

deacons. Though not expressly called so in the Scriptures, yet they are admitted to have been such, by almost universal consent. The lowest office-bearers, therefore, in the Apostolic Church, were chosen by the people.

Here, then, are three clear facts, fully sufficient to be the basis of a principle. The first chapter of Acts supplies us with an instance of the assembled men and brethren appointing to office one who was both an apostle and a minister. The fourteenth chapter shows that the elders of the congregation were chosen by popular suffrage. The sixth chapter furnishes an example of the whole multitude of the disciples choosing seven men to be deacons. On these three facts, clear and irresistible, we found the principle of POPULAR ELECTION. The conclusion that follows from this evidence, we find it absolutely impossible to evade, namely—that in the Apostolic Church the *office-bearers were chosen by the people.*

THE SECOND PRINCIPLE.

THERE is a class of office-bearers very frequently mentioned as existing in the early Church, and to which, as yet, we have only made a slight allusion. We mean the *elder*, or *presbyter*, as he is frequently called. This church officer is often mentioned in the Acts and Epistles; but an attentive reader will not fail to remark that no passage of Scripture ever speaks of him as holding an office distinct from the *bishop*. The same verse never speaks of bishops and elders. When Paul, for example, writes to the Philippian Church (i. 1), he mentions the bishops and deacons, but says nothing of elders. When James directs the sick to call for the elders of the Church (v. 14), he says nothing of bishops. If the offices of bishop and elder were quite distinct—if a bishop were an office-bearer bearing rule over a number of elders, it does seem strange that no passage of Scripture speaks at the same time of bishops and elders. There is one supposition, and only one, that would furnish a satis-

factory reason for this fact. If the two terms be only different names for the same office, then to speak of *bishops* and *elders* would be a violation of the laws of language—it would be tautology—it would be the same thing as to speak of presbyters and elders, or of bishops *and* bishops. To suppose that the two offices were identical accounts sufficiently for the significant fact that they are never mentioned together in the same passage of the Word of God; for it is plain that one of the terms being adequate to indicate the office-bearer intended, there was no need to introduce the other at the same time.

Still there must be something stronger than a presumption to warrant us in saying that the two terms were only different names for the same person. However improbable it may appear, it is still possible that these two, bishop and elder, were distinct office-bearers, even though the same passage never speaks of them together. This obliges us to consult the Scriptures farther on this question.

The first passage that comes before us is—Titus i. 5-7—“For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: if any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre.” This passage strongly confirms the truth of the supposition already made, that the two offices were identical. It appears that Paul left Titus behind him in Crete to ordain elders in every city. To guide him in the discharge of this duty, the Apostle proceeds to state the qualifications of an elder. No private member of the Church was eligible to that office except he was a man of blameless life, the husband of one wife, and had obedient children; “for,” says he, “a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God.” Dr. King well observes on this passage, “that the term *elder*,

used at the commencement, is exchanged for the term *bishop* in the conclusion, while the same office-bearer is spoken of. An *elder* must have such and such qualifications. Why? Because a *bishop* must be blameless, as the steward of God. Does not this identify the elder and the bishop? If not, identification is impossible. Were it said, the Lord Mayor of London must devote himself to his duties, for the chief magistrate of such a city has great responsibilities, would not the language bear, that the Lord Mayor and the chief magistrate were the same office-bearers? Otherwise, the representation would be absurd; for why should the mayor devote himself to his duties because some other person had great responsibilities? Yet the mayor and chief magistrate are not more identified in this comparison than are the elder and bishop in Paul's instructions to Titus.* It must be evident to every unprejudiced man that the Apostle would never state as a reason for ordaining none but men of good moral character to the office of the *eldership*, that a *bishop* must be blameless, if he did not understand that elder and bishop were only different designations for the same office. On any other supposition, the language of the Apostle would be without coherence and without sense.

Again, we turn to II John i., and we find how the Apostle John styles himself an *elder*—"The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth." Next comes up I Peter v. 1, and we find there that the Apostle Peter calls himself an *elder*—"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ." That John and Peter were both bishops all admit; but these passages show that they were elders also. This, however, brings us but a step to the conclusion. It may be true that every general is an officer, but it does not follow from this that every officer is a general. A bishop may, like John and Peter, be an elder, but it does not necessarily follow that an elder is a bishop.

* Dr. King's *Exposition and Defence*, pp. 176-7. Edin. 1853.

This may be true, but we require more proof before we can reach such a conclusion. This we have as fully as can be desired in Acts xx. 17-28. We read there how Paul sent for the elders of the Church at Ephesus to meet him at Miletus. He spoke of his ministry in their city, the great theme of his preaching being repentance towards God, and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ. He foretold the afflictions awaiting him at Jerusalem and elsewhere, and he saddened their hearts by saying to them that they would see his face no more. And he warned them to take heed to themselves and to "the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made them *overseers*"—that is, *bishops*, as the word is elsewhere rendered. Every reader acquainted with the original is aware that the word translated *overseers*, in Acts xx. 28, is the very same as that translated *bishops* in Phil. i. 1, so that we have here the evidence of inspiration, that the elders of Ephesus were bishops by appointment of the Holy Ghost. This makes the chain of reasoning strong and conclusive. Bishops, as we have seen, were elders, and elders, as we now see, were bishops. This conducts us to a principle—namely, that, IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH, THE OFFICES OF BISHOP AND ELDER WERE IDENTICAL. An elder was not inferior to a bishop, nor was a bishop superior to an elder. It was the same office-bearer who was known by these different names.

We are not disposed to attach much value to the opinion of such a man as Edward Gibbon, on any question of doctrine or morality, but that distinguished historian was competent to grapple with a matter of fact, and may be heard as one who, from being unprejudiced in favour of any religious system whatever, was in a position to judge impartially in a case of this kind. Speaking of the government and administration of the Church prior to the Council of Nice, he says, "The public functions of religion were solely entrusted to the established ministers of the Church, bishops and the presbyters; two appellations which, in their

first origin, appear to have distinguished the same office, and the same order of persons. The name of presbyter was expressive of their age, or rather of their gravity and wisdom. The title of bishop denoted their inspection over the faith and manners of the Christians who were committed to their pastoral care."•