

CHAPTER II.

THE NATURE OF THE DEACON'S OFFICE.

On the subject of this chapter there has long been, and still is, great diversity of opinion and practice. Nearly all Christian churches agree, at least in theory, that the Deacon's office constitutes a part of the order of God's house. There is not the same unanimity of sentiment respecting the nature of this office, and the duties of the deacon. Episcopalians maintain that it is a spiritual office, and that deacons are an order of preachers; Congregationalists, that the deacon rules in spiritual things. Episcopalians are clearly in error upon this subject, because, neither in the narrative, (Acts vi. 1-6,) of its original institution, nor in any other passage of scripture referring to the office of the deacon, is there any intimation that the deacon was intended to be a minister of the gospel. But the very contrary. The express intention of the office is said to be, the relief of the apostles from a portion of their labours, that they might have leisure for the ministry of the word. Ver. 3, 4: "whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." Nothing can be more evident than this: that the "business" of the deacons, and the "ministry of the word," are different employments; and, indeed, that proper attention to the one is somewhat inconsistent with due attention to the other. It is impossible that a class of officers expressly instituted to relieve the ministry from the burden of attending to pecuniary affairs, should themselves be gospel ministers. The preaching of Philip* is easily explained. He became an evangelist, (Acts xxi. 8,) having "purchased to himself a good degree."†

The deacons of Congregational churches resemble very much the ruling elders of Presbyterian churches.‡ This, also, is an evident departure from the scripture model. There is not the most remote intimation that the deacon was designed to rule. His "business" is plainly stated, to be attendances upon certain duties connected with, and belonging to the care of fiscal concerns; but not a word respecting government as attached to this office.§

To the office of the deacon belongs,

I. THE CARE OF THE POOR.

It is evident from the account in Acts vi. 1-6, that the deacons were designed to take special care to promote the comfort of the poor. The disciples had made up, with remarkable liberality, a large common stock.|| From this stock all were supported. The poor had their supply from this source. In Rom. xii. 8, the duties of the deaconship are said to be "giving" and "showing mercy." That the church at that time acknowledged her obligations to furnish support to the poor, needs no proof. The manner in which this subject is referred to in the nar-

* Acts viii. 5. † 1 Tim. iii. 13. ‡ Dwight's Theology, Sermon clv.

§ Congregationalists limit the office of the deacon, so far as it is concerned with pecuniary affairs, entirely to the supply of the poor. See same sermon. This, as will be seen in the sequel, is unscriptural, and at variance with the doctrines and practice of the purest churches.

|| Acts ii. 44, 45; iv. 32-37.

rative of the original institution of this office, and elsewhere, fully warrants the inference that one part, and an important one, of the deacon's duties, is the oversight and care of the temporal condition of the poor.* This is generally admitted. It is, therefore, unnecessary to dwell longer upon the proof.

The apostolic churches felt, as well as acknowledged, their obligations in reference to the care of the poor, particularly widows and orphans.† To attend to this sacred duty, they chose and ordained deacons. Nor is it to be supposed, that their duty to the poor was limited to the mere furnishing them with pecuniary support. The high qualifications required in the deacons,‡ warrant us to infer that they have a wider range of duty. Moreover, pecuniary assistance is not that which is alone, or chiefly, needed by the objects of the Christian's charities. They need advice and encouragement. The young, especially orphans, require to be properly educated, and their steps governed by the hand of kindness and charity. For want of proper instruction and counsel, how many baptized children, whose parents have been removed from them by death, have been lost to the church, and to themselves! Here is a wide field to be occupied by the deacon: he must feed the poor, as the almoner of the church's bounty; and he must do more. He must give to the necessitous advice, and impart to them comfort; not as a spiritual guide, but as a kind friend, and particularly, as sustaining to the desolate and friendless orphan, a relation almost as intimate as the parental.

The importance of this department of the deacon's duties cannot be doubted. All we want is, a more lively sense of the condition of the poor and solitary, and conviction of the church's duty to supply all their need. That this duty will ever be properly felt, or attended to, uniformly and systematically, until deacons are ordained in the congregations, there can be no hope. The pastor and the ruling elders have, it is true, an official responsibility on this subject, of which they cannot divest themselves. But all pastors and sessions will find in their own experience, where they endeavour to perform their spiritual functions conscientiously, the need of just such relief as the ordination of a board of active deacons would furnish. This is particularly true of the pastor. He must devote much time to study and private meditation, that he may be able "rightly to divide the word of truth," as "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed." This, with the cares of government; visiting the sick; family visitation; catechising, etc., furnish ample employment for the most robust and industrious minister of the gospel. Who is to collect funds for the poor; to inquire into their state; to furnish them with what they require for maintenance; and to watch over the children of deceased or helpless church members? The elders might attend to all this, but not as it should be attended to. Nor is it their special duty. It is a distinct, and often a very large field of operation, from the other duties of the eldership, and is liable to be neglected. The remedy is to be found in the ordination of a competent number of deacons. That they may perform all their duties in this

* See 1 Tim. v. 3-16; Rom. xii. 7, 8; 1 Pet. iv. 11.

† They must be "widows indeed." Those who could maintain themselves, or had relations to provide for them, were not to be burdensome to the church.

‡ 1 Tim. iii. 8-13.

matter, congregations should be furnished with these scriptural officers, according to Christ's institution, and the practice of the church of Christ in her purest times.

II. THE DEACONS SHOULD COLLECT AND DISTRIBUTE ALL THE CONTRIBUTIONS FOR ECCLESIASTICAL PURPOSES.

This office was not instituted solely to attend to the poor. The functions of the deacon's office embrace the charge of all the ecclesiastical goods. This has been, the doctrine of the great body of Presbyterians from the earliest periods. Independents and Congregationalists restrict this office, so far as the care of funds is concerned, to those set apart for the poor.* The scriptures, and the "footsteps of the flock," both, with equal explicitness, confirm our views of this subject.

I. The Scriptures.

Acts vi. 1-6: "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch; whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them."

This passage contains the history of the appointment of the first deacons in the New Testament church.† That we may have a complete view of the whole of this transaction, we must go back a little, and ascertain what was "the daily ministration" of verse 1, the "serving tables" of verse 2, and the "business" of verse 3. This we learn from chapter ii. 44, 45: "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." And chapter iv. 32-37: "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own: but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked; for 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: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need," etc.

From these passages, it appears that the "daily ministration" was the management, for public purposes, of a common stock created by the contributions of the disciples: that from this stock all the ecclesiastical expenses were defrayed, and, likewise, the poor, if there were

* See Dwight's Theology. Sermon civ.

† See Miller on the Ruling Elder, page 219.

any, supported. The apostles, and other ministers, were supported from this fund; and the other charges (and there must have been some) attendant upon the dispensation of the Lord's Supper, and other ordinances, were, unquestionably, defrayed out of it, for there was no other source whence they could be drawn. It is plainly impossible that there could have been any fund, at that time, distinct from this common stock, or another fund under the control of distinct officers, such as the Trustees or Committees of modern times. Such officers could not have existed. The funds required for the promotion of the good of the whole body, and to meet all demands upon the church, were "thrown together at the apostles' feet."*

Indeed, the very circumstance that is sometimes relied upon as favouring the view, that the "widows" were chiefly concerned in this ministration; namely, that when they "were neglected" the deacons were appointed, is, of itself, enough to show that "this business" was not merely attending to the poor. For then it would follow, that the apostles had altogether neglected to attend to the very object for which the contributions were thrown at their feet! This is impossible. It therefore appears plain, that there were other objects contemplated in the formation of this fund, attention to which interfered in some degree with due attention to the "Grecian widows."

The "business" over which the deacons were appointed was the whole of this daily ministration,—the whole service of the tables. The apostles themselves say, referring to the whole of that charge, which they had at first undertaken, and for a time managed, that the deacons were appointed "over this business." It is plain, therefore, that the entire fund formed by contributions for ecclesiastical purposes, was at first managed by the apostles, and by them transferred to the deacons. There could have been at that time no other officer, such as a trustee or committeeman, appointed to any part of this charge. The whole was first placed in the apostles' hands,† the whole was placed in the hands of the deacons when they were ordained. These are the views which have been entertained of this passage by the purest churches, and by the greater part of judicious commentators.

As this passage has a very important bearing upon our investigations respecting the deacon's duties, a few quotations, and but a few, for our space is limited, are given from standard commentators; with the hope that the reader will carefully examine the passage, in the light thus reflected upon it. These quotations are not classified: our limits do not

* It should be remarked here, that a part of the transactions recorded in these passages was extraordinary, and, consequently, not a rule to others. The casting all their property into a common stock was extraordinary. This is manifest from the case of Ananias and Sapphira. Acts v. 1-10. Peter says, "Whilst it remained was it not thine own? and after it was sold was it not in thine own power?" The liberality of these disciples exceeded. In other respects, their conduct was according to those laws of moral duty, which are universally binding upon church members: who are always under obligations to take care of the poor; to maintain the ministry; to make other necessary provision for attendance upon and dispensation of, gospel ordinances; to spread the gospel, and to promote the temporal welfare of the brethren as they have opportunity. To accomplish these purposes this common fund was formed: but with extraordinary liberality, so that "none among them lacked." This was the more remarkable, as the multitude of foreign Christians at Jerusalem was, probably, great at that time.

† Acts, Chapters ii and iv.

admit of this. They are given, however, nearly in the order of time, beginning with Origen, one of the early fathers. He lived in the commencement of the third century, a little more than one hundred years after the death of the apostle John. He says, "The deacons preside over the money tables of the church," and adds, "as we are taught in the Acts of the Apostles."*

Passing over many centuries, our next quotation is from BEZA, the distinguished colleague of John Calvin, in the Theological School at Geneva. He explains the passage, "To serve tables,"—"to attend to that which was then observed, the common tables, and the other necessities of the church."†

The Scottish Reformers, in the Second Book of Discipline, chapter ix., are very explicit. "In the apostolic kirk, the deacons were appointed to collect and distribute what sum soever was collected of the faithful, to distribute unto the necessity of the saints; so that none lacked among the faithful. These collections were not only of that which was collected in manner of alms, as some suppose, but of other goods moveable and immoveable, of lands and possessions, the price whereof was brought to the feet of the apostles."‡

HENRY.§ "And these (the deacons) must take care of the church's stock; must review, and pay, and keep accounts; must buy those things which they had need of against the feast, (John xii. 29,) and attend to all those things which are necessary," in ordine ad spiritualia, "in order to spiritual exercises, that every thing might be done decently, and in order, and no person or thing neglected."

SCOTT.§ "To lay out their contributions in the most satisfactory manner, both among the poor and in other necessary expenses."

GUYSE.§ "As all the necessary expenses for carrying on the worship of God, and as the apostles themselves, as well as the poor, were doubtless to be supported out of the common stock, I have given such a paraphrase as may take in the Lord's table, and the tables of the apostles."

DICK.|| "It is true, indeed, that, as the design of the institution was

* Treatise 16th upon Matthew.

† Commentary on Acts vi. 2.

‡ This quotation from the Second Book of Discipline should have the most respectful consideration. The nature of the deacon's office was closely and actively examined in Scotland for many years previously to the compilation and adoption of this Book of Policy. The reformers contended for the deacon's office, as instituted to attend to all the church's temporalities, while Mary, and her son James VI. were violently opposed to the deacon. The discussion was protracted and zealous. The court party contending that the contributions laid at the apostles' feet were alms for the poor alone; the reformers advocating the doctrine we have quoted. No opinion was ever formed more deliberately, or under circumstances better calculated to elicit the truth.

§ On Acts vi. 1-6.

|| Dick's Theology, Lee. c. This remark is introduced here, as it evidently refers to Acts vi. 1-6. It was drawn from this distinguished theologian by the force of truth: for, in the same paragraph, he endeavours to "apologize" for the neglect to appoint "deacons in all their congregations," by saying that ruling elders can perform all their duties ! Had this intelligent divine fixed his eye steadfastly upon the scriptural office, as he admits it to be, of the deacon, to attend to all the temporal concerns of the church, instead of "apologizing" for the neglect to appoint them, and thus soothing the church in her negligence, he would have been led to use his great influence in restoring, in that large denomination to which he was attached, this almost forgotten part of the church's organization, to its true position.

not to divert the attention of the apostles from the ministry of the word, the care of the temporal matters in which the church is concerned may be considered as belonging to deacons.”

DR. MILLER, of Princeton. “It is not suitable that we should leave the word of God, and devote ourselves to pecuniary affairs.”*

These quotations are sufficient to show, that the interpretation we have given of the passage under consideration is, by no means, singular. Other testimony will be adduced soon, from sources equally entitled to consideration, to establish, farther, the principles we have laid down in reference to the duties of the deacon.

The early Christians, in committing the management of all the ecclesiastical goods to none but ordained officers, did precisely what the members of the church had all along been doing, at least for fifteen centuries. During the Old Testament dispensation, this order had always been observed; at least from the giving of the Mosaic law. The funds set apart for ecclesiastical purposes were derived from various sources,† some of them peculiar to the Jewish economy, others moral and permanent, but from whatever source, or however contributed, they were, without any exception, committed to the priests and Levites.‡

The only instance in which there even appears to have been a departure from this invariable rule, established by express divine appointment, occurred in the reign of Joash, (or Jehoash.)§ This king, under very peculiar circumstances, assumed to some extent the direction of the funds, to be employed in repairing the temple. This direction extended, however, no farther than to the issuing of an order to prepare a chest and place it at the door of the temple,|| and the appointment of an officer, (the king’s scribe, or the secretary of state,) to be present with Jehoiada, the high priest, or some one acting for him, when the money deposited in the chest was emptied out and counted.¶ In all this transaction there was no infringement upon the law enacted by the God of Israel respecting the ecclesiastical funds. The chest was at all times in charge of the Levites;** the highest ecclesiastical officer was always present, and actively employed in the management of these funds, with the king’s scribe,†† while the presence of the latter was in the exercise of that extraordinary power which belonged to the kings

* A foot note to p. 227, of the treatise upon the Ruling Elder, contains so judicious a commentary upon Acts vi. 2, that it is inserted entire. He says, “It has been supposed by many that the phrase ‘serving tables,’ in the history of the institution of the deacon’s office, had a reference either to the Lord’s table, or to overseeing and supplying the tables of the poor, or perhaps both. But I am inclined to believe that this is an entire mistake. The word *trapeza*, signifies, indeed, a table; but, in this connexion, it seems obviously to mean a money table, or a counter, on which money was laid. Hence, *trapezites*, a money changer or money merchant. See Matt. xxi. 12, xxv. 27; Mark xi. 15; Luke xix. 23. The plain meaning, then, of Acts vi. seems to be this:—It is not suitable that we should leave the word of God and devote ourselves to pecuniary affairs.” The passage from Origen, quoted above, is conclusive evidence of the soundness of this criticism.

† Num. iii. 47-51; Lev. v. 17; 1 Chron. xxvi. 27, 28, xxix., and Neh. x. 37-39.

‡ For a complete list of all the passages in the Old Testament scriptures that relate to the administration of the church’s finances, see note B. An abstract is there given of them.

§ 2 Kings xii. 2, and 2 Chron. chap. xxiv.

|| 2 Kings xii. 9. It is here said, that “Jehoiada, the priest took a chest,” etc.

¶ Ver. 10.

** Ver. 9.

†† Ver. 10.

of Judah, and was often exercised in times of disorder, by which they obliged all their subjects, not excepting ministers of religion, to attend to their respective duties.* This event, therefore, furnishes no exception to the observation made respecting the principle as always acted upon in ordinary circumstances.

That for so many centuries, by the immediate direction of the Lord Jesus Christ, the God of Israel, the ecclesiastical goods should have been committed to none but ordained officers, is a fact from which we may, certainly, derive some instruction. It is not affirmed that the mode of administering the ecclesiastical finances under the Old Testament, is literally applicable in all its particulars now: but we may and ought to deduce the moral principles which pervaded that dispensation, and apply them in reference to this subject, as well as others, on all suitable occasions. In civil order what was moral under the Old Testament economy, is still binding. Why should its light and power be entirely rejected in matters of ecclesiastical order? What was typical is done away, but what was moral still remains.†

Is there any thing typical in the principle which has been brought to view? Is there any thing in it which renders its application in New Testament times impracticable, or unsafe, or derogatory to Jesus Christ? The conduct of the disciples after the day of Pentecost, when under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they cast their contributions at the apostles' feet, furnishes a satisfactory answer to these interrogatories. Moreover, the apostle Paul, in the ix. chap. of 1st Cor., enforces the duty of contributing to the maintenance of the gospel ministry, by deductions from the Mosaic economy.

The organization of the Jewish synagogue, confirms the view just presented of the moral character of the principles imbodyed in the constitution of the church, during the former dispensation, in regard to the management of fiscal concerns. In the language of Dr. M'Leod, "There were several officers in the Jewish synagogue, and these were authorized to conduct the public worship, preserve the order, and manage the finances of the congregation."‡ This latter officer was the chazan or deacon of the synagogue:§ and in the words of Prideaux, "the chazanim, that is, overseers, who were also fixed ministers, and under the rulers of the synagogue, had the charge and oversight of all things in it, kept the sacred books of the law, and the prophets, and, other Holy Scriptures, as also the books of their public liturgies, and

* 2 Chron. xv. xxix xxxiv.

† Ignorance of this principle, or unwillingness to apply it, has led to lamentable disregard, in civil things, of the wise provisions of the Jewish constitution. The London divines reply to the objection, that "arguments for the form of church government must not yet be fetched from the Jewish church,"—"2. We answer, the laws of the Jewish Church, whether ceremonial or judicial, so far are in force, even at this day, as they were grounded upon common equity, the principles of reason and nature, and were serving to the maintenance of the moral law. The Jewish polity is only abrogated in regard of what was in it of particular right, not of common right: so far as there was in their laws either a typicalness proper to their church, or a peculiarity of respect to their state in that land of promise given unto them. Whatsoever the Jewish church had not as Jewish, but as it was a political church, or an ecclesiastical republic, doth belong to the Christians, church." Divine Right, etc., p. 202. Ignorance of this principle, or its true application, not the principle itself, has confirmed Episcopalians in their erroneous views of church government. It should not be rejected on that account.

‡ Ecc. Cat. Ques. 51. § Prideaux's Connexions, Part I, Book VI.

all other utensils belonging to the synagogue.” The order of the synagogue was, as all presbyterians hold, the model of that of the church under the New Testament dispensation. In the synagogue was an officer who attended to the poor, had the oversight of the place of worship and managed the finances. This fact furnishes additional evidence that the deacon’s office is not solely the care of the poor. The chazan of the synagogue had the care of the poor as a part only of his charge: the oversight of the fiscal affairs of the synagogue belonged to him. Such officers as the trustee or committee-man of modern days, were not known either in the order of the synagogue, or of the apostolic churches.

The scripture argument for committing all the ecclesiastical goods to deacons, may be briefly stated thus: Both under the Old and New Testament dispensations, the Bible contains frequent allusions to the funds devoted to ecclesiastical uses,—in all cases these were managed, until the canon of divine revelation was completed, by ordained officers, and such officers only; during the Old Testament dispensation by priests and Levites, during the New by deacons. Nor does the Bible contain any account of officers distinct from these, and unordained, to whom the fiscal concerns of the church either were or might be committed. The consequence is plain. Any other officers for the management of church funds are of human invention, and where they exist, occupy a place which should be occupied by officers chosen and set apart for this service according to Christ’s institution.

II. The duty of the deacon to collect and disburse all the ordinary revenues of the congregation, has been generally acknowledged and practised upon by the church of Christ.

Origen, in the passage already quoted, says, that “the deacons preside over the money tables of the church.” Jerome, who wrote in the fourth century, calls deacons the “ministers of tables and widows.”

Zozomen, an ecclesiastical historian of the fifth century, says, speaking of preceding times, that “the deacon’s office was to keep the church’s goods.” Without, however, entering into an examination in detail of the history of the early periods of the church, let the authority of Calvin, respecting the office of the deacon during these times, suffice. He says,* “Nor was the situation of deacons at that time (the Nicene period) at all different from what it had been under the apostles. For they received the daily contributions of the faithful, and the annual revenues of the church, to apply them to their proper uses; that is, to distribute part to the ministers and part for the support of the poor.”

The sentiments of Calvin himself, (easily discovered in the above extract,) are found plainly expressed in the same work, where he says, vol. iii. p. 100, “Now, let the deacons come forward, with that most sacred distribution which they have of the property of the church.” And, more explicitly, in his sermons on the 1st Epistle to Timothy, ser. 24th, “But the deacons have the treasures of the church to dispense, that is to say, such as are wholly dedicated to God, and ought not in any wise to be applied to profane uses. . . . For the goods of the church (as we call them) ought to be applied no other, but to the use of the

* Institutes, vol. iii., p. 74.

church, that is to say, to find the ministers, to find school masters,* which serve to preserve the seed of the church, and such other like things, and specially to find the poor.” These doctrines spread from Geneva over the neighbouring kingdoms, but not in all to the same extent. They were adopted, so far as circumstances allowed, in France and Holland; and entirely in Scotland. In the French churches the ministry were provided for, and the other necessities of the church, as well as the wants of the poor attended to, by the ministration of deacons. In one instance, indeed, the first of these might be committed to other persons; namely, when the revenue out of which this item of expense was to be defrayed, arose from the rent of “a tenement.”† Yet even in this case the persons charged were to be “commissioned and ordained by the church.” The Holland church was never strong enough to throw off the Erastian power of the government; they always had deacons in their congregations; but in many, perhaps most instances, the funds for the church’s maintenance were drawn directly from the coffers of the state. In some cases these officers were, however, accountable to the consistory. The principles of Junius and other Holland divines were scriptural, but their circumstances were unfavourable to the application of them.‡

The 1st Book of Discipline contains the principles of Knox and the earliest reformers in Scotland. They say, chap, xvii., “The deacons should take up the whole rents of the kirk, disposing them to the ministry, the school, and the poor within their bounds, according to the appointment of the kirk.” After nearly twenty years’ investigation, the doctrines of the church of Scotland on this subject were expressed in the 2d Book of Discipline, as follows: chap. viii.: “Their office and power (the deacons’) is to receive and to distribute the whole ecclesiastical goods unto them, to whom they are appointed.” And chap, ix., “The goods ecclesiastical ought to be collected and distributed by the deacons, as the word of God appoints, that they who bear office in the kirk be provided for, without care or solicitude.”§ It has been shown that these principles were carefully cherished, and faithfully contended for by the reforming church of Scotland, for more than thirty years, against the almost unremitting opposition of the civil power, before they were admitted by the Parliament, and sanctioned by the law of the land. The Scottish church refused to accept of a full establishment upon any other principles. The 2d Book of Discipline remained, in fact, unsanctioned by the laws of the land for fourteen years, from 1578 to 1592, chiefly because the friends of truth, and the advocates of Christ’s crown rights, refused to modify these principles on the subject of the deacon’s office.||

This Book of Discipline was sworn to in the national covenant, and revived and ratified by the General Assembly 1638. It continued to be received as the church’s Book of Polity during the whole of the

* This was a common opinion at the reformation. It was a favourite idea of John Knox. The principles of the first Book of Discipline, respecting schools and school funds, might be studied even now with great profit.

† French Church Discipline, Sec. XII., chap. I., canon xliii.

‡ Gerard Brandt’s Hist. Ref. Holl.

§ For farther quotations from this chap., see pp. 11 and 31.

|| See foot-note, p. 10, and Knox and Calderwood’s histories, and M’Crie’s Lives of Knox and Melville.

second reformation. The Scottish Covenanters never either altered or modified these principles for which Knox and Melville, and a host of worthies had contended so long, and suffered so much. If they did, where is the evidence? Where is the declaration, or the law?

Perhaps some may suppose a change to have been intended in the adoption of the form of church government drawn up at Westminster, which says that “the deacon is to take special care of the poor.” In regard to this, let it be remarked, First, the language employed is not at all inconsistent with the doctrines of the Book of Discipline. It is merely said that the deacon has a special business, by no means affirming that it is his only business.* Second, such a supposition is at variance with the avowed design of the Solemn League and Covenant. The first paragraph of that covenant is in the following words: “That we shall sincerely, really, and constantly, through the grace of God, endeavour in our several places and callings, the preservation of the reformed religion in the Church of Scotland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, against our common enemies.” Will it be said that the Scottish Church intended to throw aside her attainments, and reconstruct her order? The contrary was then and always declared. But, her principles respecting the deacon’s office were no more an exception than those respecting the pastor or the ruling elder. Third, their adherence to their previous order and polity, is expressly asserted in the acts adopting the directory for worship, and the form of church government. The act adopting the former has this clause: It is also provided, “That this shall be no prejudice to the order and practice of this kirk, in such particulars as are appointed by the Books of Discipline, and acts of General Assemblies, and are not otherwise ordered and appointed in the directory.” This shows that every part of these books, not expressly repealed, was still considered to be the doctrine and order of the Scottish Church. Where is there an express repeal of the principles of the Second Book of Discipline respecting the deacon? Had they altered their doctrines, they must have repealed many laws. Where are the laws repealing former enactments? There are none. The first sentence of the act adopting the directory runs as follows: “The General Assembly being most desirous and solicitous, not only of the establishment and preservation of the form of kirk government in this kingdom, according to the word of God, Books of Discipline, acts of General Assemblies, and National Covenant,” etc., etc. Fourth, among the interrogatories put to the elders of every congregation at the annual presbyterial visitation,† respecting the pastor, is the following: “And hath he deacons in the parish distinct from elders?” Among those put to the pastor; “Are the deacons faithful in their office, in calling and distributing all the kirk goods, and in having a care of the sick poor? Is your session rightly constitute, and all the elders and deacons duly admitted according to the acts of Assembly?” Fifth, it should be remembered, that when this form of government was adopted, the Church of Scotland had for more than half a century, not only professed, but (making some allowance for the time of the oppressions of James VI. and his son Charles I.) had practised upon, the doctrines of the Books of Discipline respecting the deacon’s office: that seven

* More respecting this phraseology on pages 29 and 30.

† Stewart’s Coll., Book I.

years, from 1638 to 1645, had elapsed from the renovation of the National Covenant: that there were deacons in her congregations actively employed in the discharge of their duties. Now, where is the law stripping them of a part of their office, and appointing, or allowing, to be appointed, committee-men or trustees, to fill the vacancy? There is no such law. There were no such officers. Could so great a change have taken place in so short a time,—in an instant almost,—unheard of and unremembered? We may rest assured that Scotland in her best days never repudiated the doctrines or the practice of her noble reformers on this part of the order of the house of God.*

The divines of the Scottish Church during that period, whose sentiments have come down to our times, while they lay great stress, and with evident truth and propriety, upon the duty of the deacon to take special care of the poor, the sick, etc., do not limit his office to this business alone. RUTHERFORD, as we have seen, considered the “keeping of the church’s fabric in good repair,” as belonging to the deacon’s duties.† DAVID DICKSON, an eminent divine, and a very active and influential member of the Reforming Assembly, 1638, says:‡ “But the deacons not a little aided by their ministrations; for they took care respecting the salary of ministers, and the necessities of the saints, and distributed the public goods of the church.” Again, on 1 Timothy iii. 8: “As to that which belongs to the election of elders and of the guardians of the public treasury.”§ And again, on Romans xii. 8: “He that giveth.” “The official treasurers of the church are referred to; those who distribute the goods of the church, and the contributions of the faithful, for the public uses of the church.”||

The divines of England, although the church in that part of the island did not attain so high a point of reformation as the northern, held similar views on this subject; not in all cases, however, so clearly and decidedly. The celebrated JOHN OWEN is very explicit. He says,¶ “Whereas, the reason of the institution of this office was, in general, to free the pastors of the church, who labour in word and doctrine, from avocations by outward things, such as wherein the church is concerned; it belongs unto the deacons not only to take care of and provide for the poor, but to manage all other affairs of the church of the same kind; such as are providing for the place of the church-assemblies,—of the elements for the sacraments, of keeping, collecting, and disposing of the stock of the church, for the maintenance of its officers, and incidences, especially in the time of trouble and persecution.” These views were, at least, not uncommon among the English Protestants, Presbyterian and Independent. Owen observes, in the same chapter, that “the deacon’s office was so well known as to render it unnecessary to insist much on it.” He described no novelty to the

* In the act abolishing patronages, passed March 9, 1649, one reason assigned by Parliament is, that patronage is “contrary to *the second Book of Discipline*.” These words are italicised in the act.

† See quotation from his “Due Right of Presbyteries.” P. 12.

‡ Expositio Epistolarn, 1645, on Corinthians xii. 28, “helps.” “Diaconi autem ministeriis non parum opitulabatur, de stipendiis ministrorum, et sanctorum necessitatibus prospicientes, et publice facilitates dispensantes.” This work was published the very year that the form of church government was adopted.

§ The same work.

|| Do. on this text.

¶ Treatise on Church Government, Chap. IX.

English churches, in defining the deacon as an officer to whom belongs the management of all the temporalities of the church. The LONDON DIVINES say; “the deacons being specially to be trusted with the church’s goods, and the disposal thereof, according to the direction of the presbytery, for the good of the church,” etc.* The “good” not of the poor alone, but “of the church.”

These doctrines have been reiterated by many commentators and divines since the reformation. The opinions of Henry, Scott, Guyse and Dick, have been already quoted in our pages.† BROWN of Haddington defines the deacon to be “an officer in the church, whose business it is to serve in distributing the elements at the Lord’s table, and to provide for and duly distribute support to ministers, and to the poor.”‡ RIDGELY, after mentioning pastors and ruling elders, as church officers, adds, “others, who have the oversight of the secular affairs of the church, and the trust of providing for the necessities of the poor committed to them, who are called deacons.”§ Dr. GILL, on Acts vi. 2: “And they (the deacons) are likewise to serve the minister’s table, by taking care that he has a sufficient competency for his support,” and on 1 Cor. xii. 28, the word “helps,” or “rather the deacons of churches whose business it is to take care of tables; the Lord’s table, the ministers, and the poor, and all the secular affairs of the church.” JOHN FAIRLEY, an esteemed minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland, says of deacons: “Their office relates to the necessities of the poor, and external concerns of the church.”|| Dr. MILLER, of Princeton Theological Seminary, well known as a very learned and able writer upon church government, says, that “the function to which the deacon was appointed by the apostles, was to manage the pecuniary affairs of the church, and especially to preside over the collections and disbursements for the poor.”¶

Let us now direct our attention to the standards of a few of the Protestant Presbyterian churches. The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland, in her Testimony, expresses her views in the following terms: “Deacons are ordained upon the choice of the congregation, and are associated with the teaching and the ruling elders in distributing to the necessities of the poor, and managing other temporalities in the church.”** The same church in the United States: “The deacon has no power except about the temporalities of the church.”†† He has, of course, “power about the temporalities.” The Associate Presbyterian Church defines this office thus: “The deacon is to take care of the poor, and to distribute among them the collections that may be raised for their use. It also belongs to him to provide the elements for the Lord’s table, and other necessaries, and in general the charge and disposal of the funds or temporalities of the church, according to

* Divine Right, etc.. p. 184.

† On p. 21.

‡ Dictionary of the Bible, on the word “Deacon.” It is not so evident, as this very candid and excellent writer appears to think, that the deacon should serve at the Lord’s table.

§ Body of Divinity, Philad. Ed., Vol. II., p. 553.

|| See his sermon preached at the opening of the Synod, May, 1816.

¶ On the Ruling Elder, p. 242.

** Testimony, Ed. of 1837, chap. xi., sect. 11.

†† Reformation Principles Exhibited, chap. xviii.

the direction of the session, devolve on him.”* The General Assembly Presbyterian Church, after stating that the office of the deacon “is to take care of the poor,” etc., adds; “to them also may be properly committed the management of the temporal affairs of the church.”† This statement they confirm by Acts vi. 3, 5, 6. It is plain that this church intends to say, that by the authority of the Head of the church the management of the temporal affairs of the church may properly be committed to the deacon; or else, why adduce, in proof, that very passage of scripture which is employed to establish the duty of the deacon to take care of the poor, and of the funds destined for their supply?‡

It may, perhaps, occur to the mind of the reader as an objection to the view that has been given of the opinions of the churches, and of protestant writers, that they so often affirm that the deacon is an officer appointed to “take care of the poor.” This phraseology is met with so frequently, that a superficial reader of ecclesiastical history will be liable to infer that the protestant church has not been so unanimous in assigning to the deacon the charge of all the temporalities, as would seem from the historical view just given. For example, Calvin, in his discourses upon 1 Tim. iii. 8—13, says, “But the deacons are they which are appointed to have the care of the poor, and to distribute the alms.” And again: “There must be deacons to have the care of the poor.” Such expressions occur frequently in these discourses; and were we to stop here, and examine them no farther, we would infer that Calvin limited the deacon’s duties to the care of the “alms,” strictly so called, or the “poor’s money.” Farther examination of these very discourses, however, shows us that such an inference would furnish a very mistaken notion of Calvin’s real sentiments upon this subject: for he proceeds to say, “The deacons have the treasures of the church to dispense,” etc.; and with greater minuteness observes, that “the goods of the church ought to be applied to find the ministers,” etc.§ So in the 1st Book of Discipline, chap. vii., the office of the deacon is said to be “to gather and distribute the alms of the poor.” Taking this expression alone, and were there no other intimation in this docu-

* Book of Government and Discipline, 1817, chap. ii. This body has lately revised her book of government, etc. The paragraph quoted above, has been altered to read as follows: “To the deacon belong the care of the poor and the management of the temporalities of the church,” chap. iii., sect. 7. It will be perceived that the doctrines are the same, only more tersely expressed. For other opinions, see also Douglas’ Errors in Religion, N.Y. Ed., p. 65. Taylor’s Spiritual Despotism, N.Y. Ed., p. 321; and Buck’s Dictionary under the word “Deacon,” all of whom concur in sentiment with the writers, and church standards quoted.

† Form of Government, chap. vi.

‡ The following extract from a “Catechism on the Government and Discipline of the Presbyterian Church,” compiled by Presbyterian divines in Britain, and which has had a large circulation in the Scottish churches, and in the Presbyterian Synod of Ulster, shows that the doctrines advocated in this essay are taught in these churches. The quotations which follow are from the third edition, Glasgow, 1838, ch ip. i., Quest. 15. “What are the ordinary church-officers appointed by Christ?—Ans. Presbyters or Elders (called also Bishops or Overseers) and deacons.” Quest. xxxi. “For what duty were they (the deacons) appointed? Ans. To manage the temporal affairs of the church, and especially to attend to the wants of the poor, in order that the apostles or teachers might give themselves continually to the ministry of the word.”

§ See page 26, for the whole paragraph.

ment, or elsewhere, of the doctrines of the church of Scotland respecting the deacon's office, the inference would appear to be correct, that she restricted the deacon to the oversight of the poor alone. But in chap. xvii. the principles of that church, on this subject, are fully exhibited; and there it is said to be the duty of the deacons, "to take up the whole rents of the kirk, disposing them to the ministry," etc.* By examining the whole document, we ascertain that when the deacon's office was said to be "to take care of the poor," there was no design to limit it to that only. The London divines, in the work from which we have quoted so often, employ similar phraseology. They say, frequently, that the "deacon takes care of the poor," and at the same time, that he has charge "of the goods of the church."

This apparent inconsistency is susceptible of a very easy explanation. They speak of the deacon as an officer appointed to take charge of the poor, in the same way that Presbyterians, in writing and in conversation, denominate the teaching elder, a minister of the gospel, or a "preacher." The reason is evident. The ministry of the word is the great business of this class of ecclesiastical officers. It is greater than administering sacraments. Paul says, 1 Cor. i. 17, "for Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." In fact, there is no direct assertion of the pastor's right to rule, in any of the descriptive titles usually given to the teaching elder. Would the inference be a just one, in some remote period when circumstances had altered, that Presbyterians did not in the 19th century acknowledge the right to rule as belonging to the pastor, because they do not commonly, when speaking of him, bring to view this part of his official character? Would it be a fair inference that they denied ruling to be a part of the pastor's duties, because they call him the teaching elder in contrast, apparently, to the ruling elder? The unsoundness of such inferences would be shown by referring to other portions of the same documents, in which ruling is affirmed to belong to the pastor.

In this way, the apparent inconsistencies alluded to are explained. The care of the poor is a very important, and a primary part, of the functions of the deacon. Mainly, perhaps, for this reason, so high and extensive a range of qualifications is demanded of this class of officers. The reformers, consequently, spoke of the deacon repeatedly in terms that have given rise, in the present circumstances of the churches, (which have generally dropped the office) to mistaken notions respecting their views regarding the extent of his duties. They no more intended, when they referred to the deacon as appointed to the charge of the poor, to deny that the other temporalities of the church were to be under his management, than Presbyterians now intend to deny the ruling powers of the pastor, when they speak of him as a "minister of the gospel." All that is necessary to remove these mistakes, is a tolerable acquaintance with the history of the church, and a competent degree of familiarity with the modes of expression in use in times somewhat remote from our own.†

* See p. 25.

† The writings of the late Dr. M'Leod furnish an example of this use of language and of designations. He says, in his Ecclesiastical Catechism, repeatedly, that the deacon is an officer "to take care of the poor." And even goes so far as to say, (how properly is not now affirmed,) that this office had its "origin in the ex-

Here the argument might rest. We have examined the holy oracles, and from them have established our principle. We have traced the history of the Christian Church by a path carried through her purest and best times, and portions, and have found a very satisfactory degree of unanimity of sentiment, and conformity of practice on the subject of the deacon's office. But our labours are not at an end, for the deacon has not only been excluded in more modern times, from the position assigned to him in the house of God, by Christ her head, but his duties divided, and subdivided among various humanly devised substitutes, or transferred without warrant, to other ecclesiastical officers. An examination of this branch of the subject occupies the following Chapter.

CHAPTER III.

OF SUBSTITUTES FOR THE DEACON.

These are various. In some instances, the teaching and ruling elders perform all the duties of the deacon, and in others a part of them. In the congregations of the Scottish Establishment, the care of the poor is devolved generally upon the session; while the remaining functions of the deacon, those which respect the maintenance of the ministry, and the charge of the property of the church, are mostly discharged by civil functionaries. In the Presbyterian congregations of Ireland,* a similar arrangement exists for the care of the poor; while the other offices of the deacon are performed, so far as they are attended to at all, by temporary and unordained officers, called trustees, or committee-men.

This is the mode which, more than any other, obtains in the churches in the United States. In very few congregations, comparatively, is the office of the deacon, as a distinct institution in the church, known at all. And where the name is common, as in the congregational churches of New England, it is employed to designate an officer resembling much more the scriptural elder than the deacon.

If the doctrines advocated in this essay be sound and scriptural, there is something wrong in all this. If the Lord Jesus Christ has instituted a distinct office for the care of the poor, then the eldership have no warrant for taking its place, so as to exclude the instituted office.† If to this office belongs the charge of all the contributions

of a class of paupers in the church." Yet this distinguished writer held, and expressed very decidedly the views presented in this chapter. He says, p. 46, Ed. 1831, that "the deacon was appointed to remove the burden of the temporal concerns from the ministers and elders, when it becomes embarrassing to them." And in Quest. 80: "Is the sole right of managing the pecuniary affairs of the congregation lodged in the deaconship?" To this he replies, in substance, that they have this right, as the "helps" of the teaching and ruling elders.

* This is true, (with slight modifications,) both of the Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Synod of Ulster.

† The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, at its last meeting, enjoined upon all their congregations to elect and ordain deacons. The Associate Presbyterian Synod, in May last, reiterated their scriptural doctrine respecting deacons. It is to be hoped that both these denominations will complete the work they have begun, by abolishing the boards of trustees in their churches.