

them from danger; but here is one pre-eminent for these qualities, and he testifies, as if from his own experience, " how hard it is to resist." "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

THE DIACONATE A SCRIPTURAL OFFICE.

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IN Chapter IV., Art. 1, of the Form of Government of the United Presbyterian Church, we have the following language : " The ordinary and permanent officers of the New Testament Church are Teaching Elders, Ruling Elders, and Deacons" ; and in Art. 4, of the same chapter, we read : " The Deacon is the lowest of the ordinary officers of the church; his official power pertains to temporal things. He has no spiritual authority. The duties of his office pertain to the temporalities of the church ; especially the collection and distribution of its charities." And the General Assembly of 1878, with great unanimity, took the following action :

Resolved, 1st. "That the General Assembly, heartily approving of the teaching of its subordinate standards, touching the divine institution and permanent obligation of the office of the Deacon, and being persuaded also that it is of great importance for the welfare of the Church that the teaching of these standards on this subject be reduced to practice, hereby enjoins Synods, Presbyteries and Sessions, to adopt measures, with all becoming promptitude, to have Deacons appointed in the different congregations of the Church, in the manner prescribed in the Book of Government and Discipline."

Following this, directions were given to Synods and Presbyteries to report from time to time the progress made in carrying these directions into effect. Synods were also urged to take immediate steps to secure such civil legislation as might be necessary to enable congregations to carry out these duties. This language of the Book and the directions of the Assembly as thus given are very plain and explicit; but it appears that there are some members of our Church who are not able to see that this part of our Book of Government is based on Scriptural authority, and are, therefore, unwilling to obey it. In a very labored article in the April number of the REPOSITORY, an effort was made to show that no Scriptural authority whatever can be found for the Diaconate as that office is established by our standards. I would not speak unkindly of the honest words of an esteemed brother; but the author of that article will pardon me for saying, that if opposition to the standards of the Church on the subject of the Diaconate, in the hands of so able a writer as he is, can exhibit no better logic, and no truer interpretations of Scripture, than are found in that article, it ought to be given up at once as utterly untenable.

Before proceeding to examine the Scriptural and historic authority for the office of Deacon in the New Testament Church, it will be proper to refer to the reasons which are advanced for opposing the provisions of the Book and the directions of the General Assembly in this matter. First, it is claimed that,

“In regard to the tenure of church property, the action of the assembly requires a revolution in the long established and almost universal practice of the Church, and a reversal of the results in civil law, secured through long and painful struggles for the rights of the people against ecclesiastical despotism.” It is difficult to understand what is meant by these words. The objector ought to have been more explicit on the subject. He should not simply assert that great evils are imminent. He should tell us what they are. If it be true that our Book of Government and our General Assembly are leading us in a course that will produce such ghastly consequences, he should have told us how and why such results will follow. But facts are of more value than opinions; and over against those vague words of alarm we may place the fact that many churches, East and West, have deacons who attend to the temporalities of the Church, and no conflict with the civil law, nor any evil, has resulted. On the contrary, as is always the case when the counsels of God are followed, greater peace and power in the church have been enjoyed.

Again, it is objected that the order of the General Assembly “ would revolutionize the policy and practice of the Church.” It is very true that the part of our standards relating to Deacons has been suffered to remain inoperative during the recent past of our Church’s history, and a return to duty now would be a change from former practices. But since, as we shall presently see, the Deacon was a recognized officer in the primitive Church, and an officer in the Church in all its subsequent history where it existed in its purest and best forms—such a change should not be called a revolution to be condemned, but a reformation to be commended.

Again, “ It is said that congregations are divested of the freedom heretofore enjoyed, of judging as to the necessity for the election of separate officers to have charge of their temporalities and charities.” It is assumed in this that the temporalities and charities of the church are at present under the management of the Session, and that the appointment of Deacons would take them out of the hands of the Session, to give them to a *separate* board of officers. If the assumption were according to the fact, there would be little need of advocating so strongly the appointment of deacons. If the vital interests of the church connected with the collection and distribution of her charities were always or usually in the hands of Session, and they were able to attend to these duties in addition to the spiritual oversight of the flock, there would be little reason to ask for a change. But the fact is, in a large majority of our churches the management of their contributions—the very “sinews of the Church’s aggressive warfare—are in the hands of untrained men, chosen often for far different reasons than the possession of those spiritual qualifications which would fit them for the real work of Christ, and chosen sometimes from those *outside* of the church—officers having control of vital interests of the church, and yet under no official responsibility to the constituted authorities of the church ; holding their charter from the civil courts, and officially responsible only to them. The question is not whether we shall have officers separate from the Session to manage the temporalities of the church, for we have them now.

The real question, and the question which is steadily kept out of view by the opposition, is, Shall the temporalities of the church be in the care of men who hold their trust under the authorities of the Church of Christ, and assume their responsibilities under ordination vows, or shall they be under the care of men who are chartered by the civil courts, and sustain no official connection whatever with the divinely appointed authorities of Christ's church ? Those who oppose the position taken by the Church concerning deacons cannot escape the responsibility of virtually advocating the continuance of the existing state of things.

Another objection is " That, as the office is now commonly understood, deacons occupy an anomalous position." It is sufficient to say with regard to this, that the objection has arisen from a misunderstanding of the nature and duties of the Diaconate, as defined by our standards. A more careful study of the subject would relieve the objector from all obscurity on that point. We are now prepared to examine the teaching of New Testament Scripture in regard to matter.

First, we turn to Acts vi. 1-6. Very soon after the Apostles began their work of establishing the Church, a question came before them which has ever since been one of great difficulty and importance—viz., the management of the temporalities of the Church. There were poor to be cared for, contributions to be received and distributed, expenditures to be provided for. It was essential that these interests of the Church should be in charge of able and responsible men; and yet these duties were so distinct from those of the spiritual overseers of the Church, that it was decided "not reason that the Apostles should continue in charge of them," and they directed the people to choose " seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business, and we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." When the men chosen were set before the Apostles, they prayed and laid their hands on them. This passage with others is quoted by our Book of Government as furnishing divine authority for the office of Deacon. Certainly every established principle of interpretation will lead to the conclusion that such is the meaning. We are certainly to receive instruction both from the example and the explicit teaching of the inspired Apostles. The course they pursued under any given circumstances is to be the course which the Church of which they were the founders is to pursue under all similar circumstances. Here were poor to be relieved, contributions to be received and distributed, all the temporalities of the Church to be attended to ; and the Apostles, judging that it was not best that they should be charged with these matters, took measures to have separate officers set apart for these duties. So the conclusion is inevitable that wherever the same circumstances exist, and the same duties to be attended to, the same method should be adopted. Since we always have the poor with us, and Christian beneficence for the relief of want is always and everywhere an important part of the Church's work, certainly we should imitate the Apostles in putting the same officers in charge of it. It is objected that this was a special arrange-

ment, designed to meet a very peculiar condition of things, and is not to be taken as an example for the permanent methods of the Church. But a little reflection will show us that there was nothing in the condition of the Church then essentially different from the condition of all churches. There was just one feature of the case which was peculiar, and that was the entireness with which those who had property consecrated it to the Lord in the relief of those in want. With this single exception, the circumstances which led to the appointment of deacons in Jerusalem were precisely the same which exist in greater or less measure in every church since that day ; and, unless we are wiser than the inspired Apostles, certainly we should follow their example. There are many reasons which show that the transaction recorded in Acts vi. was designed as a permanent example to the Church.

1. If the appointment of the seven was only a temporary expedient to meet a peculiar case, would they have been inducted into office with so much formality and solemnity ? It is hard to believe that the Apostles would have engaged in the solemnities of ordination, if the men were to serve only in a temporary trusteeship.

2. It is an accepted fact that the structure of the New Testament Church was modeled largely after the Jewish synagogue ; and as there was there a class of officers to whom the collection and distribution of alms for the poor were specially committed, we may safely conclude that the appointment of similar officers in the Christian Church would be the method likely to be chosen.

3. The permanent existence in the Church of the need of Christian beneficence, and the directions in Scripture for the universal exercise of this duty, lead us to conclude that the arrangement of the Apostles for the management of these interests was permanent.

4. Those who have had an opportunity of gathering up the testimony of the earlier and later Christian Fathers, tell us that they universally interpreted the sixth of Acts as establishing the order of Deacons in the church. Hermas, one of the Apostolic Fathers, speaks of those “ who have been set over the inferior ministers, and have protected the poor and widows.” Origen says: “Deacons preside over the money tables of the church.” Cyprian speaks of a certain Deacon who had been deposed on account of misapplication of the church’s money to his own private use; ” and, in another place, he refers the appointment of the first Deacons to this choice and ordination at Jerusalem. Eusebius speaking of that event said : “Seven approved men were ordained Deacons through prayer and the imposition of the Apostle’s hands.” These testimonies might be multiplied indefinitely, and so clear was this conviction in the mind of the early Church, that many of them considered themselves bound to the original number seven, whatever their extent or their exigencies, in order to conform to the example of the Apostles. And the Council of Neo-Caesarea enacted it into a canon, that there should be but seven Deacons in any city, because this was according to the rule laid down in the Acts of the Apostles.”

And

5. The Scriptures tell us that in the multitude of counselors is safety. Dr.

Miller, of Princeton, whose extensive learning justifies him in making the statement, says, "The current opinion of all the most learned and judicious Christian divines of all denominations for several centuries past is decisively in favor of considering the passage in Acts vi. as recording the first appointment of the New Testament Deacons. Among all classes of theologians, Catholic and Protestant, Lutheran and Calvinistic, Presbyterian and Episcopal, this concurrence of opinion approaches so near to unanimity that we may, without injustice to any other opinion, consider it as the deliberate and harmonious judgment of the Christian Church."

This is the first Scripture upon which our book rests for the divine authority of the Diaconate, but there are not a few other passages which establish the same truth. The Epistle to the Philippians is addressed to the saints which are at Philippi, with the Bishops and Deacons. There was a class of officers in this church bearing that title; and when we remember that bishop means overseer, we see plainly that Paul was addressing those officers who had the spiritual oversight of the flock, and those who served the church in managing its temporalities. In I Timothy, third chapter, we have the clearest description of the officers of the Church found anywhere in Scripture. Paul is giving specific instructions to his son Timothy on the subject; therefore the true theory of the Church's organization and government is made very plain. There are just two classes of officers in the church, Bishops or Elders, and Deacons. The bishops are subdivided into two classes, teaching elders and ruling elders. This is plainly indicated in the seventeenth verse of the fifth chapter: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine."

It is evident that the difference between teaching and ruling elders was not as clearly marked then as now, owing to the fact that the Church was not fully supplied with religious teachers; and those who were ordained to the spiritual oversight of the churches were advanced to the position of teachers as they developed talents in that direction. And the aptness to teach mentioned in the second verse does not justify the conclusion that Paul is speaking only of ministers; because then, as now, counseling, reproof and comforting the people is an important part of the pastoral oversight of the flock belong to the ruling elder; hence their qualifications for this among other duties was to be kept in view in their selection. Then Timothy is instructed concerning the qualifications of Deacons. And all these specifications correspond precisely with the duties of the office indicated in the book of Acts. The qualifications of the Deacon are fewer than those of the Elder, because his duties lie on the lower plane of the Church's temporalities, but just such as would fit a man for taking charge of those interests. We are compelled to understand that Paul is speaking of the Diaconate, as that office is defined by our Book, because the qualifications he mentions would not fit a man for taking charge of the spiritual interests of a church, but would exactly fit him for taking charge of its temporalities. Besides these Scriptures, we have in other places plain allusions to this office as an established function in the Church. In Rom. xii. 6, 7, Paul exhorts

the Deacons with other ecclesiastical officers : “ Having their gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us; whether prophecy let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith, or ministry (διακονίαν, the diaconship) let us wait on our ministering (ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ).” And in the eighth verse the expressions, “giving” and “showing mercy,” according to Henry, Scott, Calvin, Hodge, Rutherford, Beza, and many others, is an unequivocal reference to the duties of the Deacon. The same Apostle, in I Cor. xii. 28, enumerates Deacons with the other officers “set in the church” under the name of “helps;” for they were originally appointed, as we learn from the account in Acts vi., to be helps or assistants to the Apostles in collecting and distributing the church’s charities. The Deacon is referred to by Peter as a recognized officer in the churches of Asia Minor. “As every man hath received the gift (χάρισμα, the office) even so minister the same to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God. If any man minister (διακονῆι, exercise the deacon’s office) let him do it as of the ability, which God giveth.” The Christians addressed in this letter were located throughout the whole of western Asia, showing that the Diaconate was an office common in the churches.

Our space will not allow us to take up the historic evidence on this subject. It might be shown that the April article blundered utterly in quoting Ignatius as favoring the idea that the Scripture Deacon was the same as our elder. The testimony of this man is invulnerable, because he lived at the close of the first century; and instead of it being against us, one or two quotations out of many from his writings will show how unequivocally he speaks of the Deacon as an officer of the church. To the Philadelphians he writes in his salutation : “ One bishop, together with his eldership and the deacons, my fellow servants.” To the Smyrnans ; “ I salute your very worthy bishop, and your venerable eldership and your deacons, my fellow servants.” To Polycarp : “ My soul be security for them who submit to their bishop, with their elders and deacons.” Mosheim is certainly authority in matters of history, and he says : “All the other Christian churches followed the example of that of Jerusalem in whatever related to the choice and office of the deacons.”

Kurtz also says of the first century:

“ Conjoined with, but subordinate to the office of presbyter or bishop, of which the Apostles themselves for so considerable a time discharged the duties at Jerusalem, was the office of *Deacon*. It was first instituted by the Apostles themselves, with consent of the people, for the purpose of caring for the poor and the sick at Jerusalem (Acts vi.). Thence it spread to most other Christian communities; the number of Deacons being primarily seven.

This historical proof might be indefinitely multiplied by reference to the best portions of the Church’s history from the time of the Apostles until now.

It would be interesting to show, before closing, how much our Church needs these officers, to give better care to her poor and to the collection and distribution of all her charities, to meet the insolent encroachments of secretism on the one hand, and for the better development of her Christian beneficence on the other; but this must be left to another time.