offerings for such as were in need were the natural expression of the feeling that they were all members one of another, so this official attention to it by the church, in her organized capacity, was a necessary result of the principle then so deeply and vividly felt, of her unity in Christ. That she was not composed of isolated individuals, each left to struggle for himself as best he could, and to gain such help and sympathy from others as circumstances might happen to afford him; but, that she was one body, all her members so blended in a sweet and loving union, that the care of each devolved upon the whole, and the wants of each were to be supplied by the whole, and thus the bond that bound them drawn still closer.

Here, then, is a function of the church distinct from both government and teaching—a function well described in the language of Paul, “ *by which the abundance of some may be a supply for the wants of others, that there may be equality* ;” a function that embodies into action the very life of the church, that gives distinct and palpable expression to that oneness of body, of affection and of interest,—that fusion of Christian hearts into one loving mass,—which is the distinctive characteristic of the church. “ *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*” The full, earnest, hearty performance of this function is necessary, if not to the church’s existence, at least to its accomplishing the great end of its existence,—the growth in grace of each of its members, and the conversion of the world to God. Just in proportion as she exercises this, does she manifest her sympathy with her Divine Head, and grow into His likeness; and so compel an unwilling world to

acknowledge and to feel her power, and to do homage to her King.

Now, for the proper performance of this important function, we find a distinct set of officers set apart in the Apostolic Church, not only in Jerusalem, but certainly at Philippi and Ephesus, and other churches; and if, as is certain, this is a permanent and universal duty of the church—a duty which she ought to attend to in her organized capacity, then does it not follow that the office ought to be perpetual and universal? If the function be so, surely the organ of it should be.

But it is just here we are met with the most weighty objection to the universal employment of this office. “Inasmuch,” it is said, “as the Apostles attended to this business at first, and until it became so burdensome as to interfere with other duties, does it not follow that whenever it can be attended to by the session, without interfering with other duties, it is perfectly right to do so, and to dispense with this office until the same exigency arise as in the primitive church? And can this office, then, be considered necessary, except where a similar pressure of such duties exists as first called it forth.” This view seems to possess some force; it must do so, or it would not have led the great mass of the Presbyterian Churches, both in Scotland and Ireland, as well as in this country, to leave the duties of this office to be performed by the ruling elder. Still, we think there are some considerations that greatly lessen, if they do not wholly destroy, its force.

a. The thoughts just presented in regard to the great importance of these duties as a distinct function of the church, go far to show the importance of a distinct officer.

b. A closer view of the facts of its first institution shows the same. It is very certain, indeed, that previous to the appointment of deacons, this function was in its fullest, freest exercise; this natural expression of the young and vigorous life of the church could not be suppressed; the Apostles, as the divinely appointed founders of the church's order, com-

prehending in themselves all offices, became, of course, the organs of this, as of every other function. They received and disbursed her charities. And they did this just as they did everything else necessary to the extension, government and teaching of the church, until a necessity arose for appointing others to do it. In leaving their work to others, they did not confer all their different functions on one set of officers, but on several—giving the work of teaching to one set of presbyters, the work of ruling to another in connection with them, and this ministry of the charities of the church to a third distinct officer. And, in devolving this last class of their duties on the deacons, they did it in such a way as to show the propriety of its entire separation from the more spiritual duties to which they gave themselves wholly, and which, as it became necessary, they devolved upon the presbyters of the church. There were, doubtless, at this time, presbyters assisting both in ruling and teaching. There *must* have been in a community of ten thousand persons,—we know there were many of them, soon after. Yet this work was not committed to any of them, as it might have been, if both duties might as well have been discharged by the same person. It would have been very easy to have increased the number of elders, if necessary, and have given the work to them. But, on the other hand, the whole passage shows that, necessary as it was to the church's welfare, still it was of such a nature that it was better to be entirely separated from all other duties, and committed to a distinct body of officers—distinct not only from the Apostles themselves, but also from those to whom they had committed the government and teaching. Now, when an office is created for a specific purpose, to set it aside and give the work to other officers who were appointed for entirely different objects, is altogether a different thing from an organizing officer with full powers performing these duties for a time previous to any appointment of others,—which is precisely the case of the Apostles. Since then they gave up this class of their duties to a distinct set of officers, which officers we find in other churches many years

afterwards, and their qualifications laid down at length as if equally needed in all churches, the inference seems legitimate, that they were designed to be perpetual and ordinary, and are necessary to the full and symmetrical working of the church's life.

c. Still further. In answer to this objection, and to show the importance of this office to the proper discharge of this function, it may be remarked that it would not be very difficult to show that a similar exigency to that which led to this office in the primitive church, exists in almost every church—that is, the charitable functions of the church will be neglected or improperly performed without them. It is certainly true that, even in our smaller churches, the pastor and elders find as much as they can do in attending to their appropriate spiritual duties. Even where all the elders are most faithful, they feel themselves unable to approximate all that is desirable; and so it must ever be while most of them are necessarily engaged in various business pursuits requiring their constant attention, and receiving no compensation for the time spent in the service of the church. Some of them make large sacrifices already to promote the spiritual interests of the church over which God has made them overseers. Is it right, or is it likely to subserve the interests of the church, and to give to this charitable function the importance properly belonging to it, that we should append to their office this additional duty?

The fact is, that where there are no deacons, and their duties are left to the session, they are, in almost all cases, scarcely performed at all. This whole function of the church lies paralyzed. Here and there, indeed, some poor starving family may be relieved from the pressure of utter destitution, very much as an alms is bestowed by the State; but this is rather a caricaturing of the duties of the deaconship than anything else. The prominent idea embodied in this office of the affectionate care of the suffering and needy, and the duty of not only relieving absolute want, but by kind and timely assistance, and affectionate and wise counsels, laboring to elevate them and their families, and increase their

usefulness, is utterly lost sight of. The selfishness of the church grows apace, and instead of that beautiful portrait of the primitive church, drawn by the inspired writer—its cordial sympathy, unity and love—we have too often sad divisions and mutual jealousies between the rich and the poor.

But, it may be asked, of what use are deacons to take care of the poor in churches where there are no poor, or but two or three ? *That, indeed, is a sadly defective state of the church where there are no poor* ; there must be something very deficient in its zeal and aggressiveness, if amidst the multitudes of poor around us, and mingling with us, there are none in the church itself. When we remember that Christ in his message, sent to John the Baptist, declares it to be a proof of his Divine mission, worthy to stand at the close of the brief summary of his most striking miracles, as of equal or even greater convincing power; and that the adaptedness of the Gospel to come down to the most despised and degraded of our wretched race—to seize and elevate the vast masses of humanity from their down-trodden condition—is one of its most distinguishing characteristics, and one of the most striking proofs of its Divine origin—Is it not evident that any church that fails to gather in the poor, fails in accomplishing one great design of the Gospel, and in presenting to the world one of the most convincing proofs of the truth and power of Christianity ?

But, even supposing that within the bounds of some particular congregation there are no poor that need the church's aid; still, are there not multitudes of God's poor elsewhere that need aid ? And is not such a favored church especially bound to extend her help to the less favored ? And, outside of the church—among the ignorant multitudes in our own land, and the impoverished nations of our world, has God no chosen ones to be looked after, sought out, and gathered in ? And are not such churches specially called upon to go forth on errands of mercy to these—errands like that of Jesus himself to our poor world—personally to those within their reach, and by their messengers to others; and with looks, and tones, and acts, such as will make even their hard and earthly souls

to feel the power of Christian love, seek to bring these outcasts home to Him that died for their redemption ?

It is, however, a mistake to suppose that it is only those on the point of starvation and nakedness that demand the good offices of a deacon. There are multitudes of pious poor who, though able by hard labor and incessant struggling to live, would have many an anxious care removed, and be stimulated to higher effort, and more persevering exertion, to elevate their condition, and so increase their usefulness, by an occasional token, in some substantial form, of the sympathy of their more favored brethren. There is also many a family, whose children are growing up almost without an education; children on whose brow the sacred seal of membership has been placed, and whose education to a certain extent, at least, the church is bound to provide for. There is, in these families, many a bright youth who might become a benefactor of his race, if early sought out and furnished with the means of mental cultivation. There is no telling the amount of good, too, that might be done, by furnishing poor families with a religious paper, whose elevating influence, felt every week, coining too as a token of the regard of their abler brethren, would soon vastly increase their moral power in the community. The evils which press upon them, and which so often aggravate faults of character and habits of thriftlessness, are to be removed not so much by any large amount bestowed upon them as by the frequency and tenderness with which they are noticed, the assurance they thus receive of the regard of the church, and the encouragement given to effort and thrift by assisting them, when possible, to positions more favorable to the proper development of Christian character and habits. Christian charity, thus administered by the church through properly qualified deacons, while it relieves want and removes or prevents much suffering, at the same time excites to industry, tends to promote habits of self-respect and self-reliance—and, by awakening the grateful love of its objects, elevates them at once to higher happiness and moral worth. It is thus liable to none of the objections that lie against all legal

provisions for the poor, which only tend to aggravate the evils they pretend to remedy.

There is, then, even where there are very few poor in a church, and none perhaps entirely dependent on its pecuniary bounty, a great and blessed work to be done for them,—a work included in the general idea of serving tables, of temporal aid—a work demanding the greatest prudence and tenderness, and which, if earnestly and perseveringly prosecuted, would bind her members together in a closer and more loving union, and add greatly to her power;—a work therefore requiring, by its interest and importance, officers specially appropriated to it. Even, therefore, confining our views to this first class of the church's charitable functions—the care of the poor—there is a work to be done of importance by every church, of importance to the preservation of her own unity, and her influence on the world around. Now, when there is a work to be done—a work in which the interests of the church are deeply involved; and when Christ, in the multitude of his gifts to the church for her edification, has bestowed on any the necessary qualifications for the work; since he has shown in his word an official position in which these gifts may be employed in doing this very work, it is clearly the church's duty to search out these gifts, and employ them as indicated by the combined intimations of his Word and Providence.

These considerations seem to show that for the proper performance of her duties to the poor, the office of deacon is generally necessary, and ought not to be combined with the eldership. But the church has other duties binding on her, properly classed under her charitable functions, besides the care of the poor in each congregation. A consideration of these will show still further the importance of this office, and indeed its necessity.

2. Each congregation is not the church. While each congregation of believers ought to exhibit a pattern of this brotherly love and mutual assistance, relieving each other's wants and soothing each other's sorrows, this same principle of Christian love and unity will also make each congregation ready to assist, as far as possible, other congregations, and the

churches of one State or country those of another, as in Apostolic times. On some churches and some regions, God has bestowed his temporal gifts in rich abundance, while others are in such straitened circumstances as to be unable to build a suitable house for his worship, or to support the Gospel among themselves. There is, too, among God's poor, many a youth whose heart he hath touched with a strong desire to proclaim the gospel of salvation to perishing souls, who is without the means of obtaining an education, and whose church is unable to assist him. Now, what are our Boards of Missions and Education, and Church Extension, but great central deaconships or charitable ministrations, by which in these things the burdens of the church may be equalized ; the richer provided with the means of helping the poorer, and the unity and union of the church at once manifested and strengthened ? And it is but a slight variation of the same principle that is developed in the work of Foreign Missions, in which the church unites in supporting her sons and daughters whom she has sent forth to the perishing nations, and in sustaining and enlarging the feeble churches established amid the wide wastes of heathenism. This is just a union of the churches to supply the temporal wants of the church's servants abroad, and to sustain her feeble outposts, without which the church can never be enlarged nor the world converted. If the love and sympathy that pervaded the primitive church led to such great sacrifices of property for the support of the widow and other private members of the church, as well as of her officers, much more would it lead to and secure the supply of the temporal wants of those officially and wholly employed in doing the Lord's work, and thus precluded from the possibility of providing for their own necessities. Now, the vigorous prosecution of these great schemes of the church, and others, as the Bible cause, and colportage, the success of which is just the final triumph of the church over human wickedness and woe, and the world's salvation, depends upon each church efficiently doing its part, which it never will, and never can do, unless in each church there be some regular official action in regard to it, and some organ through which its efforts in this direction may be put

forth. And it is but an extension of the very same principles that led to the first necessity of deacons, that would make them the treasurers of the church for all her general schemes of benevolence. They would thus stand forth in each church as the continual representatives, not only of her own poor, but of the poor and suffering portions of the church in other places, and of all her members and officers engaged in doing her work at home and abroad. The very existence of such a body of officers in any church, whose duty included the superintendence and fostering of all these charitable functions, would be a constant memento to the people of the importance attached to this duty of giving, by the Head of the Church, and would, of itself, go far toward developing a higher standard of benevolence. In this view, then, of the office, its importance in every church can hardly be at present overrated.

3. The other duties which we would class under that general function, of which deacons are the proper organ, are the support of the ministry and the care of the church's property dedicated to the service of God. We have seen how from one common fund, formed by the free will offerings of the people, the result of their love to one another and to Christ, not only the necessities of the poor, but the officers of the primitive church, must have been supplied, and hence the propriety of classing all these as different manifestations of the same function, and this a charitable function ; not because the claims of the poor, and of ministers, rest on the same ground entirely, but because ministers and all the servants of the church, in all her benevolent enterprises, are dependent for their supplies on the working of the same principle of love to man for Christ's sake, of Heavenly, Scriptural charity, in its free and untrammelled exercise. And it is worthy of consideration at least, whether the introduction of a system, more strictly commercial, into these financial operations of the church, and so pitting the support of her officers on really a lower ground, may not have had something to do with the difficulty with which they are supported. However this be, it seems certain that the support of her ministers, and the general care of her property needed for the service of God, is a necessary and

perpetual part of her functions, her business or secular functions, if any hesitate to class them under the general head of “charitable;” and it seems equally clear, that the principles involved in the first institution of a deaconship, point out this office as the proper organ of the church in the discharge of these duties. It certainly appears very evident, that the management of funds and property dedicated to God, should be in the hands of God’s people. Hence every church needs this office for this purpose,—to manage the “outward business of the House of God;” a duty, the control of which ought not to be left to those who know nothing of the high and holy motives which lead to such consecration of property to God and His service.

Whatever view, then, we take of the financial concerns of the church, whether as charitable or business transactions; whether we regard the objects she is bound to provide for,—the poor, the great causes of benevolence that embrace the whole church and the world, and the ministry at home and abroad,—or whether we consider the principles that underlie all these duties, the union of all believers with one another in Christ, and the unity of the church in Him, we are led to the same conclusion—the importance and necessity, in order to the vigorous working of the church’s life, of this office of deacon as the proper organ of these important functions.

The deacons are therefore the Divinely appointed receivers and disbursers of the church’s funds. They are a channel through which the sympathies of the members find expression. They are the impersonation of the church’s tender care for the widow and orphan, and destitute, of every age and condition. They are the channel through which those who are taught in the Word, communicate of their good things unto those who teach. In them, as in no other officer, does the church seem to say to all: We are one, one in Christ, and one by our union with each other, so that none shall be in want while others are blessed with plenty. By these officers we are helped to bear one another’s burdens, and so to fulfil the law of Christ, to love one another.

IV. QUALIFICATIONS. These, especially as they regard Spiritual

things, are very high, both as stated in Acts, and in 1st Timothy. The reason of this is evident. Their duties being so much of a secular nature, their personal holiness must be so deep and pervading as to infuse into all their discharge of official duties a holy character; otherwise their own religious character might be secularized. They must be such men as will not be secularized by their duties, but such as will infuse into these very business operations and moneyed transactions of the church, a spiritual and holy character. These qualifications summarily stated, are:

1. Holiness, such as to pervade the whole character and life, and exclude all selfish indulgence. "*Full of the Holy Ghost.*"

2. Wisdom or prudence. "*Full of wisdom.*" This is manifestly indispensable in such an office.

3. Gravity and sincerity, (1 Tim. 3 : 8,) that their words and acts may have due weight.

4. Liberality and public spirit, (1 Tim. 3 : 8,) that they may be examples of the function they exercise.

5. Holding the truth in sincerity and consistency of life, (v. 9,) that so their whole official character might not be employed to sustain any error in doctrine or practice.

6. Ruling their children and their own households well," (v. 12,) that their example might illustrate and enforce their counsels to the poor and ignorant.

7. Having wives who are grave, not slanderers, sober, (i.e. circumspect,) faithful (v. 11); because in their duties to the poor, and other relations to the church, such would be great helps, and those of opposite character great hindrances.

8. They must first be proved, (v. 10,) tried men, not novices, and hence of honest report, that so the church might not suffer serious injury from their incompetency—a mistake here being almost irremediable.

These are, indeed, high qualifications, but it is her sin and her shame, and ought to be a cause of deep humiliation to the church, if they are not found in many of her members, since they are really only what every intelligent Christian ought to have. Eph. 5: 18. Phil. 1: 9-11. Good sense, Scriptural knowledge, vital godliness, manifesting itself in all the duties

and relations of life, so as to secure, even from the world, the respect which true godliness always does, comprise the whole.

In closing this discussion, we offer two remarks:

1. The reason why this office has gone into such general disuse in the Presbyterian Church, whose standards teach its permanency, is just because of the want of that spirit which so strikingly characterized the primitive church, the spirit of liberality and of brotherly love. We have not the same vigorous, active, loving life, and hence we have not the same developments of the church's life. This spirit led them to view their property as belonging, not to themselves, but to their Saviour, and to hold it for the use of His church in whatever way it might be needed. It led them to see in His suffering poor, the Saviour himself, and thus laid deep in their inmost hearts the feeling of obligation to help all His people, as they needed it, just because they were His. That such ought to be the feeling of Christ's Church always; that they ought to be *of one heart and of one soul* ; that they *ought to esteem none of the things which they possess as their own* ; that in their use of property all other considerations ought to be swallowed up in a paramount regard to the interests and advancement of Christ's kingdom, admits not of a doubt. When and where this is the case, the need of this office will be felt, just as it was in Apostolic times, in order that none may be neglected who have claims upon the church for her temporal care; and when its need is felt, then it will be employed efficiently ; and until then, even if deacons were appointed, they would accomplish little more than can be done without them. It is of very little use to appoint officers for the performance of any function, if there is not vitality enough to perform it; to be constructing deep and broad channels for our benevolence to flow in, unless there is a stream to flow; to appoint deacons to a work that we do not much care to have done; officers to take care of and distribute our property consecrated to the service, of God in the support of poor members, churches, candidates, ministers and missionaries, while we, unlike the primitive church, do not feel disposed to consecrate our property, to this object, unless it be the mere crumbs left after we are full.

Would that we could all find in ourselves and our churches more of such a lively realization of our oneness with Christ, of our vital connection with His living body, as would make the hearts of all throb in deeper, livelier sympathy with each other; such as would make us, notwithstanding the faults and infirmities, and inconsistencies of our fellow Christians, yet, as we see in them the members of Christ, to feel our hearts glow with a tender affection, such as loving brothers always feel. Then would this office again assume its original importance, and become, by its activities meeting us at every turn, a testimony to the vigorous life of the church.

2. Finally, let us remember that, unless both the churches and these officers are endowed with the Holy Ghost, the deaconship, so far as regards the real Spiritual advancement of the church, and her influence on the world, will be worthless, and in the end worse than worthless. A deaconship, such as described, implies a higher degree of spiritual life and active benevolence in the church—higher, even, than is implied in the eldership. The eldership is implied in the very existence of the church; she cannot exist without a government. A deaconship implies that that church is doing her work of love and mercy. This Spiritual vigor and active benevolence cannot be created by the office. The office should spring out of them as in the primitive church. If these do not exist, it becomes a mere secular office, and there is danger of its secularizing the church, instead of increasing its spirit of consecration, which is its legitimate effect. If it is instituted and entered upon as a mere business transaction, to lessen labor, and make it easier to raise a pastor's salary, it were as well that it had never been created at all. Elders may labor, and visit, and pray, and admonish, though the church be sadly deficient in zeal and benevolence; but in the very nature of the case, if these be very deficient, the deacons, being but the organs through which, in part, these are exercised, are nearly useless. If, however, these be correct views of the nature of this office, it is doubtless true that the election and setting apart of such officers, even though the deficiency be very great in the spirit

of active benevolence, may tend to awaken a deeper sense of this deficiency, and so stir up to greater diligence and zeal, and more importunate prayer, for a plentiful effusion of the spirit. This is what we especially need, our first and greatest want in this, as in every other aspect of the church's work.

To this point, then, let the longing eyes of the church be directed. For this let us all lift up our united earnest prayers. Let us not rest in our wrestling with God till He grant us a new baptism of the Spirit. An organization, however perfect, if it have not life, is worthless ; or if that life be feeble, it can accomplish little. You may have the machinery all perfect, every wheel and lever in its proper place, and nicely adjusted, but if the motive power be wanting, it is a worthless bauble. All the skill and labor spent on its elaborate works is thrown away. That power in the church is the Holy Ghost. It is when that Divine agent, dwelling in the hearts of His people, kindles the feelings and desires that lead them to constitute these organizations of His appointment, and when He then infuses into them His own living vigor, that the Church of Christ appears in her beauty and her power as His living body ; and then will the world feel the full weight of her influence, and acknowledge that God is in her of a truth ; and then, too, as in primitive times, shall her converts be counted by thousands. And when deaconships are *thus* instituted in our churches, not merely as a form, to conform to the orders of Presbyteries, or Synods, or even to a primitive model, but as an earnest expression of the church's desire to discharge, with new zeal and self-denial, her much neglected charitable functions, we may expect the same results as followed in Apostolic times, when “ *the Word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the truth.*”