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THE
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

ARTICLE I.

A PRESBYTERIAN'S VIEW OF CONGREGATION-
ALISM.

BY THE REV. A. HASTINGS ROSS, D.D., PORT HURON, MICH.

THE prayer of the poet—

“O wad some pow'r the giftie gie us,
To see oursels as others see us!”

is, providentially, not often answered. But when it is answered, those who make it ought not to forego the pleasure of a careful scrutiny. Congregationalists have now that privilege. A Presbyterian after a half-century of study has drawn their portrait.¹ And let us look at it.

Rev. Dr. Killen, “after a brief but remarkably useful pastoral life, was called to the Professorship of Church History in the Presbyterian College, Belfast, and a large proportion of the clergy of the Irish Presbyterian Church have caught the spirit of his Lectures on ‘Church History’ and ‘Pastoral Theology.’ Dr. Killen is a pronounced Presbyterian, but not from mere hereditary leaning; but, as the lawyers say, ‘for cause.’”²

¹ The Framework of the Church. A Treatise on Church Government. By W. D. Killen, D.D., President of Assembly's College, Belfast, and

Our author divides his "Framework of the Church" into four parts: The Church and its Government (six chapters, pp. 1-51); Congregationalism (six chapters, pp. 53-110); Prelacy (thirteen chapters, pp. 111-235); Presbyterianism (eleven chapters, pp. 237-334); and an Appendix on The Ignatian Epistles (pp. 335-349), regarding them as entirely spurious. We pass by entirely his treatment of Prelacy and Presbyterianism, except as they may incidentally refer to Congregationalism, and confine our examination to his presentation of the latter. The author has given "much of his attention for at least half a century to the scriptural constitution of the church," and naturally desires "to communicate to others his matured convictions on the questions in dispute."¹ It is a great pity that he has not given us the sources of information on which his convictions rest. We are at a loss to know who sat for our portrait.

We will notice but a few minor points. He retains generally the Authorized Version, but in a few instances he calls in the Revision to support his positions. Repeatedly he quotes Acts xx. 28, but without any intimation that the Revision and commentators and scholars alike agree in changing "over the which" into "in the which," thus placing elders in the church, not over it. This fact excites the suspicion that the advocate sometimes leads him to suppress the exact truth. He does not seem to be aware that the words "the church," in Acts ix. 31, can be satisfactorily explained in harmony with Independency.²

In 1 Peter ii. 2 he turns "the Rock of God" into "one

inces; ¹ as Paul addresses an Epistle to "the churches" of one of these provinces; ² and as John speaks of "the seven churches," most of which were in these provinces; ³ we can hardly believe that the apostle referred to a synod of churches, but, instead, to the spiritual body of saints gathered into churches presided over by the elders. But we will pass by details and texts where the ground has been fought over and with results so generally adverse to Dr. Killen's positions, and confine ourselves to several lines of argument.

In many things we agree with our author. We are glad he gives polity a higher place than many. He says: "Polity has a more special reference to the *edification* of the church. It is designed to check irregularities, to foster spiritual growth, to sustain or vindicate reputation, and to promote the free development of the gospel." ⁴ "The discussion [of polity] has been prosecuted with the greatest vigor when the church has been in the most healthy condition." ⁵ "But it is obvious also that the question of ecclesiastical polity must be solved to the satisfaction of all parties, before we can realize this happy consummation," "of a visible and universal church." ⁶

Fortunately the Presbyterians and Congregationalists have one standard of authority, which both sides regard as final because supreme. "The apostles were empowered by their Divine Master to make all needful arrangements; and, so far as it is desirable for us to be supplied with information, these arrangements are reported to us in the New Testament." ⁷ He does not claim that the New Testament gives in detail the form of the church, but says: "The church, to a considerable extent, partakes of the character of any other human society; and, thus far, we do not need the light of

¹ 1 Peter i. 1. ² Gal. i. 2. ³ Rev. i. 4.

⁴ Framework, etc., p. 11. In quotations throughout this article, the italics are the author's.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38. ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32. ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

revelation to enable us to regulate its management." "Scripture comes to our aid only when we might be expected to err if left without its illumination."¹ Dr. John Hall had said the same: "All that is contended for is that principles are indicated, guarded, illustrated, and enforced, the development of which in a body of Christian people" would give the true polity.² No doubt all good Presbyterians would acknowledge that "the church which, in all its arrangements, adheres most closely to the standard laid down in the book of God, has the most substantial claim to the title Christian, Catholic, and Apostolic."³ It is unfortunate, when we discuss polity with some other denominations, that we find no common standard; for reason, inner-light, tradition, decrees of the church or of the pope, are made co-ordinate with, or superior to, the Bible;⁴ but with our author we have a common criterion by which to settle questions in dispute.

One question in dispute between us relates to the independency of the primitive churches. On this he says: "If the Scriptures teach that there was once, or may be, one catholic church *visible*, then the idea of every congregation being independent of every other is fairly overturned."⁵ He goes so far as to assert that "Presbyterian Church government prevailed throughout the whole of the first and a considerable part of the second century."⁶ He even thinks that certain passages "authorize Presbyterian Church government as clearly as language can sanction any ecclesiastical institution."⁷ As Presbyterianism consists in a series of appellate courts, namely, sessions, presbyteries, synods, and

churches, "their courts were held in much privacy; and until Christianity was established by the Emperor Constantine, no general, or ecumenical, council could be congregated."¹ He cites no authorities in proof that there existed presbyteries, synods, and assemblies in the first century or in the first half of the second century. He refers to the conference at Jerusalem (A. D. 50), held between "the apostles and the elders;"² and claims that its action "completely upsets the theory of Congregationalism. . . . The primitive disciples knew nothing of any such stand-off Christianity."³ This general synod, as he regards it, admitted "the whole church" to a part of the proceedings (ver. 22), whose action had authority because the apostles, guided by the Holy Ghost, authorized it (ver. 28). This is not left to inference, but is made a matter of record. Hence Congregationalists and church historians see nothing in it inconsistent with the independence of the primitive churches.

Against his denial of their independence or autonomy, we present the concession of historians, who assert that the primitive churches were absolutely independent of exterior control, each competent in itself to manage all its affairs, elect and ordain all its officers, to complete all its rites and acts, and so to perpetuate Christianity should all other churches cease to exist. Dr. Killen does not refer to any such authority, but ignores it. If quoting at all, it is in favor of some incidental point, as the plurality of ruling elders in the churches. He denies Independency, or Congregationalism, on his own authority. But for such recent denial we might forego quotation: as it is, we cite impartial authorities chiefly of other communions. Gibbon says: "The societies which were instituted in the cities of the Roman

¹ Framework, etc., p. 104.

² Acts xv. 1-35. ³ Framework, p. 80.

Empire were united only by the ties of faith and charity. Independence and equality formed the basis of their internal constitution."¹ "Every church," says Waddington, dean of Durham, "was essentially independent of every other."² Archbishop Whateley, the primate of Ireland, wrote: "The apostles founded Christian churches, all based on the same principles, all sharing common privileges, . . . but all quite independent of each other."³ "Every town congregation of ancient Christianity," says Bunsen, "was a church. The constitution of that church was a congregational constitution. In St. Paul's Epistles, in the writings of Clement Romanus, of Ignatius, and of Polycarp, the congregation is the highest organ of the Spirit, as well as the power of the church."⁴ Mosheim⁵ is very explicit on the independence of "the minor churches" of those of "greater magnitude or consequence," each "being on a footing of the most perfect equality with the rest." Dean Milman: "Each church was an absolutely independent community."⁶ Even the *Encyclopædia Britannica* calls their "constitution" "thoroughly democratic."⁷ So certain is their independency, that Coleman says: "No fact connected with the history of the primitive churches is more fully established or more generally conceded."⁸ But modern criticism and research have unsettled many things; is this conceded independency also unsettled? Has Dr. Killen discovered new light in his half-century of research? He claims none and presents none. Indeed, the most critical research has confirmed the absolute independency, under Christ, of the early churches.

ity," in "a remarkable book," says: "The theory upon which the public worship of the primitive churches proceeded was that each community was complete in itself, and that in every act of worship every element of the community was present." "Every such community seems to have had a complete organization, and there is no trace of the dependence of any one community upon any other." "At the beginning of the [fourth] century . . . the primitive type still survived; the government of the churches was in the main a democracy; at the end of the century the primitive type had almost disappeared; the clergy were a separate and governing class." "In the first ages of its history, while on the one hand it was a great and living faith, so on the other hand it was a vast and organized brotherhood, and being a brotherhood, it was a democracy."¹ So far from there being any such judicatories, with authority, as constitute the very essence of Presbyterianism, "not even the resolutions of the conference were binding on a dissentient minority of its members. Cyprian . . . claims in emphatic and explicit terms an absolute independence of each community."² He shows that it was the state, in the fourth century, which, joined with the church, constrained such "resolutions" to be "regarded as binding upon the churches."³ "There is no proof that the words of Holy Scripture in which the unity of the church is expressed or implied refer exclusively, or at all, to unity of organization. There is, on the other hand, clear proof that they were in early times applied to another kind of unity."⁴

"The most recent and thorough inquiries into the organization of the apostolic churches exhibit the same traces from

phatic the constitutive principle under discussion."¹ Professor Hugh M. Scott, D. D., of the Chicago Theological Seminary, in giving the results of such inquiries, says: "Everywhere the congregation is independent, autonomous, and self-deciding." "Whether we accept the details of this discussion or not, two things shine forth with greater clearness than ever before: an apostolic system, in which every local church was free, self-governed, autonomous, and resting on a holy brotherhood of believers; and a ministry that was called only of God, charismatic, prophetic, and in very few respects resembling its ordinary modern clerical successor."²

So far from agreeing with these results of impartial modern inquiry, Dr. Killen pronounces the "very name, *Independency*," to be "apparently opposed to the genius of the gospel;"³ and the picture he gives of our polity, if true, justifies him in saying this. We will not venture to state his views, lest we be charged with caricature. He says: "The Independents, or Congregationalists, maintain that every single congregation is a complete church in itself; that it should be allied to no other body by any bond of ecclesiastical connection; and that it should look up to no other body for any ecclesiastical superintendence."⁴ "*One* catholic church visible is not a heap of unconnected fragments, but a *united whole*. . . . But, according to the Independent scheme, *one* catholic visible church can have no existence; for Congregationalists deny that Scripture recognizes any such *union* or *confederation*."⁵ Referring to Paul's comparison of the church to the body with many members,⁶ each

dom: 'I am independent, I have no need of you.'"¹ "Independency practically holds that, according to the law of Christ, congregations are *not bound* to bear one another's burdens."² "The model of a church, as furnished by Congregationalism, is that . . . of a solitary building surrounded by a high wall shutting it out from all adjacent edifices."³ This "model" is so transcendent in its "insulation," that "the Independents . . . practically admit that to act up strictly to the peculiarities of their system would be damaging to their interests as a party; and . . . on several occasions, they have shown a disposition to unite their churches."⁴

In astonishment we ask: Where had the aged professor obtained such false views of the Congregational polity? He refers to no authorities. We can hardly believe that the Independent churches of Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales sat for the picture. It is certainly to be hoped that not "a large proportion of the clergy of the Irish Presbyterian Church have caught the spirit of his Lectures" on "Polity," if they have "on 'Church History' and 'Pastoral Theology.'" He confounds authority and unity; so that, with him, there can be no union without authority to coerce, and the denial of authority to govern is a denial of unity and all fellowship. This is his false assumption, out of which his caricature of Congregationalism springs. But our whole history, including platforms and standard writers, is a protest against this contortion of our polity.

The very word "Congregationalism," which he uses interchangeably with "Independency," is a repudiation of his conception of the polity. The lamented Dr. Dexter, in 1865, cited a long array of authorities to attest that "a fraternal fellowship is yet to be maintained among these

¹ Framework, p. 75.

² *Ibid.* p. 73. ³ *Ibid.*, p. 76. ⁴ *Ibid.* p. 53.

independent churches :"¹ Robert Browne (1582), John Robinson (1624), John Cotton (1645), Richard Mather (1643), John Davenport (1663), Thomas Hooker (1648), Cambridge Platform (1648), John Wise (1710), Increase Mather (1716), Cotton Mather (1726), Samuel Mather (1738), Upham (1844), Nathaniel Emmons (1826), Enoch Pond (1848), Principles of Church Order, etc., of the Congregational Union of England and Wales (1833), Punchard (1840), Davidson (1848), New Englander (1856), Wellman (1857). How could a student overlook these authorities? Besides, his reading should have brought to his attention these other refutations of his theory of Congregationalism. A writer in New England sent a letter to the mother-land, in 1643, in which he said : "We have had a synod lately in our college, wherein sundry things were agreed on gravely. . . . 3. That consociation of churches, in way of more general meetings yearly, and more privately, monthly, or quarterly consultative synods are very comfortable, and necessary for the peace and good of the churches."² In 1641 the General Court of Massachusetts—"the whole body of the church legislating for its parts"³—enacted, as a law of the Colony: "It is allowed that once in every month of the year . . . it shall be lawful for the ministers and elders of the churches near adjoining together, with any other of the brethren, with the consent of the churches, to assemble by course, in each several church, one after another," for preaching and for "public Christian conference," etc.⁴ Indeed, no church could be organized or approved "without they shall first acquaint the magistrates and the elders of the greater part of the churches in this jurisdiction, with their intentions, and

General Court a synod was held in 1648, "to set forth a form of government;"¹ and another in 1662, to answer "whether there ought to be a consociation of churches, and what should be the manner of it?" "There appeared no dissent or dissatisfaction in the synod about the matter."² "They were industrious for the combination of our churches into such a bundle of arrows as might not be easily broken."³ They did not intend to become Presbyterians, for they defined consociation as "a combination which doth neither constitute any new form of a church, nor ought it to take away, nor in any measure to diminish, the liberty and power which Christ hath left to his churches, but only it serves to direct and abridge the same."⁴ The Cambridge Platform (1648) says: "The term Independent we approve not."⁵ Its fifteenth chapter, consisting of four sections and six subsections, is entitled: "Of the Communion of Churches One with Another;" while the sixteenth chapter, of six sections, is entitled: "Of Synods." This Platform dominated our churches, except in Connecticut, down to 1865, when the Boston Platform was endorsed and commended; of which Part III. is given to "the communion of churches," in five chapters, thirty-one sections, besides subsections. In Connecticut, in 1708, the Saybrook Platform supplanted the Cambridge, introducing a consociation system that borders on Presbyterian authority. A system of councils has also been in constant operation among American Congregationalists from the beginning, and a system of associations of churches from the beginning of the present century, combining all our churches in district, state, and national bodies. In view of these facts, how could any

¹ Records Mass. Col., Vol. ii. p. 200.

² Felt's Eccl. Hist., Vol. ii. pp. 289, 296.

³ Mather's "Magnalia," quoted by Felt, Vol. ii. p. 296.

⁴ Felt's Eccl. Hist., Vol. ii. p. 341.

⁵ Chap. ii. sect. 5.

well-informed and truthful writer say: "According to this system [Congregationalism], the church is in *the most perfect condition* when it presents the appearance of universal dismemberment, and when every individual congregation is in no way bound to any other."¹

But it may be replied that he is speaking of Congregationalism in Great Britain, not in America. But had he read "A Confession and Protestation of the Faith of Certain Christians in England," 1616, he would have found a section on "Synods and Councils," in which it is said: "We acknowledge . . . that, on occasion, there ought to be, on earth, a consociation of congregations or churches, . . . but not a subordination, or surely not a subjection, of the congregations under any higher spiritual authority absolute, save only Christ's and the Holy Scriptures."² In a reply to Herle, in 1644, it is said: "While churches are subject to the wholesome advice and counsel of other churches; and so far as the same shall be according to God, they ought to hearken thereunto: and if they do not, they may lawfully be renounced by other churches from all church communion with them."³ Heylyn writes, 1638, of "Goodwin, Nye, Burroughes, Bridge, and Simpson": "These men, neither affecting the severe discipline of Presbytery, nor the licentiousness incident to Brownism, embraced Robinson's model of church government in their congregations, consisting of a co-ordination of several churches for their mutual comfort; not of a subordination of the one to the other, in the way of direction or command. Hence came the name of 'Independents.'"⁴ But the English Congregationalists, in 1658, held a formal synod at the Savoy, by elders and messengers from one

tional Churches in England.”¹ The Declaration of Faith was almost identical with the Westminster Confession. The Declaration of Church Order is short compared with the Cambridge Platform (1648), consisting of only thirty sections. On the question of Independency, it is very explicit, and yet it says: “So the churches themselves (when planted by the providence of God, so as they may have opportunity and advantage for it) ought to hold communion amongst themselves for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification.” It then provides for “a synod or council” of churches, “to consider and give their advice in, or about, that matter in difference, to be reported to all the churches concerned,” but without authority or “jurisdiction over the churches.” So churches, without cause, should not “refuse the communion of each other.”² Since 1831 the Congregational Union of England and Wales has existed, with similar bodies in Australia, Canada, and other countries. “In every county in England there are ‘associations’ or ‘unions’ of Congregational churches, several of which were organized, in their present form, before the close of the last century.”³ Dr. Wardlaw regards the union of churches as essential. “In the designation of ‘congregational union’ there are no elements whatever of contradiction.” “The whole mystery is, that ours is a union of *fellowship* and *co-operation*, but not a union of *jurisdiction* or *authority*.”⁴

Neither in America nor in England and Scotland does Dr. Killen find justification for his view of Congregationalism. Certainly we need not quote further. We doubt whether a

that any or "every individual congregation is in no way bound to any other," and that "congregations are *not bound* to bear one another's burdens," and they emphatically assert the very opposite.

With such a false view of Congregationalism, Dr. Killen treats all the attempts at union and co-operation as concessions to Presbyterianism. We quote: "Of late they [the Congregationalists] have been induced to set up a machinery, to which, according to their own tenets, the Scriptures give no countenance; for they have been assiduously endeavoring to organize general associations, or what are called *Congregational Unions*, in England, Scotland, and Ireland."¹ "The constitution of Independent congregations presents insuperable difficulties in the way of carrying out any such general rule" as is required in administering a sustentation fund.² In councils of ordination "Independency virtually acknowledges its insufficiency; it tacitly admits that every congregation does *not* possess all spiritual authority." In disputes between pastor and people, the minister is denied trial by jury, or by a disinterested tribunal, but instead "his opponents are his judges."³ "Congregational Unions are merely awkward approximations to presbyteries and synods."⁴ Even Dr. John Hall is led into the same error, for he says: "Whatever may be guarded in name from the appearance of legislative or executive authority, in an 'association' among our Baptist and Congregational brethren, any Presbyterian admitted thereto by courtesy finds the substance of the action of his presbytery reproduced."⁵ Even "when a confederation of ministers is

education, missions, etc., "they have departed with a noble inconsistency from the peculiarities of their ecclesiastical constitution," which is "totally unable to accomplish any great enterprise."¹

Dr. Killen utterly ignores union and co-operation through fellowship; yet this has been the common source of the magnificent charities and co-operative labors among Congregationalists. In our polity, as in others, there has been "a principle of evolution,"² to quote Dr. Hall again, which has in this century united our churches in associations and in labors; and free fellowship is stronger for unity than force. There is but one general congregational union or association in any one of the United States, one national council, one union for Ireland, one for Scotland, one for England and Wales, one for Canada, one for each province in Australia. But in the Second Council of the Presbyterian Alliance, held in 1880, there were enrolled two Presbyterian churches for Ireland, five for Scotland, eight for the United States, three for Austria, two for France, two for Germany, two for Italy, and four for Switzerland,—each a national body. This is the unity of force! Independency, on the basis of free fellowship, manifests a far greater unity.

But even free and equal fellowship is reciprocal in rights and duties. Two churches, in contemplating association together, are bound to inquire whether in faith and practice they are sufficiently agreed to walk together. The same is true of many. No church has the right,—because it is a church of Christ,—to force itself upon the fellowship of another church.

should cover essential points, and "no church should be cut off from communion for inferior and dubious offences."¹ While largely the church "partakes of the character of any other human society," "the word of God must be the ultimate arbiter of all our actions."² In exhibiting therefore the revealed unity of all believers, the method is left to sanctified common sense, subject to the independency of local churches; for the complete autonomy under Christ of each and every congregation of believers is as much a matter of New Testament teaching as the unity of all such congregations is the prayer of Christ.³ On this constitutive principle of autonomy, our churches have built up a consistent scheme of unity in each nation, and the call is issued for an international council. Though this scheme has been developed during the past century in Europe and America, the independency of each church is held to be as sacred now as ever. We have never heard of an instance of lording it over the churches by such bodies.

Such is our unity and liberty. What of protection and security for churches and ministers? When a church asks admission to the fellowship of an association, that association, in the exercise of reciprocal rights and duties, decides, after due inquiry, whether it will receive it or not. So also when a minister asks for standing therein on credentials. If either church or minister be found unworthy of fellowship, the application is rejected; and if they be admitted and then become unworthy, that church or minister is, after due inquiry, expelled. And if the excluded or expelled party

mutual or *ex parte* council for examination and advice. An appeal to a presbytery, in matters of doctrine, may be, not to say, must be, to a partial tribunal; for every member of the presbytery has had to subscribe the Westminster Confession, a partial statement of biblical doctrine; and if appeal be taken to the synod and to the assembly, the same creed controls. But when in our polity an aggrieved party asks for a mutual council to hear its case, that party chooses one-half of its members; and if the party doing an alleged wrong refuse to join in calling a mutual council, the aggrieved may call an *ex parte* council, selecting all its members. Dr. Killen's charge that our polity denies a "trial by jury," but makes a man's "opponents" "his judges,"¹ has no foundation in fact. True, none of these councils can reinstate an expelled member or put into membership a rejected member, in any particular church or association; but if its findings and advice exonerate the aggrieved party, the result of council becomes credentials on which any other church or association may receive that party into fellowship with the whole body, and into standing as member, church, or minister. There is then in Congregationalism a method of redressing wrongs by councils which is neither cumbersome, nor unjust, which gives offenders not only a jury, but a jury one-half chosen by themselves, mercy glorying against judgment.²

Dr. Killen charges that "Independency makes no proper provision for preserving the church against the invasion of false doctrine;" and, referring to the Unitarian defection, he adds: "Their system of church government afforded the friends of orthodoxy no protection against the spread of the blighting heresy." Their polity prevented them "from adopting any creed which individuals entering the ministry

timents." ¹ This defect is now supplied by the doctrinal bases of our district, state, and national bodies. But before the rise of these associations, we got on very well compared with other polities, especially the Presbyterian. "Ninety-six churches in Massachusetts out of three hundred and sixty-one became Unitarian. Only twenty-seven per cent of them apostatized. But in England, out of two hundred and fifty-eight Presbyterian churches, all but twenty-three lapsed into Unitarianism; which was ninety-one per cent of the whole. In Connecticut no Congregational church was lost to the faith; but in Ireland two Presbyterian synods became Unitarian. In England, only six, or at most ten, churches of our order became unsound in the faith; while in Scotland the whole body of Presbyterian churches fell away into Moderatism, a term which included all shades of unbelief from bald deism up to the evangelical faith; . . . while the Presbyterian and Reformed churches of Switzerland, Holland, and Germany lapsed almost wholly into rationalism and heresy, leaving even the cradle of Presbyterianism without a church of the faith of John Calvin." ² Never was a polity freer from heresy than Congregationalism.

The book we are in part reviewing lays great stress and labor on the ruling eldership. Five chapters are devoted to it. He denies that ruling elders are laymen, and assumes that his position is that of the standards of the Presbyterian churches. Obligated to yield the false interpretation of 1 Tim. v. 17, on which the lay eldership was built, he seeks, with others, to change the position of Presbyterians on a point that involves the ruin of their polity. He only ob-

functions. "A plurality of rulers or elders in every church," "associated on equal terms in the government of the church," "of the same order, though they do not perform the same duties,"¹ we concede, as did our ecclesiastical fathers. The Cambridge Platform gives a chapter to "ruling elders and deacons," and another to "the powers of the church and its presbytery."² This local church presbytery laid hands on Timothy at his ordination.³ "But," says our author, "this court is unknown to Independency. It may have a pastor and deacons in every congregation; but it has nothing properly corresponding to a *presbytery*, or an 'assembly of elders.'"⁴ Yet Dr. John Hall had said: "The New England deacon is the exact counterpart of an Old World Presbyterian elder."⁵ And our author, perhaps remembering his pupil's words, says, in another place: "The Congregational deacons very nearly correspond to the Presbyterian eldership. In Independent churches the discipline is usually administered by the pastor and deacons; but from their decision an appeal may be made to the whole body of the communicants."⁶ A Congregational board, consisting of pastor, deacons, and members chosen annually by the church, is more nearly like the old Presbyterian session with its pastor and lay elders than is a modern Presbyterian session composed wholly of ministers, according to the new theory of the ruling eldership. This theory will compel a change in their standards or else emerge in two orders in the ministry. For their "Form of Government" says: "Ruling elders are properly the representatives of the people, chosen by them for the purpose of exercising government

ministers by the laying on of hands;" nor "administer sealing ordinances."¹ Ruling elders must be members of the church they respectively serve;² but ministers are not members of any particular church, but of their presbyteries,³ so that credentials from a presbytery cover church membership and ministerial standing. If now we substitute "ministers" for "ruling elders" in these passages, as the new theory demands, we have two orders in the ministry, or something like it. One order cannot do what the other is required to do. Congregationalists never put such limitations on ruling elders as distinct from pastors or ministers. With them they are one order. But Dr. Charles Hodge declared that to regard ruling elders as of the same order as ministers is "entirely contrary to the doctrine and practice of all the Reformed churches, and especially of our own. In those churches the ruling elder is a layman." "Ruling elders are the representatives of the people."⁴ "This doctrine [that ruling elders are ministers] is, therefore, completely revolutionary. It deprives the people of all substantive power. The legislative, judicial, and executive power, according to our system, is in church courts, and if these courts are to be composed entirely of clergymen, and are close, self-perpetuating bodies, then we have, or should have, as complete a clerical domination as the world has ever seen."⁵ Vain protest! Dr. Hodge could not stay the truth. The elders in 1 Tim. v. 17 are of one and the same order, and lay eldership has fallen. For Presbyterians have begun to adjust their policy to the revealed word, distinction

are commanded to 'feed his flock, *taking the oversight thereof.*'¹ But how can they properly perform their duty if, as in the case of the Episcopal Church of Ireland, they must first share their power with ordinary laymen, who have no right whatever to sit in spiritual judicatories?"²

"It is with some a favorite idea that the ruling elders in the Presbyterian Church, as distinguished from the ministers, represent the people. There appears to be no foundation in the New Testament for this theory of distinctive representation. In as far as representation is concerned, ministers and elders stand on the same platform. Both are elected by the people, and both are expected to minister for their benefit."³

Thus the people are ruled out of all participation in the government of Presbyterian churches. All that is left them of this boasted government of the people is the election of their elders, usually for life, who constitute the session of their respective congregations, which elders are ministers. Then the session elects from its members by vote of itself ruling elders as delegates to the presbytery and synod to which it belongs; and the presbytery elects from its members by vote of itself commissioners to the general assembly to which it belongs; while each general assembly, if satisfactory in creed and practice, may elect commissioners to the international Presbyterian Alliance. It is clerical domination from the top to the bottom, rather from the assemblies down. After declining several times to limit the term of service of ruling elders, because opposed to "the most obvious and natural construction of [their] Form of Government,"⁴ the General Assembly, in 1875, permitted churches to limit the exercise of the functions of ruling elders to a term of years. "The office is perpetual. But a distinction is here made between the office and the exercise

¹ 1 Pet. v. 2. ² Framework, p. 204.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 268. ⁴ Moore's Digest, pp. 342-344.

of its functions—between an acting elder and one who is for the time not exercising his office.” “Elders, once ordained, shall not be divested of the office when they are not re-elected.” “They shall be entitled to represent that particular church in the higher judicatories when appointed by the session or the presbytery.”¹ This rotary eldership concedes nothing to popular government in the Presbyterian Church, as all elders are ministers, those not active being eligible to courts of control. It leaves the whole Presbyterian structure to be built of clergymen, resting on a session of ministers. To this has Presbyterianism, which hitherto had asserted with great earnestness “the divine right of the people to take part in the government of the church,”² fallen; but it cannot stand as a “clerical domination” in this age of liberty.

But whither shall they go? up into Prelacy? or over into a popular church government, which until quite lately they have held theirs to be? They must come to the latter; for the people are claiming their “divine right” to rule, once made essential to Presbyterianism. For it was while the theory of lay eldership was the interpretation of 1 Tim. v. 17 and of the Form of Government alike, and presumably in view of this recognition of “the divine right of the people to take part in the government of the church,” that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States declared the ruling eldership to be “essential to the existence of a Presbyterian church.”³ If that deliverance was based on the essential elements of Presbyterianism, then the change in the theory of the ruling eldership, from lay to clerical eldership, cuts off all popular government, and en-

dilemma, either to change their polity or to endure clerical domination. Episcopalians are admitting laymen to their counsels. And the Presbyterians, having at length accepted the right interpretation of the one text on which their theory of the lay eldership rested, will go farther, and accept also the generally conceded interpretation of the New Testament touching the independency of the churches, with lay representation. Indeed, they have already taken a large step towards Congregationalism. When they wished to organize an "Alliance of the Reformed Churches throughout the world," they could not do so on their constitutive principle of authoritative representation, for this would have placed all the general assemblies under the control of the Alliance, dominating the world. So they borrowed our constitutive principle, independency, and put it up as their head of gold: "But it [the Alliance] shall not interfere with the existing creed or constitution of any church in the Alliance, or with its internal order or external relation."¹ We trust they will like the working of this express negation of authority. It makes the Reformed churches throughout the world visibly one. On this same negation of authority, Congregationalists have sought unity in fellowship and co-operation from the beginning, in every stage of their development. That Dr. Killen should speak so contemptuously of a principle of unity adopted by all the Presbyterian churches throughout the world in their ecumenical alliance, is passing strange. Possibly he may yet see therein the solution of the problem of polity—unity in liberty. He expects agreement sometime

vigor of discussion as we approach the millennium. Already the discussion has made clear two things: the absolute autonomy under Christ of every particular congregation of believers, and the visible union of all such churches. The first gives liberty, the last gives unity. The latter is not more certainly revealed in the New Testament than the former. We can assure our author that Congregationalists believe in the union of all Christ's churches in fellowship and co-operation on the scriptural autonomy of each church, that is, in liberty. They do not regard each church as "a solitary building surrounded by a high wall shutting it out from all adjacent edifices."¹ Our polity is an evolution from independency unto unity. Each particular church as independent manages its own affairs, having a board of rulers responsible alone to the membership of the church; these churches on the law of Christian equality and fellowship, unite by delegates chosen by the churches from their own membership in district, state, national, and ecumenical bodies; with reciprocal rights and duties, but without the exercise of authority from the local church to the ecumenical council. Having encountered a long and bitter struggle for existence with state and ecclesiastical force, our polity was compelled first to vindicate its constitutive principle of independency; but while doing it, it never overlooked its principle of unity, although it failed for a time adequately to express that unity. But for a century our churches have been combining more and more in free and equal associations and co-operative labors, until the consummation has been reached in the International Congregational Council to be held in

pletion of our polity, the same constitutive principle controlling from the beginning to the end of our fellowship. And thus far only Congregationalism and the Papacy have attained ecumenical unity without the introduction of a foreign element. Neither Presbyterianism nor Episcopacy has been able consistently to express such unity, nor can they ever do so. Authority in their ecumenical bodies would rend them asunder.