

THE CHURCH: THE BISHOP.

ACTS ii. 47.—“ And the Lord added to the church.”

THE divine agency was at work daily, and the result, addition of saved ones to the church, is ascribed to the proprietor of the agency: *qui facit per alium, facit per se*: especially in this case, where the agent is powerless, except through the presence and energy of the principal. “ Without me ye can do nothing ; ” *John* xv. 5. “ As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine (i. e. the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, under any conditions: of itself, it has no power to live, even: but if it abide in the vine, from the vine it will receive power to live and to bear fruit); no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing: *ou dunasthe poiein ouden.*” By reference to *Matth.* iii. 8, 10, it will be seen that *poiein karpou* is a mode of expression for “ bearing fruit,” “ producing fruit: ” “ Bring forth therefore fruits (*poieesate karpous*) meet for repentance ; ” “ every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit; *dendron mee poion karpou kalon.*” The branch, then, disparted from the vine can produce nothing; no grapes; no leaves; no buds; nothing: in a little while it will wither; then, a little while, it is dead. Therefore, what fruit the branch produces, is properly attributed to the vine. So the Lord added the saved to the church. Not “ such as should be saved ; ” but the saved; *soozomenous*. To be sure a branch may abide or not, as our Lord intimates above, *ver.* 5, “ he that abideth in me,” after he had ordered, *ver.* 4, “ abide in me ; ” and certainly allows

himself the same liberty of will, as he adds, *ver.* 5, "and I in him." The true convert is saved; but that he shall remain saved, depends upon the harmony of his will with the will of Christ, the vine. He is now a branch in the vine; and, saved. If he shall separate himself from the vine, or the vine exclude him from position, he ceases to be saved, and unless he recover his position will be lost. It is a wondrous mercy, that the loving Christ, the deserted, is more than ready for reconciliation.

The apostles affirmed Jesus to have risen from the dead, of which fact they were eye-witnesses, and therefore he was the Christ, and every one believing in him, should have remission of sins. Those that believed were the saved: not the elect: not a word about the elect. When Peter had borne his testimony, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. * * *. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ:" then — "when they had heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the Holy Ghost. * * * Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added (unto them) about three thousand souls."

Up to this time, the only enumeration we have is the eleven apostles and one hundred and twenty other disciples, including the women, Mary the mother of Jesus (whose name here appears for the last time in the sacred history), and his brethren. These assembled for prayer and supplication, *Acts* i. 14. In the midst of these stood up Peter, *ver.* 15, to propose the filling

the place of Judas. And these constituted the assembly on the day of Pentecost, when "the promise of the Father" was fulfilled, and Peter speaking for the eleven, *ch.* ii. 14, gave in their testimony, and the three thousand were saved, and added. They continued the testimony, and it continued to produce the same result; the salvation of believers; it was salvation to believe; and daily was it so; and daily were the saved added to the church.

Let us look again at this church; this *ekkleesia*. What an unpretentious object, as to form, externals, it is! At first, the apostles and the one hundred and twenty: without an officer, or rule: a mere congregation, assembly, as the word *ekkleesia* implies: they believed Jesus to be the long-promised Christ, were full of love to him and to each other, and associated, met together, assembled for worship. They had no government but the love which was in their hearts, the love that drew them to a common centre; and, so, to each other. There is no indication of any organization; nothing as yet but an assembly of those of one heart, one mind, one purpose, one hope: and to this simple *ecclesia*, the three thousand were added, the day of Pentecost; and then, daily, such as were saved daily.

But, while everything was so simple, so unostentatious as to form, externals; with neither governor, nor law; a mere voluntary assembly; within, at the centre, what amazing power, what efficient control! Jesus is the Christ, much love to him from those to whom much had been forgiven; this love united this assembly around that precious name, at the peril of the loss of all earthly things, and of life itself. It was not who should govern, but who should serve; as the Lord had taught "—their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister, *diakonos*

(servant).” *Mark* x. 42, 43. They of that assembly sought neither lordship, nor revenue. It was a wonderful power that was present and in force: “And all that believed were together”—more than three thousand believers, all, all together, assembled by a power in each one’s heart: no command; no law; no scourge; no spear:—“and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need.” Such persons needed neither governor nor laws, other than the mystic force in their own simple, loving hearts. “After those days, saith Jehovah, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” *Jerem.* xxxi. 33, 34.

This happy condition of the assembly was not of long duration. The success of the apostles in the deliverance of their testimony; their prominent position of speakers; occasioned them great popularity and admiration. They had “favor with all the people;” presently even the high priest Annas and his illustrious associates dare not punish them, “because of the people;” then, “as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet;” then, “And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them;” the same sort of people who in the ancient time repudiated the government of Jehovah, and to whom Samuel said, “ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when Jehovah your God was your king;” magnified the apostles into functions not intended for them,

and rejecting the inward law of Jehovah by which they had distributed to the need of others, *Acts* ii. 45, they "brought the prices and laid them at the apostles' feet."

Thus ended the simple government by the law in the heart. It was very efficient and grand; and, in the end, when men shall have convinced themselves of the miserable inferiority of their wretched substitutes, it will be restored: for in the New Jerusalem, which came down from heaven, there was "no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light of it." *Rev.* xxi. 23. Happy church, again, when the gentle, loving Lamb shall be its light once more; its suns and its moons being unneeded. But, now come murmurings, *Acts* vi.; something like organization by the appointment of seven men, to relieve the apostles from functions, which, in the previous days, every man who sold his possessions had performed with his own hands, by the guidance of the government in his own heart. Presently we read of elders, *ch.* xi. 30; though this seems rather cheerful, looking, as it does, like some one again "daring to join himself" unto the apostles: for "the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief (*eis diakonian*, something to be ministered) unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul." Not now to be "laid at the apostles' feet;" but "sent it to the elders." The terrific persecution that had driven the seven, and all the rest, except the apostles, out of Jerusalem, seems to have shaken down the nascent hierarchy, and the apostles are not designated as distributors, or even receivers, of the Antiochian testimony of loving care, for their suffering brethren at Jerusalem. It is pleasant, too, to see the name of Barnabas, who was not an apostle, preceding that of Paul, who was not the inferior of any of the apostles.

The elder is an officer borrowed from the Mosaic forms, to which the first Christians had been accustomed. Why Luke did not give any account of their first employment, it is impossible to say; we can only conjecture with others, that he did not hold church organization to be of any importance; outside the internal, spiritual force in every Christian's heart; which, like every other life force, contains its own powers and laws of organization; organizes its own form; to suit the aim of its own life. The living seed of the vine, organizes a vine: of an oak, an oak: of a church, a church. Jesus, the Lamb-like Son of God, planted the seed of a church, watered it with his blood, warmed it with his smile; it sprang up and began its beautiful development; what a pity the simple, efficient plan was encumbered with insidious parasites, covering and embarrassing its bark, and inviting decay and languor. The elder is introduced here as an officer in the Christian Church, as naturally and quietly, as one would, in writing of a man, mention his hand or foot, or any other organ of the human body. They had always been accustomed to elders, and they were appointed without noise or ceremony, so soon as they felt the need of rulers, overseers, superintendents; and had ceased requiring the apostles to be at their head; in anything other than in bearing their appointed testimony. But what were the functions of an elder?

In discussing this question, we limit ourselves to the Scripture: the question relating to that primitive assembly, very unlike the church of the present day, with very rare, if any, exceptions. The elder, as a Scriptural title, has marked precedence to the bishop. One reading ecclesiastical history, or certain church controversies, might suppose, that the word *episkopos*, rendered bishop, was one of the words most frequently mentioned in the N. Testament. What then must be his astonish-

ment at learning, that the most minute investigation cannot find that word in any one of the four Gospels; but once in The Acts; not at all in the Ep. to the Romans; nor in I Corinthians; nor in II Corinthians; nor in Galatians; nor in Ephesians; but once in Philippians; not at all in Colossians; nor in I Thessalonians; nor in II Thessalonians; but once in I Timothy; not at all in II Timothy; but once in Titus; not at all in Philemon; nor in Hebrews; nor in James; but once in I Peter; not at all in II Peter; nor in I John; nor in II John; nor in III John; nor in Jude; nor in Revelation. Of the twenty-seven books, *episkopos*, rendered bishop, occurs in five, and but once in each of the five; while in twenty-two, and these embracing the larger books, it is not to be found at all. But of these five occurrences, one, that in *I Pet.* ii. 25, "the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls," the reference is to our Lord; leaving only four occurrences of the word in reference to a human officer in the Church; and one of these, *Acts* xx. 28, so evidently identifies the bishop with the elder, that our translators substituted the word *overseers*, for *bishops*, in their rendering of *episkopoi*. This whittles down this small showing of five in gross, in the entire N. Testament, to three. But of these three, one of the instances merits consideration: that at *Philipp.* i. 1, "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ;" etc. This is a very solemn and formal address. They of the chief part being "all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi," a city of Macedonia; while they of the inferior part are "the bishops and deacons." These "saints" are not of the sort whose names have been inserted in the calendar, and who, if as good as represented by the inserters, might very well take

precedence of many bishops and deacons: but they were the members of the Christian community or communities; for Philippi was "a chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony;" *Acts* xvi. 12; and saints was the general name, then, of believers in Jesus as the Christ. How came *bishops* to be connected with the saints, in one city? The idea is absurd, if bishops meant there, at Philippi, what the word means here, in Baltimore: and, yet, it is quite likely that episcopalians are as numerous here, as were the saints there: what then if a modern Paul were to address a solemn, formal epistle, to "all the saints (meaning members of the episcopal communities) which are at Baltimore, with the bishops and deacons?" Who could understand it? It would be necessary to rank such an address, with those things in Paul's writings, which Peter said were hard to be understood. Whose bishops and deacons? We suppose, of the saints at Philippi: which certainly, to us, has the appearance that the bishops and deacons belonged to the saints, and not the saints to the bishops and deacons: as "the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath;" so bishops and deacons were made for the saints, and not the saints for bishops and deacons: had there not been man, the sabbath had not been; and had there been no saints, there had been no bishops and deacons: before the days of bishops and deacons, there were saints, *Acts* i., as before the sabbath there was man. It would be as natural and philosophical, to think and write of a man being owned by his own hands, his instruments; as to think and write of the saints being owned by their own bishops and deacons, their instruments. So, Paul, the ancient, addressed "all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi," as the real, essential body, church, wishing them grace and peace; in which good wishes he includes their church instrumentalities, their bishops and deacons. Probably

a modern apostle would have addressed, The Bishop and Clergy, with the saints at Philippi: but this would have been as unintelligible there, as the form of Paul's address would be here: for as here the inquiry would be, Where are the bishops? there it would have been, Where is the Bishop, where are the Clergy?

Bishops and deacons: but why did Paul overlook the elders? Did he not wish the elders, which must have been here, as in other churches planted by Paul, (*Acts* xiv. 23,) to share in the "grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ"? There is express record, as hinted above, that Paul took care that the churches should be supplied with elders. So, we read, "And when they (Barnabas and Paul) had ordained them elders in every church," etc.; *Acts* xiv. 23. Every church among the gentile believers, under the advice of Paul, elected elders, after the Jewish fashion; to which Paul, but not the gentile converts, had been accustomed. But how happens it, that these gentile saints at Philippi, had no elders? Or, if they had, why did Paul omit them from his salutation and blessing? There is an easy way out of this dilemma. Before the writing of this Epistle, according to chronologists, Paul had identified bishops (*episkopoi*) with elders (*presbuteroi*), as we see, *Acts* xx. 17-35. "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders (*presbuteros*) of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, etc., * * * Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers (*etheto episkopous*)," etc. Here he sent for the *presbuteroi* (elders) and styles them *episkopoi* (bishops); leaving not a particle of distinction between the *presbuteros* and the *episkopos*. The one church at Ephesus had elders who were bishops; and the one church at Philippi had bishops who were elders. This should be

clear enough ; especially when we find no trace of any other sort of bishop appointed through Paul's instrumentality, except the *presbuteros*, the elder.

So, we strike this from our list, before this reduced from five to three ; and now, from three to two. Then, these two are both found in the writings of Paul : " A bishop then must be blameless," etc. ; *I Tim.* iii. 2 : " For a bishop must be blameless," etc. ; *Titus* i. 7. How could it be deemed unreasonable, in the utter absence of any record in The Acts, or any other of the inspired books, that Paul ever advised, or assisted at, the appointment of any bishop other than the *presbuteros* ; and in the open, evident, undeniable presence of a most distinct record, that he styled the *presbuteroi*, *episkopoi* ; how can it be unreasonable, we repeat, to understand his blameless bishop to be nothing more nor less than a blameless elder ? And so the *episkopos* shrinking, of necessity, into the *presbuteros*, our criticism looks again for the Bishop in the New Testament, and finds no higher officer overseeing the church, than the elder. If it be proved that we have blundered, in traversing our subject, we will be surprised, and retract : but until furnished with such proof, we will adhere to our conclusion, that the Episcopalian government warrant, is not from any model to be found in the New Testament : the only bishop known there being the elder.

But, now, the elder, the *presbuteros*. This word appears in the New Testament, sixty-seven times. Of these, twenty-seven instances refer to the elders of the Christian Church, thirteen of them in the writings of Paul, and thirteen times in Revelation where *episkopos* does not occur once. As this book, Revelation, is of the latest date in the canon ; its free use of *presbuteros*, and utter oblivion of *episkopos*, was not the warrant for Dr. Whedon's surmise, " It seems probable that before

the apostle John died the episcopal form was generally prevalent, and probably with his sanction." *Com. on Acts xi. 30.* Such a probability finds little countenance in the foregoing facts, unless, like Paul, our respected and able commentator reads *presbuteros* and *episkopos* as referring to the same officer, and episcopacy as being a mere function of an elder; which would have as authority not only Paul, *Acts xx. 28*, but also Peter, who exhorts the elders to, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight (*episkopountes*, bishoping, overseeing)." *I Peter v. 2.* The Doctor does not use the word episcopal in this sense; though, as we have seen, this is its true Scriptural signification. "But," he adds, "it is not clear either that the episcopal form was ever divinely enjoined, or prescribed as indispensable to a legitimate Church; or that an absolutely unbroken succession was required for all ages, except so far as such regular succession was, in the given case, most conducive to the Church's well being." In our judgment, as given elsewhere, the "unbroken succession," in the usual church sense of that phrase, was never intended, because never needed, therefore an impossibility, a myth. Not only is it "not clear that the episcopal form" of church government "was ever divinely enjoined;" but it is most clear, that it was not: nothing being enjoined but the life, springing from a grateful, loving faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Lamb of God sacrificed for sin; which loving faith, looking to God, said Abba, father; and to man, brother: and this life, like all those proceeding from him "who has life in himself," contained the force of self-organization: and it organized itself upon these three principles, the Fatherhood of God, the Lordship of Jesus the Christ, and the Brotherhood of Believers. Behold the Church!

To return now to the elders. What was their peculiar function? Not preaching; any believer preached,

as he had opportunity; as we see, *Acts* viii. 4, where thousands of believers, with no other credential than their faith, are on record as preachers of the word; a clear, distinct, undeniable record, which the elders, as elders, do not exhibit. Peter, as quoted above, makes "taking the oversight" of the church, the business of the elders. Paul, in *I Tim.* v. 17, says, "Let the elders that rule well (*kaloos proestootes presbuteroi*), be counted worthy of double honor (*diplees timees*, double salary), especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The laborer is worthy of his hire." If, then, the function of the elder was "preaching," why the "especially" in favor of an elder laboring in "the word and doctrine?" In that case, it ought to have been in the favor of the *proestootes*, who added ruling, presiding, taking charge, to their appropriate function of preaching. As it is, such elders as to their appropriate function of ruling, added, because of the love and zeal in their hearts, labors of preaching as they could snatch a spare moment, were specially commended, by the apostle, and declared worthy of increased salary. In fact, the Jewish elder, to which alone the early Christians were accustomed, was not a preacher, but a ruler: and it is very incongruous to suppose, that in their organizing, they continued the elder but changed his functions: especially when they had thousands of preachers, but no formal ruler. When the history arrives among the gentile believers, it gives account of the appointment of elders; because they were unaccustomed to such officers: but the Jewish believers seemed to assume the use of them naturally, and noiselessly, as the Methodists of the United States, were easily led by Dr. Coke and the revered Asbury, into the adoption of the three orders of ministers, they had been accustomed to

associate with the mother church of England ; Bishops, Elders, and Deacons.

It is not irrelevant to repeat, that in all the inspired history of the Church, for the first thirty years, the bishops are mentioned but once, *ch.* xx. 17, 35, and those bishops were the elders of Ephesus: while, on the other hand, the mention of elders is frequent. In *ch.* xv. 2, we have an account of a deputation from Antioch to "the apostles and elders" at Jerusalem, about some question of doctrine. "And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church (*ekklesias*), and of the apostles and elders." Church first, then the witnesses, then the church's instruments: but where is the bishop? "And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter." Again, where is the bishop? There was a long debate, but there is nothing recorded as the argument, or opinion of a bishop. "Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen (*eklexamenous*) men of their own company (*ex autoon*) to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:" etc. Once more we inquire, where is the bishop of the church at Jerusalem, that his authority is ignored in this most solemn, formal, ecclesiastical letter? And where the bishop of Antioch, the bishop of Syria, the bishop of Cilicia, that such a document as this should be addressed to "the brethren" at Antioch, Syria, Cilicia? Not even the elders are particularized: nor the deacons: bishop, elders, deacons; all the reverend clergy entirely ignored; "the brethren" alone addressed: the communication is to "the brethren," the congregation, the

church: and the church officers get only the share of brethren. The saints were not yet the property of their rulers.

Among such records, it is useless to look for deacons: deacons appear nowhere, in the history of the Church for the first thirty years. But, as for the bishops, their one single appearance at Miletus, at the request of Paul, is such, that we may, with entire certainty, find them in these elders at Jerusalem. For if the elders of Ephesus were the bishops of Ephesus; no one can say nay, when we affirm the elders of Jerusalem to have been the bishops of Jerusalem. Judas and Silas, having been declared "chief men," wherever they appear they appear as "chief men:" and when Paul, with the fullest possible information in the case, has declared elders to be bishops, wherever they appear they appear as bishops; bishoping being a mere function of an elder; *I Peter* v. 2. The elder was an overseer, ruler in this sense, seeing that the assembly, the congregation, the church, was orderly; and reporting cases of disorder to the congregation for judgment and sentence.

Such we think to have been the simple, efficient organization of the first Christian assemblies. As time wore on, various changes were made, as leading minds impelled by loving hearts, or by ambitious purpose, projected and proposed: and as in the State (Rome) there was a departure from the democratic idea of the earlier times, and a tendency to place supreme power in the hands of one; * such influence was felt, of course, in Christian assemblies, and the elders, at first all bishops

"* * * et is esset reipublicæ status, ut eam unius consilio atque cura gubernari necesse esset: — and the condition of the republic (Rome) being such, as to make it necessary, that it should be governed by the care and will of one person." *Cicero, De Nat. Deorum, Lib. I. 4.*

alike, glided into the *primus inter pares* condition; and then into the bishop and his elders, etc.; until we have nothing now, perhaps, after the original model. No church can claim to be The Church, without blushing if it has any modesty; or if its modesty be gone, without laughing in its sleeve at its own pretensions. Let any church square with the Church of The Acts, and it may then boldly prefer a claim to true Christian Antiquity: for anything short of that is mere pretense.

But any existing church, possessing and cultivating the true Christian spirit of love to God and man; is not only entitled to think for itself in all relative matters; but also to determine upon the method in which its loving heart will provide itself with instrumentalities and plans, for spreading the glad tidings of salvation for sinners by faith in the blood of the Lamb; and the privilege of believers to grow in grace, and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Any such church is a happy retreat for a sin-sick soul, desirous of learning and pursuing the right ways of the Lord; and though there may be some things, as is very likely, in the order of such assembly that might have been better arranged; it is ruinous to be always tinkering at them, and utterly unreasonable to become schismatic. By a thousand times is it better to be patient, brotherly, loving in our demeanor and intercourse; that while taking sweet counsel together, we may assist each other in our studies of the sacred word, and make common progress in Christian enlightenment and spirituality. We have been slow in learning the depth and extent of that most simple and forceful of all laws, love: in our anxiety and effort for points of doctrine, or of order, we have too often forgotten, The greatest of these is love! And it is a poor gain to smash a magnificent chandelier, under pretense of improving the position of a taper. The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.

The great essential for a church is not form: form does not produce life; but life, form. Life, life from the breath of God, *Gen.* ii. 7, breathed into the form we have; that is the great church need of the day: and life gets into the sum by getting into the units; a million of dead men would make up a huge mass of death; but there would not be a particle of life. To have a living mass of men, it must be made up of living men: and as the best thing a man can do for his country, is to be a true, enlightened, earnest patriot; so, the best thing any member can do for his church, is to become a true, enlightened, earnest Christian. He might be a great churchman (bigot) and a very poor, and even hurtful member: but a great Christian can be neither a poor nor hurtful member of any church: and to be such a Christian, is the privilege and duty of each of us. The effort to achieve such result is the true and only road to personal and church prosperity. Doctrine and order will be all the time getting into proper adjustment, while the heart is kept in proper condition. "My son, give me thy heart:" yes; for that is the avenue of influence to the head, the hands, the feet.
