

LECTURE VIII.

TREATISES ON CHURCH-GOVERNMENT, CHURCH CENSURES,
AND ORDINATION OF MINISTERS.

IN my last Lecture I gave you a succinct account of the Directory for the Public Worship of God prepared by a special committee, and after careful revision adopted by the Assembly in 1644. I am to-day to speak of the treatises on church-government, church censures, and ordination of ministers, which were prepared almost simultaneously with that Directory. Two or perhaps, more strictly speaking, three treatises on these subjects were drawn up by the Westminster Assembly in the course of the first two years of its sessions. The one to which it first addressed itself was that for which it began to make preparations immediately after receiving from the two Houses the order for its members to 'confer and treat among themselves of such a discipline and government as may be most agreeable to God's holy word and most apt to procure the peace of the Church and nearer agreement with other reformed Churches. It may be said to have formed the chief occu-

pation of the Assembly during the remainder of the year 1643 and during the greater part of 1644. It proved a work of great labour and difficulty, and it was in connection with it that those keen and almost interminable debates between the Presbyterians and Independents took place, which broke the harmony of the Assembly and retarded its more important work. This treatise was entitled by its framers, *Propositions concerning Church-Government and Ordination of Ministers*, but it is now generally known and referred to as the *Form of Church-Government*, probably because that was the title arranged for the treatise on church-government in the Solemn League and Covenant. Under this title it still holds its place in Scottish editions of the Westminster standards. It embodies in the form of distinct propositions, arranged in logical connection, and accompanied with the Scripture proofs which were held to warrant them, the conclusions in which the Assembly saw fit from time to time to sum up the results of its lengthened and exhaustive discussions. It treats in succession of the Head of the Church, of the Church itself, and the officers whom Christ its Head has given it, viz., pastors, teachers, other church governors (whom reformed churches commonly call elders), and deacons, then of particular congregations, and the officers and ordinances appropriate to them, of church-government, the several sorts

of assemblies for exercising it, and the common and distinctive powers of these several assemblies, and finally of the doctrine and power of ordination accompanied by a practical directory for the ordination of ministers. Prefixed to Gillespie's *Notes of the Debates and Proceedings of the Assembly*, as I stated in a former lecture, we have in tabulated form the votes or separate resolutions of the Assembly out of which the Propositions were gradually framed, accompanied in the margin by a notification of the date or at least of the session when each separate vote was passed, and of the fact whether it was *ordered*, that is, accepted without discussion, or *resolved* on after debate and perhaps a formal vote. The latest entry, however, in this tabulated form was made in the 186th session, or on 25th March 1644, and thus unfortunately it does not include the votes regarding the gradation of church courts and their respective powers, nor even the greater part of those relating to the ordination of ministers. It is authenticated by the subscriptions both of the assessors, and of the scribes of the Assembly, and it was probably got by Gillespie and his colleagues that it might be forwarded to the commissioners of the General Assembly in their own country, to whom they were required from time to time to give account of their proceedings. But if so, it was not formally communicated to the

General Assembly of that year, nor indeed in accordance with the provisions of the ordinance calling the Westminster Assembly could any public use be made of it at that date. It is only one of several indications we have that they occasionally sent documents as well as notes of their speeches to these commissioners, as it is also one of several indications that besides the books in which Byfield inserted notes of the speeches of the members and formal minutes of their meetings there was another (probably under the charge of his colleague Roborough) in which their votes alone, and so the separate propositions contained in their formularies of church order, worship, and doctrine, were recorded as they were voted, which book is now hopelessly lost.¹

It was not till the 8th November 1644 that the Propositions, or at any rate the main part of them (I suppose so far as they are printed on the first sixteen pages of the Scotch edition of 1647), were presented by Dr. Burgess and some others of the Divines to the House of Commons as 'the humble advice of the Assembly of Divines now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster concerning *some part* of church-government.' And on p. 16 of the edition of the Propositions above men-

¹ Vol. i. of the ms. Minutes under session 186 or 25th March 1644 records the appointment of the prolocutor, assessors, and scribes as a committee, but does not indicate the object for which they were appointed. Possibly it was to prepare this *vidimus* of votes.

tioned, the statement (no doubt given in on this occasion) has been allowed to stand as it originally did: 'Some other particulars concerning church-government do yet remain unfinished, which shall be with all convenient speed prepared and presented to this honourable House.' But when by a subsequent message from the House they were requested to send in with all convenient speed all the parts of church-government that are yet behind,' they replied by Mr. Marshall 'that all the material parts of church-government are already brought up' with the exception of that relating to church-censures, the *ubi* of which was a subject of theological dispute about which they had not yet agreed. The conclusions to which they ultimately came respecting it were incorporated not with the *Propositions*, but with the *Directory* for church-government, etc. When and how the Propositions contained on pp. 17 to 26 of the Scotch edition of 1647 were moulded into the precise shape in which we there find them, it is not so easy exactly to determine. In all likelihood this was the part of the Directory which was first completed and presented to the Houses, to enable them to make temporary arrangements for the ordination of ministers. From the full notes of the debates given in Lightfoot's *Journal* it is evident that the twelve propositions relating to the doctrinal part of ordination had by April 3d, 1644,

been put into the exact form in which we there have them, and if by April 19th the directory for ordination was not yet *verbatim et literatim* as we now have it, any alterations made on it subsequently must have been of the most trifling kind. The Committee which drew up the first draft of this Directory were Messrs. Palmer, Herle, Marshall, Tuckney, Seaman, Vines, Goodwin, and Gataker, with the Scottish commissioners, and their draft was completed¹ between the 3d and the 19th of April, on which day it was discussed, and with modifications adopted by the Assembly. Next morning it was presented to the Houses, Dr. Burgess, in offering it to the House of Lords, saying, 'That these were the first-fruits of the Assembly, and if they shall receive sanction and confirmation from their Lordships it will abundantly recompense for the long time they were in debate, and the Assembly recommends them to the blessing of God for a good success upon them.' At first the action of the Houses, on what had been presented to them, was far from satisfactory to the Assembly.² They struck out, from the ordinance they proposed to pass respecting ordination of ministers, all reference to the doctrinal part of ordination, and from the practical

¹ Lightfoot's *Journal*, pp. 237-253.

² It is recorded in *Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. iii. pp. 590, 591. For alterations made see pp. 610, 622, 625.

Directory, all reference to a presbytery as the ordinary ministers of ordination. They made provision for the special emergency that had occurred, only by a temporary and extraordinary association of presbyters, and deferred determining the method to be ordinarily and permanently followed until the whole question of church-government was ripe for settlement. They also proposed various alterations in particular regulations recommended by the Assembly. This fortunately came to the knowledge of the divines before the ordinance had actually passed, and they asked and got permission to make further suggestions respecting it. The adjustment of these suggestions gave occasion to considerable debate in the Assembly, and to expressions of disappointment on the part of several divines (notably of Henderson), that the House of Commons should have taken such liberties with a document they had so carefully drawn up; and after paring away so much that was deemed important by its framers—especially as to the doctrinal part—should have ventured to prefix to the ‘directory part’ a preface of their own. The preface as ultimately passed seems harmless enough, but though negatively allowed by the divines, it was as rigidly excluded from a place among their Propositions and in their Directory as it was persistently maintained in the English Ordinance, as printed in 1644,

modified and reprinted in 1646, and merged in the larger and more general Ordinance on church-government in 1648.¹ At first the divines seemed disposed to content themselves with urging two amendments to the ordinance drafted by the Commons, the one embodying a more satisfactory definition of ordination than the preamble contained, and the other restoring the clause requiring an express promise of *submission* on the part of the people to their pastor. Ultimately, however, thirteen suggestions were sent up, of which eleven were accepted by the House of Commons without difficulty. The other two—being those just referred to, and numbered respectively 8 and 9—were after further consideration accepted; the first partially, the second entirely; but on the dissent of the House of Lords from the latter it

¹ 'Whereas the word *presbyter*, that is to say elder, and the word bishop do in the Scriptures intend and signify one and the same function, although the title of bishop hath been by corrupt custom appropriated to one, and that unto him ascribed, and by him assumed, as in other things so in the matter of ordination that was not meet. Which ordination notwithstanding being performed by him, a *presbyter*, joined with other *presbyters*, we hold for substance to be valid, and not to be disclaimed by any that have received it. And that *presbyters* so ordained being lawfully thereunto appointed may ordain other *presbyters*. And whereas it is also manifest by the word of God that no man ought to take upon him the office of a minister until he be lawfully called and ordained thereunto; and that the work of ordination, that is to say, an outward solemn setting apart of persons for the office of the ministry in the Church by *preaching presbyters*, is an ordinance of Christ, and is to be performed with all due care, wisdom, gravity, and solemnity: It is ordained,' etc.

was in the end rejected. Instead of the presiding minister being directed immediately *before the ordination* to 'demand of the people concerning their willingness to receive and acknowledge the person about to be ordained as the minister of Christ, and *to obey and submit unto him as having rule over them in the Lord,*' etc., he was simply authorised *after the ordination* 'to exhort and charge the people in the name of God, willingly to receive and acknowledge him as the minister of Christ, and to maintain, encourage, and assist him in all the parts of his office.' As the objection to their suggestion appears to have proceeded mainly from the House of Lords, it is likely that it arose quite as much from dislike of the position it conceded to the people, as of the position of rule it claimed for the minister once accepted by them. And, strange as it may seem, though the clause requiring the people to declare their acceptance of the minister, and promise submission to him, was retained in the Propositions and Directory as published in 1647, and was countenanced by the Knoxian Form of Admission of Ministers, the practice which has generally prevailed in the Church of Scotland ever since the Revolution comes nearer to that authorised by the Ordinance of the English Parliament. The people's acceptance and promises are held to have been evinced by the signature of the call or acquiescence in it,

and at the time of ordination are tacitly assumed, and after the minister-elect has been ordained, and counselled as to his duty, they are exhorted and charged as to theirs.

But the main subject of difference between the Assembly and the Houses related to the insertion of a satisfactory definition of ordination in the preamble of the ordinance. The original draft had borne merely that ordination, that is, an outward solemn setting apart of persons for the office of the ministry, is an ordinance of Christ, and left out the explanation contained in the fourth doctrinal proposition of the Assembly. They suggested that the ordinance should run 'that ordination by preaching presbyters with prayer and imposition of hands is an ordinance of Christ,' but they ultimately agreed not to press for the insertion of the words 'with prayer and imposition of hands,' so that the clause might stand, 'that ordination by preaching presbyters is an ordinance of Christ.'¹ This modified request was substantially granted by the Houses, but it was determined by them that the words 'by preaching presbyters' should come in not in the first part of the definition, but at its close, to complete the explanation: 'that is, an outward solemn setting apart of persons for the office of the ministry in the Church.'² Some further additions were afterwards made to the ordinance on

¹ Gillespie's *Notes*, p. 71.

² As in note on p. 253.

the suggestion of the Assembly which may possibly not have been in their Directory as originally transmitted. The ordinance retained one variation from the draft of the Assembly which is deserving of notice. It had been determined there by a majority that the phrase '*with* imposition of hands and prayer' should be changed into '*by* imposition of hands,' etc. Selden, Gataker, and Seaman all pressed this; but Gillespie contended that 'it neither agreed with the apostle's phrase nor with the opinion of our divines.'¹ Yet in the House of Commons, where Selden's influence was generally greater than in the Assembly, the word *by* was left out, though *with* was not inserted, but the sentence simply ran, 'shall solemnly set him apart to the office and work of the ministry, *laying* their hands on him.'

The first and larger part of the propositions, as already stated, was only presented to the Houses on 8th November 1644, or more than six months after the part which now stands last had been sent up.

The propositions concerning church-government and ordination, as put into shape by the divines and presented to the English Parliament, were taken down to Scotland by Gillespie and Baillie, and along with the Directory for Public Worship, they were presented apparently in manu-

¹ Gillespie's Notes of Debates, p. 45.

script to the General Assembly which met in Edinburgh in February 1645. Baillie says they were to have the Assembly's opinion upon them, 'but no Act till they had passed the Houses of the English Parliament.'¹ Of course he means they were to have no Executive Act such as they had asked and got for the Directory for Public Worship. The Assembly passed, and the Parliament ratified, an Act approving of the Propositions so far as submitted to them, but instead of decerning and ordaining, as in the other case, that they should be observed and practised, it simply authorised their Commission to conclude a uniformity on the basis of them as soon as they should be ratified without *substantial* alteration by the Parliament of England. They never were so ratified in the South, and the Act of the Scottish General Assembly in 1647, approving and establishing the Confession of Faith, speaks of the truth of Christ as to the several sorts of ecclesiastical officers and assemblies not as having been embodied in the Propositions approved in 1645, but '*to be expressed* in the Directory of Government.'²

The circumstances which led to the preparation of this latter treatise were the following:—The majority of the English Parliament, while willing to substitute a Presbyterian for an Episcopal form

¹ *Letters and Journals*, vol. ii. p. 260. For the Act see Note K.

² Peterkin's *Records of the Kirk*, p. 475.

of government in the National Church, were not disposed to concede the apparent *jure divino* claim made for it in the Propositions. Even many of the warm friends of Presbytery in the south became satisfied that if they were to retain the bulk of the nation in the reconstituted Church they must be content to get their assent to their favourite system of church-government as one that in its main principles was lawful and agreeable to the Word of God rather than expressly enjoined in it, and that could be justified by considerations of reason or expediency in many of its details for which the texts appended by the Assembly to the 'Propositions' did not seem to furnish a clear divine warrant, still less a positive and permanent institution. At the desire of these friends of comprehension and their friends in Parliament generally, who, to use Coleman's words, preferred 'may be to must be,' the Assembly set itself to prepare its practical Directory for church-government and discipline, and for ordination of ministers during the latter part of 1644 and the earlier part of 1645. Henderson took a special interest in the preparation of this Formulary, and culled its materials, in part at least, from his treatise on the Order and Government of the Church of Scotland, in part from the discipline of the French and Dutch Protestant Churches, modifying and toning down the whole, and doing his very utmost to put it into a shape that might

be acquiesced in, or borne with, by those whose personal leanings were towards other polities. Yet with every disposition to respect, as far as a loyal Presbyterian could, the scruples of the dissenting brethren, and inclination to yield to them in minor matters, he and his colleagues found it impossible to come to an agreement with them on the basis of the practical Directory any more than on that of the theoretical 'Propositions.' But though it entirely failed to ward off the threatened schism, the Directory did not fail to secure the favour of the majority of the Parliament, and with two or three notable exceptions, to which I shall advert in my next Lecture, it was substantially embodied in the ordinance passed by the Houses on 29th August 1648, and published under the title, *The Form of Church-Government to be used in the Church of England and Ireland*. This Form contains minute directions for the choice of elders, the erection of twelve Presbyteries and a Synod, in London, and more general directions for the choice of elders and the erection of Presbyteries and Synods in other parts of the kingdom. It also made provision for the meeting

¹ Even the ministers and elders met in their provincial assembly at London, in November 1648, venture to say: 'The external government and discipline of Christ, though it be not necessary to the being, yet it is absolutely necessary to the wellbeing of a church. . . . Not that we think that every circumstance in church-government is set down precisely in the word, or is of divine right in a strict sense.'—*Vindication of the Presbyterianial Government and Ministry*, pp. 1-3.

of a National Assembly when summoned by Parliament, but in point of fact it never was summoned to meet. The classical Presbyteries were to consist of one minister and at least two elders from every parish within the bounds, the provincial synods of at least two ministers and four elders from every classis within the province, and the National Assembly of two ministers and four elders from each provincial synod, and of five learned and godly persons from each university in the kingdom. These various courts were subordinated to each other after the Presbyterian fashion, that so appeals might be made from the inferior to the superior, and any person who deemed himself aggrieved by the proceedings of a congregational eldership might appeal to the classis, from that to the provincial synod, and from that to the National Assembly, and from it to the Parliament. This last provision no pleading nor protestation on the part of the divines could prevail with the Houses to alter, and perhaps that may have been one reason why they did not urge on at once the complete organisation of the Church, though of course the main reason was furnished by the political changes that so soon took place. Presbyteries and a synod were erected in Lancashire¹ by separate ordinances, and presbyteries² in

¹ *Journals of House of Commons*, vol. iv. p. 668; vol. v. pp. 7, 23.

² E. 430, No. 16; E. 431, No. 4.

Somersetshire and Surrey by other ordinances. Any organisation attempted in other counties was rather on the lines suggested by Baxter for the county of Worcester than on the lines of the ordinances of Parliament.¹ Any associations in them were probably composed of ministers only, and of ministers of different judgments on the question of church-government. It was on the 7th July 1645 that the Assembly's Directory was formally delivered to the Houses by Mr. Marshall and certain other members. The following is the entry in the Journals of the House of Commons (vol. iv. p. 199), regarding it:—

‘The House being informed that some of the Assembly of Divines were at the door, they were called in, and Mr. Marshall acquainted the House, That whereas the House had been pleased, at several times, to order the Assembly of Divines to send to them such propositions as they had finished ; which they had done ; that there are some more which needed some proofs out of Scripture, and had been under debate with them and were now finished : They had cast their votes into a model and method ; and now the House may see all before them. They have left out the proofs, both of Scripture and reason, having sent them in with their former votes ; but if the House please to command the Assembly to give in the proofs, they are ready to do it. Some of these votes are plainly held out by Scripture ; others have reasons agreeable to Scripture, and have been alleged : And such as have the light of nature are received and practised in all Reformed Churches. This work, though it appeared short, yet had spent much time, by reason of dissenting judgments ; that, if possible, they

¹ There were isolated *classes* ; see *Minutes*, p. 536, for Kent.

might be satisfied. To this short paper of additional votes they have given in the proofs out of Scripture ; and if those proofs, at the first reading, be not convictive, in regard that God hath not laid down the points of church discipline in such clear texts, they desire they may not be laid aside, but that the House will command them to give in the proofs at large.'

The Directory for Church-Government was brought down by the Scotch Commissioners Gillespie or Baillie, and laid before the Scottish Assembly in 1647, and by their orders it was printed (with the propositions prefixed, and in the exact shape in which it had passed the Westminster Assembly) before the close of the year, that it might be examined and reported on by presbyteries. Next year the consideration of the reports was again deferred, and in the confusions that followed no action may have been taken respecting it. Baillie says that with four or five reservations it would have been approved of by the Assembly but for the persistent opposition of Calderwood, who objected even to the propositions of which the Assembly had approved in 1645. Both sanctioned congregational elderships as distinct courts, whereas he maintained they were nothing more than committees of Presbytery. The latter provided that the provincial synods should consist not of all the ministers of the bounds, but of a certain number of ministers and elders chosen out of each presbytery, and that the National Assembly

should consist not of delegates from the presbyteries, but of three ministers and three elders from each provincial synod, and five learned and godly persons from each university. To all these provisions we cannot doubt this uncompromising defender of old Scottish arrangements would resolutely object, particularly to the last,¹ which had been opposed, but unsuccessfully, by the Scottish Commissioners at Westminster. But some of these provisions are not unworthy still of the consideration of the larger Presbyterian Churches, which feel that their supreme courts, as at present constituted, are somewhat unwieldy, and hardly so well adapted as they might be for the transaction of judicial business. And if ever the time should come when they should feel that the laity ought to be more directly represented than they yet are by idoneous persons as well as elders, it may cheer them to remember that the Westminster Assembly, notwithstanding the objections of our countrymen, did not hesitate to put on record their decision that 'synodical assemblies do consist of pastors, teachers, church governors, and *other fit persons* (when it shall be deemed expedient) where they have a lawful calling thereunto.'

¹ *Letters and Journals*, vol. iii. pp. 11, 20, 21, 59. 'A full and perfect model of discipline,' 'a very excellent and profitable piece, the fourth part of our uniformitie was shuffled by through the pertinacious opposition of Mr. David Calderwood and two or three with him.'

The Directory was reprinted in 1690 in a neat little volume containing also Henderson's treatise on the Government and Order of the Church of Scotland, on which it was based. Once and again the treatise was reprinted in the earlier half of the succeeding century. It holds its place even in a collection of Confessions, etc., published in 1776. Use was unquestionably made of it in drawing up what are termed the Larger Overtures on Discipline, etc., printed among the proceedings of Assembly 1705, and the Form of Process approved by Assembly 1707. But as a whole it, as well as the propositions, was left unsanctioned at the Revolution, and it is not now nearly so well known as it ought to be. It is practical and comprehensive, a storehouse of valuable counsels as to many things in government, and still more in discipline, not touched on in the propositions, and is well worthy of being studied by Presbyterian ministers still, who wish to do full justice to the system of government the Westminster Assembly sanctioned. What wiser statement of church principles could be desired than the following : Where the number of the people is so great 'that they cannot conveniently meet in one place, it is expedient that they be divided, according to the respective bounds of their dwellings, into distinct and fixed congregations, for the better administration of such ordinances as belong unto them, and the discharge of the mutual

duties, wherein all, according to their several places and callings, are to labour to promote whatever appertains to the power of godliness and credit of religion, that the whole land in the full extent of it may become the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ. Parochial congregations in this kingdom, consisting of ministers and people who profess faith in Christ and obedience unto Christ, according to the rules of faith and life taught by Him and His Apostles, and join together in the public worship of hearing, praying, and administration of the sacraments, are churches truly constituted. . . . Communion and membership in congregations thus constituted . . . is not unlawful. And to refuse or renounce membership and church communion with congregations thus constituted, as unlawful to be joined with, in regard of their constitution, is not warranted by the word of God. . . . Separation from a church thus constituted, where the government is lawful, upon an opinion that it is unlawful, and that therefore all the godly are also bound to separate . . . and to join themselves to another church of another constitution and government, is not warranted by the word of God, but contrary to it. . . . Nor is it lawful for any member of a parochial congregation, if the ordinances be there administered in purity, to go and seek them elsewhere ordinarily.' . . . 'Although the truth of conversion

and regeneration be necessary to every worthy communicant for his own comfort and benefit, yet those only are to be by the eldership excluded or suspended from the Lord's table who are found by them to be ignorant or scandalous.' 'Where there are many ruling officers in a particular congregation let some of them more especially attend the inspection of one part, some of another, as may be most convenient ; and let them at fit times visit the several families for their spiritual good.' 'These elders ought to be such as are men of good understanding in matters of religion, sound in the faith, prudent, discreet, grave, and of unblameable conversation.' 'The deacons must be wise, sober, grave, of honest report, not greedy of filthy lucre.' 'It belongeth unto classical presbyteries to consider, to debate, and to resolve according to God's word, such cases of conscience or other difficulties in doctrine as are brought unto them out of their association, according as they shall find needful for the good of the churches : to examine and censure according to the word any erroneous doctrines which have been either publicly or privately vented within their association to the corrupting of the judgments of men, and to endeavour the reducing of recusants or any others in error or schism . . . to dispense censures in cases within their cognisance . . . yet so as that no minister be deposed but by the resolution of a

synod : to examine, ordain, and admit ministers for the congregations respectively therein associated.' 'The provincial and national assemblies are to have the same power in all points of government and censures brought before them within their several bounds respectively as is before expressed to belong to classical presbyteries within their several associations.'

The sum of all may be given in the words of Henderson in that treatise on 'The Government and Order of the Church of Scotland,' from which this Directory to so large an extent is taken : 'In the authority of these assemblies, parochial, presbyterial, provincial, and national, and in the subordination of the lesser unto the greater, or of the more particular elderships to the larger and general eldership, doth consist the order, strength, and steadfastness of the Church of Scotland. . . . Here is a superiority without tyranny, for no minister hath a papal or monarchical jurisdiction over his own flock, far less over other pastors and over the congregations of a large diocese. Here there is parity without confusion and disorder, for the pastors are in order before the elders, and the elders before the deacons. Every particular church is subordinate to the presbytery, the presbytery to the synod, and the synod to the national assembly. One pastor also hath priority of esteem before another for age, for zeal, for gifts, for his good

deservings of the Church, each one honouring him whom God hath honoured, and as he beareth the image of God, which was to be seen among the Apostles themselves. But none hath pre-eminence of title or power or jurisdiction above others ; even as in nature one eye hath not power over another, only the head hath power over all, even as Christ over His church. . . . And lastly, here there is a subjection without slavery, for the people are subject to the pastors and assemblies, yet there is no assembly wherein every particular church hath not interest and power ; nor is there anything done but they are, if not actually yet virtually, called to consent unto it.' Such is presbytery in theory, and there is no reason why in practice it should not approximate to the ideal more nearly than some recent caricaturists represent it to have done, save that we who are intrusted with its administration, not excluding these caricaturists themselves, still come far short of what we ought to be as men, as Christians, and as the descendants of such noble-hearted Christians ; and that is a shortcoming that would mar any form of government which God has instituted, or human wisdom has devised.