

been fully expounded in Dr Newman's Essay on that subject; and applied by him to the vindication of the additions which the Church of Rome has made to the Christianity of the New Testament. It is in substance this, that the doctrines taught by inspired men might be legitimately developed or drawn out in subsequent times into notions which were not contained in, or deducible from, the doctrines themselves, but merely stood related to them in some vague and distant connection. This theory, which is plainly infidel in its bearing and tendency, as virtually denying the supreme authority of an external objective revelation, is somewhat skilfully accommodated to modes of thinking largely prevalent in the present day, when there is a tendency to resolve everything, both in the material and in the moral world, into development; and to give great prominence to the subjective, or to what is found within man himself, as the source and test of what is true. At present we can only observe, that the adoption of this new theory implies an abandonment of the ground which was occupied by all former Popish controversialists, and which the well-known principles of their church required them to occupy. It amounts to a virtual acknowledgment that this ground is untenable. No doubt, the doctrine of the infallibility of the church, if once established, and fairly and fully applied, is quite adequate to cover and to vindicate anything. But the more judicious Popish controversialists are rather afraid of overburdening the doctrine of the infallibility of the church, by imposing upon it more than it is able to bear; and, indeed, they are not fond of resting anything upon it *alone*, without having something else in the way of proof or evidence to relieve and assist it. Some of the more rash and unscrupulous defenders of Popery have held that the infallible authority of the church includes a power of establishing and imposing new articles of faith, which they might perhaps, in accordance with the fashionable phraseology of the present day, call developments of what was taught by inspired men. But the more judicious defenders of Popery have shrunk from taking up this extreme ground; and, besides, the doctrine of the Council of Trent on the subject of tradition plainly commits them to the necessity of maintaining that all their doctrines are contained either in the written word or in the unwritten traditions, and, of course, entitles us to demand of them proof that all they teach is either supported by Scripture, or can be traced up through another channel to the

teaching of Christ or His apostles. It is a curious and characteristic specimen of Popish policy, that the Romish ecclesiastical authorities of this country, while labouring to take advantage of Dr Newman's theory of development, have not ventured very formally either to approve or to repudiate it; while their pretended unity is contradicted by the fact, that some of the leading Romish authorities in the United States have openly denounced it as heretical and dangerous.*

It is the more important to keep these considerations in remembrance in investigating the history of the church, because really the history of the church for fifteen hundred years is, to a large extent, just the history of Popery. The Apostle Paul assures us that, even in his time, the mystery of iniquity was already working; and in every succeeding century we find clearer and clearer traces of these seeds or elements, which, when fully developed, constitute the Popish system. Satan took six or seven hundred years to develop and bring to full maturity what has been justly described as his great masterpiece; and indeed some of the peculiarities of Popery were not devised till the middle ages, when the great body of the visible church was sunk in gross darkness, superstition, and idolatry. Even since the Reformation, the condition and efforts of the Papacy have exerted no small influence upon the general state of the professing church. In the present day, it is exerting more influence than it has done for a long period; and there is good ground to believe that that apostate and antichristian system will henceforth continue to hold a most prominent and influential place in the history of the visible church, even until the Lord shall consume it with the breath of His mouth, and destroy it with the brightness of His coming.

There is, indeed, something dark and mysterious in the survey of the history of the church of Christ, in its so soon losing its purity, and falling into error and corruption; and in this error and corruption gaining such an ascendancy, and virtually overspreading the visible church for nearly a thousand years.† And Papists take advantage of this circumstance, and appeal to men whether they can believe *that*, considering the promises of Christ's constant

* Review of Newman in *North British Review*, vol. v. Discussions on Church Principles, p. 35.—Edrs. | Let. i. *Bulwark*, vol. ii., pp. 159 and 216.
 † Isaac Taylor, 'Ancient Christianity,' vol. i., No. 4.

presence and Spirit,—*can* believe, that this is a correct view of the leading features in the church's history. But we deny that there is anything in these premises sufficient to prove, *à priori*, that this could not be: we find in Scripture other intimations, leading us to expect that it would be; we feel it to be our duty to judge of the truth of doctrines only by the standard of God's word, and of the truth of facts only by their appropriate historical evidence. We are not able to fathom the plans and purposes of Him who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working, with whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. But we can see enough in the history of God's dealings with men before the manifestation of His Son in the flesh, to convince us that there is nothing in the Protestant view of the history of the Christian church in the least inconsistent with the analogy of the divine procedure, or with the great principles which have all along regulated God's communication to them of spiritual blessings; and we cannot doubt that, in regard to this as in regard to any other department of His dealings with men, the Lord will yet more fully manifest to His people His manifold wisdom and His unshaken faithfulness.

CHAPTER II.

THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM.

Sec. I.—Scripture Narrative.

ALTHOUGH our review of Theological Discussions properly begins at the close of the apostolic age, yet there is one transaction recorded in the New Testament to which it may be proper to advert, from its intimate connection with the whole subsequent history and government of the church, and with the controversies to which they have given rise, many of them continuing down to the present day. I allude to what is commonly called the Council of Jerusalem, recorded in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

There has been a very great deal of discussion about the true character of this transaction, and the lessons, if any, which it is fitted to suggest respecting the government of the church in subsequent ages. Papists, Prelates, and Presbyterians have usually held that it was fitted and intended to convey some instruction as to the way and manner in which the government of the church should be permanently conducted, and have all professed to find in it something to favour their respective systems; while Congregationalists, not being able to find in it anything to favour *their* views of church government, have generally contented themselves with maintaining that it does not afford any very clear or certain materials for determining in what way the government of the church should be conducted in subsequent ages.* Papists, finding it recorded here that Peter took a prominent part in the discussion

* Books and references on the Council at Jerusalem :—
 Buddaeus, *Isagoge*, Lib. ii., c. v., sec. iii., p. 741.
 Moshemii *Institutiones Majores*, p. 263. *Commentarii*, pp. 155, 169.
 Parker, *De Politica Ecclesiastica*, Lib. iii., c. xiii.
 Buddaeus, *Ecclesia Apostolica*, c. iv. | Böchmeri *Dissertationes Juris Ec-*

which arose upon this occasion, adduce the narrative as a proof that he acted then, was entitled to act, and was recognised as entitled to act, as the vicar of Christ and the head of the church. Prelatists, finding that, several centuries afterwards, the notion was broached that James was appointed by the apostles Bishop of Jerusalem, profess to get scriptural evidence of this fancy in the prominent part which *he* took in the discussion. There is not in the narrative a trace of any *superiority in office or jurisdiction* on the part either of Peter or James; so that the substance of the Popish argument is virtually this,—Peter spoke *first*, and therefore he was superior in authority and jurisdiction to the other apostles; while the Prelatic argument is,—James spoke *last*, and gave shape to the decision of the council, and therefore he was diocesan bishop, and, as such, superior in some respects even to the apostles. This, of course, is sheer trifling; and the only question of real importance or difficulty connected with this matter, lies between the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists or Independents.

The Congregationalists usually contend that this transaction was so peculiar and extraordinary as to afford no pattern or precedent for the disposal of theological controversies, and the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs in subsequent ages, and in ordinary circumstances; * while Presbyterians deny this, and allege that it affords a warrant for the general substance of some of the leading features of Presbyterian church government. The question whether or not the transaction was so peculiar and extraordinary

clesiastici Antiqui; Diss. iii., pp. 98, 218, commented on by Mosheim, Inst. Maj. 264.

Rutherford, Peaceable Plea, c. xiv., p. 199.

Rutherford, Due Right of Presbyteries, pp. 355-380, *et seq.*

Divine Right of Church Government. Jus Div. Reg. Eccles. By London Ministers, c. xiv. and xv.

Wood's Answer to Lockyer, and books referred to there. Part ii., sec. viii., p. 302.

Cotton's Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, c. vi. and c. vii., Prop. iv.

Gillespie's Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland.

Brown's Vindication of the Presby-

terian Form of Church Government; Let. viii. and xii.

Carson's Reply to do.; Let. x. Davidson's Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament; Lect. vii.

Wardlaw on Congregational Independence, c. vi.

Heidegger, in his 'Libertas Christianorum a Lege Cibaria,' gives a full commentary upon the whole chapter.

* Others besides Congregationalists have sanctioned this view. Dr Pusey contends that, "being the result of full inspiration, it forms no precedent at all."—The Councils of the Church, c. i., p. 33.

as to afford no model or precedent for the subsequent government of the church, is virtually identical with this one,—whether the apostles acted *in this matter* as inspired and infallible expounders of the will of God, or simply as the ordinary office-bearers of the church, using the ordinary means of ascertaining the divine will, and enjoying only the ordinary guidance and influences of His Spirit.

Presbyterians contend that there are plain indications in the New Testament that the apostles sometimes acted in the administration of ecclesiastical affairs, not as inspired men directed by the infallible guidance of the Spirit which they enjoyed in declaring truth and in organizing the church, but simply as ordinary office-bearers in co-operation with other elders, and more especially that they acted in this capacity merely in this case; and Congregationalists, not absolutely denying, and yet not prepared to admit, that they never acted in the administration of ecclesiastical affairs without infallible guidance, strenuously contend that in this case they acted under the influence of immediate supernatural inspiration, which infallibly guided them to a right decision, and that therefore it affords no model or precedent for the church in future times.* It seems very manifest, from the whole scope and strain of the narrative, that the apostles did *not* act here as inspired and infallible men, but simply as ordinary ecclesiastical office-bearers, in conjunction with the elders or ordinary pastors. Had it been the purpose of God to settle the controversy which arose about the necessity of circumcision by an inspired infallible decision, the apostles might have at once decided it without meeting, and without discussion of any kind; or any one of them might have done so in the exercise of his apostolic authority, and confirmed his decision by the "signs of an apostle." Paul himself might have done so at Antioch, without the matter being brought up to Jerusalem at all. This was not done; the matter *was* brought up to the church at Jerusalem. The apostles and elders assembled to deliberate upon it publicly in the presence of the people; and we are expressly told that much disputing took place regarding it, when they were assembled to decide it. The apostles who took part in the discussion, in place of at once declaring authoritatively

* Wardlaw on Congregational Independence, p. 278. Davidson on the Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament; Lect. viii., p. 317.

what was the mind and will of God regarding it, formally argued the question upon grounds derived at once from God's providential dealings, and from statements contained in the Old Testament Scriptures. In this way, and by this process, they carried conviction to the understandings of all who heard them, so that they concurred at length in an unanimous decision. Here everything plainly indicates, and seems to have been obviously intended to indicate, that inspiration was not in exercise, but that the matter was decided by means accessible to men in general under the ordinary guidance of the Spirit.

There is no evidence, indeed—and the Congregationalists found much on this consideration—that *any of the apostles* were, even at the first, of a different mind from that in which the whole assembly ultimately concurred, or that they had any disputing among themselves; but it is certain—and this is sufficient to warrant our conclusion—that there was much disputing, *i.e.*, arguing on opposite sides, in the assembly *in their presence*; and that they did not put an end to this disputing by an immediate and infallible declaration of the mind of God upon the point, in the exercise of their apostolic authority, but by ordinary arguments derived from admitted principles, and addressed to the understandings of those who heard them. The only thing that appears to contradict the conclusion to which the whole scope and strain of the narrative obviously points, is the fact that the decision to which the assembly ultimately came is announced in these words: "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us." Now, this statement certainly implies that they were confident that the decision was *de facto* in accordance with the mind of the Holy Ghost, but it does not *necessarily* imply more than this; and therefore it should not be held to imply more, as it would then contradict the general scope and strain of the narrative, which are plainly fitted to teach us that Christ, the Head of the church, determined the disposal of this matter, not by direct and infallible inspiration, but by a general meeting of apostles and elders seeking and attaining the truth upon the point, by means accessible to men in general with the ordinary influences of the Spirit. Not only does the expression, "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us," not necessarily imply more than the certain accordance *de facto* between the decision given by them and the mind of the Spirit, but it seems of itself to indicate that there was

something in the case different from a mere declaration of what they knew simply as inspired men. It seems much more natural, that if they had been simply declaring what they had been miraculously and supernaturally taught upon the point by the Spirit, they would have said only, "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost;" the addition, "and to us," having the appearance of intimating that they did not act in the matter merely and solely as the inspired declarers of His mind, though confident that their decision was accordant with His.

We hold it, then, to be clear, that while the apostles ordinarily had the gift of supernatural infallible inspiration in the discharge of their public duties, in declaring the truth and in organizing the church, yet on this occasion they did not, in point of fact, exercise this gift, but left it as it were in abeyance, and acted in the matter just as uninspired men might and could have done. Now, these two facts, taken in combination, not only prove that this transaction may afford a pattern and precedent for the proceedings of the church ordinarily in similar circumstances, but also warrant us to believe that it was expressly arranged in this way for that very purpose, and that therefore it is the church's duty to apply it for the regulation of her conduct. We assume now, then, that the view generally taken by Congregationalists, as to this controversy having been decided by a supernatural exercise of infallible inspiration, is erroneous. We assume that the whole transaction must have been intended, and of course fitted, to convey instruction and direction to the church as to the management of its affairs; and we proceed to inquire what particular instructions or directions it does convey.

Sec. II.—The Rule of Church Power.

This transaction, and the record of it which has been transmitted to us, are fitted to remind us of the great scriptural principle, that the sole standard by which the affairs of the church ought to be regulated is the revealed will of God. The question upon this occasion was, whether Gentile converts should be required to be circumcised, and to keep the ceremonial law. The apostles and elders, when met to consider this point, evidently had it for their sole object to ascertain what was the mind and will of God concerning it; and they looked to no other standard

but this. None but God was entitled really to decide this question, and no certain materials for deciding it aright could be derived from any other quarter. Accordingly, they directed their attention to the sources from which the will of God might be learned, and examined *them*. They considered, indeed, both the providence of God and the word of God; for we find that Peter, in his statement, founded mainly upon what God had actually done in the case of Cornelius, upon the evidence of the fact that His Spirit had been then and there communicated; while James appealed to statements contained in the writings of the prophets. The written word of God is, properly speaking, the only standard by which the affairs of the church ought to be regulated, though much is also to be learned from carefully considering His providence, or what He has actually done, in connection with the statements of His word; the example of Peter in this matter especially affording us warrant and encouragement to give careful attention to any evidence that may be presented to us of God having poured out His Spirit upon any occasion for the conversion of sinners.

The Church is represented in Scripture as the kingdom of Christ. He alone is its King; and He has established and promulgated in His word its constitution and laws, as well as made provision for the ordinary application of these laws to the permanent regulation of its affairs, as a distinct organized society *in* the world, but not *of* the world. He has commissioned none to make laws for His kingdom; He has done this Himself, as a Son over His own house. He has indicated His will as to the way in which the affairs of His kingdom are to be permanently administered, and he has committed the application and execution of the laws He has established to the church itself. He has authorized no civil or secular authority to interfere in the regulation of the affairs of His kingdom; and therefore it is at once unlawful for them to interfere, and for the church either to be a consenting party to their interference, or to pay any regard to their mere enactments or requirements. He has laid down the laws of His kingdom in His word, and therefore the church is bound to be guided wholly by His word in the execution of the functions which He has conferred, and in the discharge of the duties which He has imposed upon her; and with that view, she is called upon to bring everything to that standard, and to make it her sole object

in regard to every question that comes before her, to ascertain what is the mind and will of Christ concerning it. The church is not only not bound to be guided by any other rule or standard, but is not at liberty to have regard to any other; as this would be virtually to withdraw herself from subjection to Christ's authority, and voluntarily to submit to a foreign yoke. No mere laws or statutes of men,—no mere regard to worldly or secular advantages,—should ever regulate the conduct of the church of Christ, or of any section or branch of it. She should be guided solely by the revealed will of Christ, and she should ascertain what that will is by diligent and prayerful study of His word.

When this great principle is explained and enforced, men who, from whatever cause, dislike and shrink from it, but who do not venture openly and directly to dispute it, usually attempt to evade it, and to escape from the practical application of it, by questioning whether there are, in point of fact, materials in God's word for deciding many of those disputes that arise in connection with the administration of the affairs of the church.

This notion, as it is often exhibited, is little else than a pretence for escaping from the supremacy of God's word without formally denying its authority. But the truth is, that God fitted and intended His word to be a full and adequate guide to His church in the execution of its functions, and in the discharge of all its duties, and to His people individually in everything bearing upon their relation to God and their eternal destiny; and it is very certain, that if men were really willing to submit to the authority of Christ as the supreme and only lawgiver,—if they were really anxious to know His will that they might do it, and if they would diligently and prayerfully search His word, they would find materials there for regulating their opinions and conduct in all circumstances much more fully and completely than they might anticipate. It has been remarked—and the remark, we think, is equally just and important—that many of the applications made in the New Testament of Old Testament statements seem to have been intended, besides their direct and immediate object, to convey this general lesson, that much more is to be learnt from the Old Testament—and, of course, from the Scriptures generally—than might at first sight appear. Men desirous to evade or abridge the authority of Scripture, in its practical applications, seem to think that they are not called upon to regard anything but what appears

plainly and palpably upon the surface of Scripture, and is set forth there in distinct and explicit assertions or requirements. But the mode of applying Old Testament statements frequently adopted by our Saviour and His apostles, points to a very different conclusion. We have a specimen of this in the statement made by James on the occasion we are considering. There was nothing very direct and express in the Old Testament upon the precise question to be decided; and the way in which he does decide it, by an application of Old Testament statements, is one of the many instances of a similar kind, occurring in the New Testament, which are fitted to impress upon us the conviction, that much more is to be learnt from the written word than what can be found on the surface of it,—much which cannot be discovered and brought out without a large amount of study and meditation;—and that the Bible is fitted and intended, when rightly used and improved, to be far more extensively useful and effectual, as a rule or standard of faith and practice, than men commonly suppose or experience.

Sec. III.—Authority of Church Officers.

The inspired record of this Council of Jerusalem plainly sanctions the Presbyterian principle of the right of the office-bearers of the church, as distinguished from the ordinary members, to decide judicially any disputes that may arise about the affairs of the church,—to be the ordinary interpreters and administrators of Christ's laws for the government of His house. It is quite plain, from the inspired narrative, that the apostles and elders, or presbyters—*i.e.*, the office-bearers of the church—alone composed the Council; that they exclusively were its constituent members, and that they alone formally and judicially decided upon the point brought before them. It is true that the brethren—*i.e.*, the Christian people—generally were present, that they were consulted, and that they concurred in the decision; and the place which they occupied in the matter will be afterwards adverted to. But it is certain that the apostles and elders alone composed the Council, and alone formally pronounced the decision. We have the regular formal minute of sederunt, as it might be called, in the sixth verse, where we are told that “the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter;” and at the fourth verse of the sixteenth chapter, the decrees of the Council are expressly described as “the

decrees that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem;” and these decrees, it is manifest, were authoritative or binding upon the churches. There is, indeed, a clear distinction kept up in the New Testament between the office-bearers and the ordinary members of the church: the one class being described as rulers and governors, and of course being invested with a certain kind and degree of authority; and the other being bound to render a certain measure and degree of submission and obedience.

There are some obvious and important limitations of the authority to be exercised by the one party, and of the obedience to be rendered by the other.

First, The authority of the office-bearers, while restricted exclusively to the affairs of the church,—to the administration of the ordinary necessary business of Christ's house,—is even there not lordly, or legislative, or discretionary, but purely ministerial, to be exercised in Christ's name, *i.e.*, in entire subjection to His authority and to His word. Christ is the church's only King and Head; and this implies that its affairs must be regulated by His mind and will revealed in His word. The constitution and laws of His kingdom have been fixed by Him, and cannot by any human or uninspired authority be altered, abrogated, or extended. The office-bearers of the church are not lords over God's heritage: they have no dominion over men's faith; they have no jurisdiction over the conscience; they are the mere interpreters of Christ's word, the mere administrators of the laws which He has enacted.

Secondly, Even within their proper sphere of simply interpreting and administering Christ's laws—*i.e.*, applying them to the actual regulation of the affairs of the church as occasion may require—the office-bearers of the church are not, as Papists allege, infallible, so as to be entitled to exact implicit and unquestioning obedience. No such privilege has been promised to, or conferred upon, them; and to claim it, is to put themselves in Christ's stead, and to usurp dominion over the conscience.

Thirdly, The office-bearers of the church have no *exclusive* right to interpret Christ's laws. Upon scriptural and Protestant principles, every man has the right of private judgment,—*i.e.*, he is entitled to interpret the word of God for himself upon his own responsibility, for the regulation of his own opinions and conduct, for the execution of his own functions and the discharge of his own duties, *whatever these may be*; and Christ has conferred upon

no class of men any power that interferes with the exercise of this right. This right of private judgment belongs to all men in their different capacities, public and private, and ought to be exercised by them with a view to the discharge of their own duties and functions, whatever these may be. Civil rulers are, on this ground, entitled and bound to interpret the word of God for themselves, with a view to the right discharge of any duties, competent to them in their own sphere and province, with respect to which the word of God affords any data for decision; and every private individual enjoys the same right or privilege. The same principle, in this general mode of stating it, applies equally to ecclesiastical office-bearers; but in their case it must be viewed in connection with this additional Scripture truth, that they are Christ's ordinance for the ordinary government of His visible church,—that it is *their* function and duty, while it is *not* the function and duty of any other party, to administer His laws for the management of the ordinary necessary business of His church,—for deciding and regulating all those matters which require to be regulated and decided wherever a church of Christ exists and is in full operation. This being their function and duty, they are of course entitled and bound to interpret the word of God for themselves, in the exercise of their own judgment, and upon their own responsibility, for the execution and discharge of it. Christ has not vested the government of His church—*i.e.*, the management of its ordinary necessary business—either in civil rulers or in the body of ordinary members; and therefore they are not entitled to interpret the word of God *for the purpose of executing this function*. He has vested the ordinary administration of the affairs of His church in ecclesiastical office-bearers; and to them, therefore, and to them alone, belongs the right of interpreting and applying *His laws for the attainment of this object, the accomplishment of this end*. In so far as the decisions of ecclesiastical office-bearers affect other men collectively or individually, these men are fully entitled to judge for themselves whether or not the decisions pronounced are in accordance with the mind and will of Christ; and by the judgment which they form upon this point to regulate their own conduct, in so far as they have any function to execute, or any duty to discharge. But since the judicial determination of the office-bearers of the church is the only ordinary provision which Christ has made for administering the affairs of His church,

no party is entitled to interfere authoritatively with them in the execution of this function; and all parties, while exercising their own right of private judgment, ought to regard the decisions of the ordinary and only competent authorities in the matter with a certain measure of respect and deference—at least to this extent, that if they do resolve to condemn and disobey the decisions, they ought to be very sure that these decisions are opposed to the mind and will of Christ, and that, therefore, they may confidently appeal from the decision of the office-bearers to the tribunal of the Head of the church Himself.

With the limitations, and in the sense, now explained, it is a scriptural principle which has always been held by Presbyterians, in opposition to Independents or Congregationalists, that the government of the church—the ordinary administration of Christ's laws, the judicial determination of any questions that may arise, and that may require to be decided in the ordinary management of the business of His house—is vested, not in the body of the people, or the ordinary members, but in the office-bearers of His church; that they constitute the only regular and ordinary tribunal for the decision and regulation of these matters; that therefore their decisions should be treated with respect and obedience, unless they be contrary to the mind and will of God; and that men who refuse to obey them are bound to be well satisfied, upon good scriptural grounds, that they can confidently appeal to Christ against the sentence pronounced in His name upon earth.

It is the doctrine of our church, as set forth in the Confession of Faith,* that “the decrees and determination” of Synods and Councils, “if consonant to the word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God appointed thereto in His word.” Without giving a full exposition of this general principle, I merely observe that it may be regarded as comprehending the three following positions:—

First, That all the decrees and determinations of Councils or Church Courts should be regulated by the word of God.

Secondly, That they are to be received with reverence and submission only *when* they are consonant with the word of God;

* Chap. xxxi., sec. 3.

and that of this, of course, every one is entitled and bound to judge for himself on his own responsibility.

Thirdly, That when they are consonant with the word, regard should be had, in the feelings with which they are contemplated, and in the way in which they are treated, not only to the fact of their accordance with the word, but also to the fact that they are righteous and scriptural decisions of a legitimate authority, rightfully exercised; that they are instances of the right working of a provision which God has made, of an ordinance which He has appointed for the administration of the affairs of His church. The ordinary provision which God has made, for settling public controversies and regulating the ordinary necessary business of His church, is by the public deliberations and decisions (according to His word) of the ordinary office-bearers; and when, through His blessing, this provision operates rightly, and brings out results which are consonant with the word, men are called upon to recognise the wisdom and goodness of God in appointing such an ordinance, and in guiding it, *upon this particular occasion*, to a right and scriptural result, and to contemplate and receive the result with the reverence and submission which the realization of the truth that this is an ordinance of God appointed thereto in His word is evidently fitted to call forth.

Sec. IV.—The Place of Church Members.

The history of the council suggests to us, that, in important ecclesiastical matters, the Christian people, or the ordinary members of the church, though not possessed of a judicial or authoritative voice in determining them, ought to be consulted; that the merits of the case ought to be expounded to them, and that their consent and concurrence should, if possible, be obtained. There is a very marked distinction kept up through the whole of the narrative we are now considering, as well as through the New Testament in general, between the position and functions of the apostles and elders, or of the office-bearers, on the one hand, and of the people or ordinary members on the other. The assembly, as we have seen, was composed properly and formally only of the apostles and elders; and its decisions were, as they are expressly called by the inspired historian, “the decrees that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.” All this is

very plain,—so plain, that it cannot be explained away; and therefore what is said or indicated of the place and standing of the people or ordinary members, must, if possible, be so interpreted as to be consistent with this.

What, then, is here said of the people; and what does it fairly and naturally imply? They are mentioned for the first time in the twelfth verse, where we are told that “all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul.” This, of course, implies that they were present, but it implies nothing more; and, for anything that appears here, they might have been mere spectators and auditors, without having anything more to do with the matter. They are next mentioned in the twenty-second verse, where we are told that “it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, *συν ὅλη τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ*, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch.” Now, the way in which they are here introduced, plainly implies that they did not stand upon the same platform in the matter with the apostles and elders, and that they had not the same place and standing in this, any more than in the preceding part, of the transaction which the office-bearers had. It *does* imply, however, that *after* the apostles and elders had made up their minds as to what was the mind and will of God in this matter, and what decision should be pronounced, the subject was brought before the people,—that they were called upon to attend to it, to exercise their judgment upon it, and to make up their mind regarding it. It implies that all this was done, and that, as the result of it, the brethren were convinced of the justice and soundness of the decision, and expressed their concurrence in it, as well as in the practical step by which it was followed up, of sending chosen men of their company to Antioch. *All this having taken place*, it was perfectly natural that the public letter addressed upon the subject to the Gentile churches, should run in the name of the whole body of those who at Jerusalem had adopted or concurred in the decision or judgment pronounced; and, accordingly, we find at the twenty-second verse, that this letter runs in the name of “the apostles, and elders, and brethren.” There is no reasonable ground to doubt the correctness of the representation we have given of the actual facts or *res gestae* of the case, as indicated by the narrative, up till the time of the preparation of this letter; and if it be correct, then the mere introduction of the brethren, *along* with the apostles and elders, into the letter, cannot be fairly

held to indicate, as it certainly does not necessarily imply, that the brethren formed a constituent part of the assembly, or that they had acted with anything like judicial authority, as the apostles and elders had done, in deciding upon the question.

Some Presbyterians, afraid that this introduction of the brethren into the letter along with the apostles and elders, might sanction the idea, that ordinary members of the church had some judicial authority in deciding controversies as well as the office-bearers, have tried to show that the brethren mentioned here are not the same parties as the whole church mentioned in the preceding verse, but rather the presbyters, or elders, who were not pastors or teachers. But this, I think, is a forced and unnatural interpretation, unwarranted by anything in the passage itself, and unnecessary to the end for the promotion of which it has been devised. Presbyterians have always denied, upon good and sufficient grounds, that Scripture assigns to the ordinary members of the church anything like judicial authority in the decision of controversies, or in the ordinary administration of the general government of the church. But they have very generally admitted, on the ground of what is contained in this chapter and in other parts of the New Testament, that, in important ecclesiastical questions, the nature and merits of the case, and the grounds and reasons of the judgment, should, in so far as circumstances allowed of it, be laid before the ordinary members of the church; and that their consent and concurrence should, if possible, be obtained. Presbyterians, indeed, have never assigned to the ordinary members of the church, because they could see no warrant in Scripture for doing so, the same distinct and definite place and influence in the ordinary regulation of ecclesiastical affairs in general, as they have ascribed to them in the appointment of their own office-bearers; in other words, they have never held their consent or concurrence in the decisions pronounced by the office-bearers in the ordinary regulation of ecclesiastical affairs to be necessary or indispensable, so that the withholding or refusal of their consent nullified or invalidated the judgment, or formed a bar in the way of its taking practical effect.

Upon distinct and specific scriptural grounds bearing upon this particular subject, Presbyterians have usually held that the consent or concurrence of the ordinary members of the church is necessary or indispensable in the appointment of their office-

bearers, so that the withholding or refusal of their consent or concurrence is an insuperable bar to the formation of the pastoral relation. But, while they have maintained this principle upon *special* scriptural grounds, bearing upon this particular topic of the election of office-bearers, they have usually denied that either this, or anything else contained in Scripture, afforded any sufficient ground for assigning to the ordinary members of the church so high and definite a standing and influence in the ordinary government of the church, or in the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs in general. They have, however, generally admitted that, in important questions affecting the welfare and peace of the church, the people should be consulted, and that their consent and concurrence should, if possible, be secured by the fair use of scriptural arguments addressed to their understandings.

The Presbyterians of this country about the time of the Westminster Assembly, had perhaps somewhat higher and more aristocratic ideas of the power and authority of ecclesiastical office-bearers and church courts than had been generally entertained by the Reformers of the preceding century;* not that there was any very marked or definite difference in opinion or doctrinal statement between them on this subject, but that there was a somewhat different impression produced by the controversy in which, at the later of these two periods, Presbyterians were engaged with the Independents,—a disposition to keep rather at a distance from anything that might seem to favour Congregationalism. Accordingly, there is nothing direct or explicit upon the subject of the place and standing of the people in the general regulation of ecclesiastical affairs, as distinguished from their influence or privilege in the election of their office-bearers,—nothing, indeed, but the general statement formerly explained, that Christ has given the ministry to the church,—contained in any of our authorized standard books prepared at that time. But, at the same time, it is certain that the leading Presbyterians of that period held the principle about the consultation and concurrence of the people which we are now illustrating; and that they ordinarily acted upon it in practice.

* The Theological Faculty of Utrecht thought that too high ground was taken on some points connected with this subject in Gillespie's (cxi.) Propositions. Vide "Voetii Politica Ecclesiastica," P. i., Lib. i., tract ii., c. vii., tom. i., p. 246. The Faculty consisted at this time of Voetius, de Maets, and Hoornbeeck, and the judgment prepared by Voetius was signed by them.

As this point has been very much overlooked in modern times, it may be proper briefly to adduce some evidence of the statement which has now been made. In 1641, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland sent a letter to their Presbyterian brethren in England, who had asked their opinion in regard to the Congregational scheme of church government, which contained the following passage:—"Not only the solemn execution of ecclesiastical power and authority, but the whole exercises and acts thereof, do properly belong unto the officers of the kirk; yet so that, in matters of chiefest importance, the tacit consent of the congregation be had before their decrees and sentences receive final execution." We have statements to the same effect published in the same year by Alexander Henderson and George Gillespie,—the one the most influential actor, and the other the most learned and conclusive reasoner, among the great men who adorned our church at that important era in her history. In the work entitled "The Government and Order of the Church of Scotland," intended to give an account to Englishmen of the ordinary practice of our church, Henderson says, "Nothing useth to be done by the lesser or greater presbytery—*i.e.*, the kirk-session or the presbytery—in ordering the public worship, in censuring of delinquents, or bringing them to public repentance, but according to the settled order of the church, and with express or tacit consent of the congregation."* And Gillespie, in his treatise entitled "An Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland," has the following statement: "It is objected (by Independents) that what concerneth all, ought to be done with the consent of all. Answer, *We hold the same*; but the consent of all is one thing, the exercise of jurisdiction by all, another thing." And, in commenting upon the council of Jerusalem, he gives the same view of this point as we have done, saying, "The apostles and elders met, sat, and voiced apart from the whole church, and they alone judged and decreed. In the meanwhile were matters made known to the whole church, and done with the consent of all. . . . The brethren are mentioned (along with the apostles and elders), because it was done with their knowledge, consent, and applause."†

These were the views entertained upon this subject by the men to whom we are indebted for the standards of our church, who

* P. 39.

† Pp. 117-118.

held that they were sanctioned by the inspired narrative of the council at Jerusalem, while they held also that neither this, nor any other portion of the New Testament, warranted or required the ascription to the people of any higher place or standing than this in the ordinary administration of ecclesiastical affairs.*

Sec. V.—Subordination of Church Courts.

There is another principle of church government which Presbyterians have generally regarded as sanctioned by the transaction recorded in this chapter—*viz.*, what is called the subordination of courts; or, to adopt the phraseology of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Form of Church Government, the right of synodical assemblies to exercise authority or jurisdiction over congregational and classical assemblies, *i.e.*, over what we now call kirk-sessions and presbyteries,—their right to receive appeals in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same. The scriptural warrant for classical assemblies or presbyteries is, that there are clear instances in Scripture in which the whole body of the Christians of a particular place—as at Jerusalem and Ephesus, where there must have been more than one congregation—are spoken of as a church, or one church, which they could be only as being under one and the same presbyterial government, having a joint or common body of ecclesiastical office-bearers, who presided over them, and regulated their common ecclesiastical affairs. The chief direct warrant which Presbyterians profess to find in Scripture for synodical assemblies, or higher courts invested with some measure of authority over congregational and classical assemblies or elderships, is this synod or council at Jerusalem; and I have no doubt that it does give countenance to the general idea on which the Presbyterian principle of a subordination of courts is based. The whole transaction here recorded, viewed in its complex character, naturally and obviously wears the aspect of the church at Antioch referring an important and difficult question, because of its importance and difficulty, and because of its affecting the interests of the whole church, to the church of Jerusalem, as to a superior authority; and of that church accordingly entertaining the reference, and giving

* *Vide Discussions on Church Principles*, p. 383, etc.—EDRS.

an authoritative decision upon the subject referred to them. This, we say, is naturally and obviously the general character and aspect of the transaction here recorded; and as there is nothing in the particular statements of the narrative inconsistent with, or exclusive of, this view, this must be held to be the general idea or principle which, if the transaction was really fitted to furnish a model or precedent for the government of the church in subsequent ages, it was intended to sanction. And if this was really the general character of the transaction, then it is plain that, if the church at Antioch, instead of referring the matter to the church at Jerusalem, had themselves given a decision upon it, as they might have done, it would have been equally competent for the minority in the church at Antioch (for we know there was a division there) to have appealed to the church at Jerusalem to review, and, if they saw cause, to reverse the decision.

While this is the idea or principle which the transaction, *in its general aspect*, naturally and obviously suggests and countenances, there is no real weight in the attempts which have been made by Congregationalists and others to overturn or escape from the conclusion. There are two positions upon this point which, with this view, and for this purpose, the opponents of Presbyterian principles have laboured to establish: first, that the decision of the council at Jerusalem was not binding, as possessed of any proper authority, but was a mere counsel or advice, having only a moral weight or influence; and, secondly, that even if the decision were binding or authoritative, the council at Jerusalem did not stand to the church at Antioch, or to other churches, in a relation at all similar or analogous to that of a superior authority to an inferior one, as being possessed of higher and wider jurisdiction. That the decision was binding and authoritative, and was not merely a counsel or advice coming from a party whose judgment was entitled to much moral weight, seems very plain from the whole strain of the narrative, and especially from the twenty-eighth verse, where the council says, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;" and from the fourth verse of the sixteenth chapter, where it plainly appears that "the decrees which were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem" were promulgated and prescribed as laws binding upon all the churches. This last circumstance—viz., that the decrees were imposed not only upon the church at Antioch, but

upon all other churches likewise, overturns another view which has been propounded, intermediate between that which describes the decision as an authoritative judgment, and that which represents it as a mere counsel or advice. It has been contended by Böehmer*—a very learned German jurist, who has thrown much light upon some important topics in ecclesiastical history and ecclesiastical jurisprudence, though he was a strenuous defender of Erastian principles—that this question was referred by the church at Antioch to the church at Jerusalem simply in the way of arbitration, or, as he says, *per modum compromissi*,—any obligation which might attach to the one party to obey the decision being based *wholly* upon their own voluntary act, in agreeing to submit it to the determination of the other. The narrative exhibits no trace of anything like a voluntary submission to arbitration on the part of the church at Antioch; and this, therefore, is a mere gratuitous assumption, devised to serve a purpose, while the imposition of the decrees upon other churches, equally with the church at Antioch, proves that this was *not* the character of the transaction.

The generality of Congregationalists, who maintain that this whole transaction affords no direct pattern or model for the permanent government of the church, on the ground that the decision was pronounced by the apostles in the exercise of their apostolic authority, under infallible supernatural guidance, cannot of course adopt the first mode of overthrowing the Presbyterian conclusion, and commonly have recourse to the second position which we have mentioned—viz., that the church of Jerusalem did not stand to the church of Antioch in a relation *at all* similar or analogous to that of a supreme authority to a subordinate one, or of a higher to a lower church court; or, more generally, that the council at Jerusalem did not possess those qualities or attributes which Presbyterians require as necessary to warrant and legitimate the exercise of a supreme controlling authority on the part of synodical assemblies. Now, it must be admitted in fairness that some zealous Presbyterian writers have gone beyond what the inspired narrative warrants in making out a virtual identity, or very complete similarity, between the Council of Jerusalem and modern synodical assemblies. More particularly, it must be admitted that

* *Dissertationes Juris Ecclesiastici* | on by Mosheim in his "Instit. Maj.,"
Antiqui; Diss. III., p. 218, commented | p. 262.

we have no evidence that any other churches were present, or were represented in this council, except those of Antioch and Jerusalem; and that thus the council cannot be shown to correspond fully with the modern idea of a synodical assembly or supreme church court, formally representing, and *simply because representing* a considerable number of particular churches, exercising authority or jurisdiction over them. But notwithstanding this concession, Presbyterians contend, and we think with good reason, that the *general principle or idea* of a representative character or standing, and of a *corresponding* jurisdiction or right of exercising judicial control, is sufficiently indicated and maintained by the general position of the church at Jerusalem, and especially of the apostles who resided there, and regulated and administered its affairs.

The apostles, whether regarded as inspired and infallible teachers, or merely as ordinary office-bearers, had, it will not be disputed, jurisdiction over the whole church of Christ. Their authority was not confined to any one particular place or district, but extended over the whole church, over all who professed subjection to their Master. And if so, then a Synod or Council of which they were constituent members might be fairly regarded as representing the church, and as thus entitled to exercise over the whole length and breadth of it whatever authority and jurisdiction was in itself right or competent. This is quite sufficient to sanction the use which the more judicious Presbyterians make of the Council at Jerusalem, as countenancing the general idea or principle of courts of review, or of a subordination of courts of ecclesiastical office-bearers—of some assemblies possessed of a wider representative character, and of a corresponding wider jurisdiction than others. It is of course only the general principle or idea that is sanctioned—the general principle or idea of the subordination of one court to another of wider jurisdiction—of the subordination of one church to many churches, or to their representatives. The way in which this general idea is to be followed out and applied may, or rather must, depend much upon external circumstances, upon opportunities of meeting and organizing; but enough may be fairly deduced from the inspired record of the Council at Jerusalem, if it was really intended to afford instructions in regard to church government in subsequent ages, to show that this general idea may be legitimately applied to the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs.

The regulation of all ecclesiastical affairs, and especially the decision of theological controversies, should be characterized at once by an uncompromising adherence to truth, and by a tender regard to the infirmities and prejudices of those who may be to some extent involved in error.

That both these qualities were exhibited in the decision pronounced by the apostles and elders upon this occasion, might be easily shown; but it is not necessary to enter into detail upon this point. That these qualities should be combined in the decisions and proceedings of ecclesiastical office-bearers in the administration of ecclesiastical affairs, is a position the truth of which all admit; but experience abundantly proves that it is very difficult to follow it out in practice, and the history of the church exhibits very many instances in which the one or the other of these objects was entirely disregarded or trampled under foot. There have been many instances in which individuals possessed of authority or influence in the church and in ecclesiastical councils have, on the one hand, exhibited, under the profession of a great zeal for truth, a great want of Christian forbearance and discretion, and practised odious and offensive tyranny; or, on the other hand, under a profession of moderation and forbearance, have sacrificed the interests of truth and sound doctrine. The Council at Jerusalem did neither, but combined a due regard to both the important objects referred to; while the sharp contention that soon after separated Paul and Barnabas—originating, no doubt, in the same general features of character, in the same tendencies and infirmities which tempt men on more public questions either to undue zeal or to undue forbearance—affords a striking lesson of the necessity of men keeping at all times a strict watch over their own spirits, and realizing unceasingly their dependence upon the Spirit of all grace, that they may be guided in the ways of wisdom, and fitted for the right discharge of their duties, to the glory of God and the welfare of His church. Some Congregationalists have dwelt much upon the humility and condescension which the apostles manifested in the whole course they pursued upon this occasion, in submitting the decision of the matter to an assembly of elders in conjunction with themselves,—in permitting disputation to go on in their presence,—and in dealing with the erroneous views propounded by arguments, and not by mere authority. We have no doubt that the apostles manifested in their proceedings and deportment upon

this occasion, everything which humility and condescension could have suggested; but in the facts now referred to, in which Congregationalists see only manifestations of these graces, we see, as has been explained, the proof of something else, of something different from this, and much more specific; a proof, viz., that they did not act in this matter as inspired men under infallible guidance, but as ordinary office-bearers in conjunction with the elders; and we venture to think, that if they were really upon this occasion exercising their infallible apostolic authority, as Congregationalists allege, the facts referred to would furnish indications rather of something like simulation and deceit, than of humility and condescension.

It thus appears, upon a survey of this whole subject, that the first controversy which arose in the Christian church, and which broke out while the church enjoyed the guidance of inspired men, was taken up and disposed of in such a way as was fitted and intended to afford general lessons as to the mode in which the affairs of the church should be conducted, after the miraculous and supernatural gifts of the Spirit should be taken away.

Sec. VI.—Obligation of Apostolic Practice.

There can be no reasonable doubt that it may be justly laid down as a general principle, that apostolic practice, such as that exemplified in the Council at Jerusalem, does impose a permanent binding obligation in regard to the constitution and government of the church, and the administration of its affairs; though it has been generally conceded by Presbyterians, that there are some limitations or modifications attaching to this principle in its practical application. The truth of this general principle seems very clearly deducible from these two positions—First, that Christ commissioned and authorized the apostles to organize His church as a distinct visible society, and to make provision for preserving or perpetuating it to the end of the world; and secondly, that the apostles, in executing this branch of their commission, have left us few direct or formal precepts or instructions as to the constitution and government of the church, and have merely furnished us with some materials for ascertaining what it was that they themselves ordinarily *did* in establishing and organizing churches, or what was the actual state and condition of the church and the churches while under their

guidance. Whatever *precepts* or *directions* they might have given on this or on any other subject, would have been received as binding, and whatever precepts or directions they *have* given, are admitted to be so; but as they were executing their Master's commission when they were establishing and organizing churches,—as they did little in the way of executing this branch of their commission except by their practice in establishing and organizing churches, and by giving us materials for ascertaining what their *practice* in this respect *was*,—and as there is no intimation in Scripture, either in the way of general principle or of specific statement, that any change was ever after to take place in the constitution and government of the church, or that any authority was to exist warranted to introduce innovations, the conclusion from all these considerations, taken in combination, seems unavoidable, that the practice of the apostles, or what they actually did in establishing and organizing churches, is, and was intended to be, a binding rule to the church in all ages; that the Christian churches of subsequent times ought, *de jure*, to be fashioned after the model of the churches planted and superintended by the apostles.

It is proper, however, to advert to some of the limitations and modifications under which this general principle is to be held and applied, and to the objections commonly adduced against it. One very obvious limitation of it is, that the apostolic practice which is adduced as binding, must be itself established from the word of God, and must not rest merely upon materials derived from any other and inferior source. This position is virtually included in the great doctrine of the sufficiency and perfection of the written word,—a doctrine held by Protestants in opposition to the Church of Rome.

If this doctrine be true, then it follows that anything which is imposed upon the church as binding by God's authority, or *jure divino*, whether the medium, or proximate source, of obligation be apostolic practice or anything else, must be traced to, and established by, something contained in, or fairly deducible from, Scripture. Unless Scripture proof be adduced, we are entitled at once to set aside all claim alleged upon our submission. If God really fitted and intended the written word to be the only rule of faith and practice, and has made this known to us, He has thereby not only authorized, but required us to reject or disregard anything obtruded upon the church as binding that cannot be traced to that