not favourable to the general diffusion of the detailed development of Presbyterian organization and arrangements. We have no doubt, that a congregation of professing Christians may be so placed in providence, as to be warranted, upon the ground of the general principles taught in Scripture concerning the rights and prerogatives of the church, to organize itself in Independency, without actual subjection to Presbyterial government, and to provide within itself for the execution of all ecclesiastical functions, and for its own perpetuation; and we do not dispute that such churches or congregations existed in early times; but if the general principle of such association and organization is sanctioned by Scripture, and if some specimens of it are set before us there, in apostolic practice,—and this, we think, Presbyterians have satisfactorily established,—then we are entitled to say, that this associated and organized condition is the complete, normal, and perfect state of the church, which ought ever to be aimed at, and, as far as circumstances and opportunities admit of it, carried out and exhibited in practice. And there is nothing in the records of primitive antiquity, which affords any ground for denying that this scriptural and Presbyterian principle was exhibited and acted upon as far as the general condition of the church and the world rendered this practicable; and, on the contrary, there is not a little which favours the idea that this was aimed at, and was to some extent accomplished. It is not, of course, contended, that Presbyterian organization and arrangements, in their complete and detailed development, were universally diffused in the primitive church; but there is good ground to believe that our fundamental principles, as indicated in Scripture, were acted upon as far as circumstances admitted of it,—and that *very soon*, as the natural and appropriate result of scriptural sentiment and feeling prevailing among Christians as to the general character and constitution of the church, as to the right relation of particular churches to each other, and as to the consequence of filling up and following out arrangements which the apostles had sanctioned, the church in general *became*, in its leading features and arrangements, and continued to be, until the original government of the church was changed by the gradual growth of Prelacy, substantially Presbyterian.*

* The books on this subject are just those we mentioned when treating of the Council of Jerusalem.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ERASTIAN CONTROVERSY.

Sec. I.—*The Civil Magistrate and Religion.*

THE general subject of the relation that ought to subsist between the state and the church, or between the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, had been discussed before the Reformation, usually under the designation of the controversy *inter imperium et sacerdotium;* and I have had occasion to give some account of the very defective and imperfect manner in which the topic was then commonly treated: the one party defending the Popish extreme of the subjection of the civil to the ecclesiastical, and the other the opposite extreme of the subjection of the ecclesiastical to the civil,—which came afterwards to be commonly called among Protestants by the name of Erastianism; while scarcely any had a clear perception of the true scriptural Presbyterian doctrine of the mutual independence of the civil and the ecclesiastical authorities,—of the supremacy of each in its own province,—or of the true principle of connection between them, as described by the expressions, *a co-ordination of powers*, and *a mutual subordination of persons.*

I have already pointed out the clear and definite line of demarcation between Popish principles upon this subject, and those which have been usually maintained by Presbyterians as scriptural; and exposed the weakness and unfairness of the common Episcopalian and Erastian plan of dealing with the arguments in support of the only points in which Papists and Presbyterians agree,—namely, the unlawfulness of the civil authorities assuming and exercising jurisdiction or authoritative control in ecclesiastical matters,—the plan just consisting in evading the arguments upon the merits, and attempting, as a substitute, to make something, as a means of exciting prejudice, of the mere fact, that thus far, and

upon this point, Presbyterians and Papists *do* agree. I wish now to make some remarks on the way in which this subject was stated and discussed at the period of the Reformation.

The circumstances in which the Reformers were placed in providence, while such as naturally and necessarily led them to speak and write on the subject of the civil magistrate's interfering in religious and ecclesiastical matters, were not by any means favourable to the object of their forming precisely accurate and definite opinions regarding it. In the Church of Rome the two jurisdictions were wholly confounded,—the civil magistrate being deprived of all independent authority, and being required or obliged to act as the mere servant of the church, the executor of her sentences, irrespective of his own judgment or conviction,—or the clergy themselves having assumed, and exercising, civil as well as ecclesiastical power and functions. The Reformers were, on this account, exposed, like the ante-Reformation defenders of the rights of the empire against the priesthood, to some temptation to extend unduly the rights of the magistrate in religious matters. They had, besides, generally speaking, more to expect in the way of protection and support to themselves, and of countenance and encouragement to the truth which they proclaimed, from the civil than from the ecclesiastical authorities. When any of the civil rulers did espouse the cause of the Reformation, there was, in consequence of the thorough mixing up of things civil and things ecclesiastical, and the entire subjection of the former to the latter, which had previously obtained, a necessity for their doing a great deal, and making many important alterations, in ecclesiastical matters, in opposition to the existing ecclesiastical authorities; and this the Reformers would scarcely fail to approve and defend. All this produced very naturally a tendency, on the part of the Reformers, to state the powers and rights of the civil magistrate with respect to religious matters in the fullest and strongest terms. On this account, it would not be in the least surprising if the first Reformers, especially in the early part of their labours, when some of the civil authorities began to exert themselves in the cause of the Reformation, had spoken of the power of civil rulers in these matters in somewhat wide and incautious terms; and also that, as this general topic did not become at that period a subject of full and formal controversial discussion, some of them had never attained to perfect precision and accuracy in their opinions regarding it. Now, this, we find, was to some extent the case; and on this account we cannot appeal with the same confidence to what may be called the testimony of the Reformers upon this subject, as upon some other topics connected with the government of the church and the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs. It can scarcely be proved that, upon some of the points involved in what has since been called the Erastian controversy, there was any very explicit and harmonious testimony given by the Reformers as a body; and I certainly do not consider myself warranted in saying, in regard to this matter, what might be said in regard to the subjects of Presbyterian church government and popular election,—namely, that the question as to what were the views of the Reformers concerning it is not one where there is room for an honest difference of opinion.

The Reformers all strenuously asserted the lawfulness, the advantages, and the divine institution of civil magistracy; and this general position may be confidently maintained concerning them, that they usually assigned to the civil authorities, *at least* all the powers and prerogatives, and imposed upon them at least all the obligations, which can be shown to have any sanction from the sacred Scriptures. They were led to give considerable prominence to their general views on the subject of civil magistracy, not only because the Church of Rome had depressed civil rulers beneath their proper place, and deprived them of their rightful and independent jurisdiction, but also because the Anabaptists condemned all civil magistracy as unauthorized and unlawful under the Christian dispensation, and denied that Christians should either exercise or acknowledge it. These facts, too, furnish the reasons why magistracy was commonly introduced as the subject of a chapter or section in the confessions of the Reformed churches, and why it has generally continued to form a distinct head for discussion in the systems of theology.

Under the general head of the civil magistrate, or of civil magistracy,—that is, in the exposition of what is taught in Scripture concerning the functions and duties of the *supreme* civil authorities of a nation, whatever be its form of government,—the Reformers were unanimous and decided in asserting what has been called in modern times the principle of national establishments of religion,—namely, that it is competent to, and incumbent upon, nations, as such, and civil rulers in their official capacity, or in the

exercise of their legitimate control over civil matters, to aim at the promotion of the honour of God, the welfare of true religion, and the prosperity of the church of Christ. This principle, which comprehends or implies the whole of what we are concerned to maintain upon the subject of national establishments of religion, we believe to be fully sanctioned by Scripture; and we can appeal, in support of it, to the decided and unanimous testimony of the Reformers,—while the Anabaptists of that period seem to have been the first, if we except the Donatists of the fifth century, who stumbled upon something like the opposite doctrine, or what is now-a-days commonly called the Voluntary principle.

The "Voluntary principle" is, indeed, a most inaccurate and unsuitable designation of the doctrine to which it is now commonly applied, and is fitted to insinuate a radically erroneous view of the *status quæstionis* in the controversy. The Voluntary principle properly means the principle that an obligation lies upon men to labour, in the willing application of their talents, influence, and worldly substance, for the advancement of the cause of God and the kingdom of Christ. Of course no defender of the principle of national establishments of religion ever questioned the truth of the Voluntary principle in this its only proper sense. The true ground of difference is just this,—that we who hold the principle of national establishments of religion extend this general obligation to nations and their rulers, while those who are opposed to us limit it to individuals; so that the Voluntary principle, in the only sense in which we reject and oppose it,—and in the only sense, consequently, in which it forms a subject of fair and honourable controversy,—is a mere limitation of the sphere of this obligation to promote the cause of God and the kingdom of Christ—a *mere* negation that the obligation in this respect which attaches to individuals, extends also to nations and their rulers. We have no intention, however, at present of discussing this question. We have merely to advert to the unanimous and decided testimony of the Reformers in support of the general doctrine, as a portion of scriptural truth,—that the civil magistrate is bound, in the exercise of his legitimate authority, of his rightful jurisdiction over national affairs, to seek to promote, as far as he can, the welfare of true religion, and the prosperity of the church of Christ.

It has been often alleged, in order to neutralize the testimony of the Reformers in support of this doctrine, that as they maintained some great errors upon this general subject, and more especially as they ascribed to civil rulers an authoritative control in the affairs of the church, such as would now be called Erastian,—and as they approved of intolerance and persecution upon religious grounds,—their sentiments about the power and duty of the civil magistrate in regard to religion are entitled to no respect. As to the first of these allegations, we do not admit, but deny, that the Reformers in general held Erastian principles, or ascribed to civil rulers an authoritative control over the affairs of the church; though it is true, as we have admitted, that there were some of them whose views upon this subject were not very well defined, or very accurately brought out. As to the second allegation, we admit that they held erroneous views upon the subject of toleration, and ascribed to the civil magistrate a power of punishing upon religious grounds, which is now universally rejected by Protestants; but we do not admit that their undoubted error upon this point deprives their general testimony, in support of the scriptural duty of nations and their rulers, of all weight or claim to respect.

There is an essential difference between the general duty or obligation alleged to be incumbent upon nations and their rulers, with reference to the promoting true religion and the welfare of the church of Christ, and the specific measures which they may be warranted and called upon to adopt in the discharge of this duty, for the attainment of this end. The question as to what particular measures the civil magistrate may or should adopt in this matter, and with a view to this object, is, comparatively speaking, one of detail, or at least of inferior importance, and of greater difficulty and intricacy. Men who concur in asserting the general duty or obligation as a portion of scriptural truth, may differ from each other about the measures which it may be lawful or incumbent to adopt in discharging it. And errors in regard to the particular way in which the duty ought to be discharged ought not, in fairness, to prepossess men's minds against the general truth that such a duty is binding. The first question is this, Does an obligation to promote the welfare of true religion, and the prosperity of the church of Christ, attach to nations, as such, and to civil rulers as representing them, and as regulating their affairs? And if this question be settled in the affirmative, as we think it ought to be, then we have next to consider, In what way or by

what means ought the duty to be discharged? Upon this second question there is room for considerable difference of opinion, both with respect to what may lawfully be done with that view, and what is naturally fitted as a means to effect the end; while it is also plain, that, in regard to some of the topics comprehended in the general subject, the particular condition of the nation or community at the time may very materially affect or determine both what it is practicable and what it is expedient to do in the matter.

There are, indeed, some general principles upon this subject, which may be easily enough discovered and established from Scripture, reason, and experience, and which are now generally admitted; and these both of a positive and of a negative kind,—that is, setting forth both what civil rulers ought to do, and what they ought not to do, in the discharge of this duty, and for the attainment of this end. It is with the negative principle alone that we have to do at present, in considering the value of the testimony of the Reformers in support of the general obligation. And the two most important of them certainly are these: First, that civil rulers, in seeking to discharge their duty in regard to religion, must not assume any jurisdiction or authoritative control over the regulation of the affairs of the church of Christ; and, secondly, that they must not inflict upon men civil pains and penalties,—fines, imprisonment, or death,—merely on account of differences of opinion upon religious subjects. What is shut out by the first of these principles, is what is commonly understood by Erastianism; and it is precluded or rendered unlawful by what is revealed in Scripture concerning the character, constitution, and government of the church of Christ,—concerning the principles, the standard, and the parties by which its affairs ought to be regulated. What is shut out by the second of these principles is intolerance or persecution; and it is precluded or rendered unlawful by the want of any scriptural sanction for it,—by God's exclusive lordship over the conscience,—and by the natural rights and liberties which He has conferred upon men. These essential limitations of the right of interference on the part of civil rulers in religious matters seem to us very plain; but they have not been always seen and appreciated by those who have contended for the scriptural duty of nations and their rulers. There is nothing, indeed, in the maintenance of the general principle of the obligation of nations and their rulers, which, either by logical sequence

or by natural tendency, leads men to advocate either Erastianism or intolerance; and it is unwarranted and unfair to attempt to burden the general principle with the responsibility of rejecting or excluding either of the two negative positions above laid down. It is also true, however, that the first of them is still to this day disregarded and trampled upon in every Protestant established church in the world; for there is not now one in which the state has not sinfully usurped, and the church has not sinfully submitted to, Erastian domination. The second, which excludes as unlawful all intolerance or persecution, has been always denied and rejected by the Church of Rome; and as the denial of it seemed to have some countenance from Scripture, most of the Reformers continued to retain, in a greater or less degree, the sentiments upon this point in which the Church of Rome had instructed them.

Practically, it is a worse thing,—more injurious to the interests of religion and the welfare of the community, and more offensive to the feelings of Christian men,—that civil rulers should Erastianize the church, which they profess and design to favour, and should persecute those who dissent from it, than that they should, in fact, do nothing whatever in regard to religion, and with a view to its promotion. But it does not follow from this, that theoretically, as a matter of doctrine or speculation, it is a less error,—a smaller deviation from the standard of truth,—to deny altogether that any such duty is incumbent upon nations and their rulers, than to maintain some erroneous notions as to the way in which the duty ought to be discharged. We are firmly persuaded that all Erastianism and all intolerance are precluded as unlawful,—as sinfully interfering with the rights of the church and the rights of conscience; but still we are disposed to regard it as being quite as obvious and certain a truth, that a general obligation to aim at the promotion of the welfare of true religion and the prosperity of the church of Christ, attaches to nations and their rulers, as that everything which might be comprehended under the head of Erastianism or intolerance is precluded as unlawful. And it is very much upon this ground that we refuse to admit that the error of the Reformers, in sanctioning to some extent the Popish principle of intolerance and persecution, and especially in pressing the right of civil rulers to inflict punishment upon account of errors in religion beyond what the word of God

warrants or requires of them, is to be regarded as wholly neutralizing the weight of their testimony,—so far as human testimony is entitled to any weight in a matter of this sort,—in support of the doctrine as to the obligations attaching to nations and their rulers, with reference to true religion and the church of Christ. The general subject of the principles by which civil rulers ought to be guided, in the discharge of their duty with respect to religion, was not then carefully investigated. It was too commonly assumed, that the general obligation being once established, anything that had a *prima facie* appearance of possessing, or was at the time usually supposed to possess, any tendency or fitness to promote the end, might, and must, be tried in the performance of the duty. Both those who defended Erastianism and those who defended persecution, were accustomed to act upon this assumption, and to imagine that they had established their Erastian and intolerant principles respectively, when they had really done nothing more than establish the great general duty of the magistrate, without having proved the lawfulness or the obligation of those particular modes of discharging it.

A striking illustration of this may be found in the writings of Beza and Grotius,—two very eminent men. Beza wrote an elaborate treatise in defence of intolerant and persecuting principles, with special reference to the case of Servetus, entitled, "De Hæreticis a civili Magistratu puniendis." His leading object in this work is to prove that heretics and blasphemers may be lawfully put to death by the civil magistrate; and that Servetus, being a heretic and blasphemer, suffered only the merited punishment of his crimes; but all that he really does prove, so far as the general question is concerned, is only this,—that civil magistrates are entitled and bound, in the exercise of their authority, to aim at the promotion of the honour of God and the interests of truth, and, of course, at the discouragement of blasphemy and heresy. He proves this, and he proves it conclusively; in other words, he proves the scriptural authority of the great general principle from which the abstract lawfulness of national establishments of religion may be deduced. But he proves nothing more than this: he does not prove that, under the Christian dispensation, civil rulers are warranted, and much less bound, to inflict the punishment of death upon heretics and blasphemers; and neither does he prove that putting heretics and blasphemers to death has any real tendency or fitness, in the long run, as a means to discourage heresy and blasphemy.

Grotius, in like manner, wrote an elaborate treatise in defence of principles which were thoroughly Erastian, entitled, "De Imperio Summarum Potestatum circa Sacra." In order to accomplish this object, he just begins, as Beza had done, by establishing the general principle of the obligation of civil rulers to aim at the promotion of the welfare of religion and the prosperity of the church, and then virtually assumes that this settled the whole of the general question, leaving for subsequent investigation only the extent to which civil rulers ought to interfere authoritatively in the regulation and administration of the different departments of the ordinary business of the church. He proves satisfactorily, as Beza had done, the right and duty of civil rulers to aim at the promotion of the welfare of true religion and the prosperity of the church; but in establishing this position, he adduces nothing which really concludes in favour of the Erastian control over the church, which he assumed to be involved in it. A power, indeed, *circa sacra*,—the expression which Grotius employed in the title of his work,—Presbyterian and anti-Erastian divines have usually conceded to the civil magistrate; and, indeed, this is necessarily involved in the general principle to which we have so often referred, and which implies that his obligation to aim at the promotion of true religion entitles and requires him to employ his legitimate authority, or rightful jurisdiction, in civil things with a view to the advancement of the interests of religion. But a mere power, *circa sacra*, affords no sufficient warrant for the Erastian domination over the church, which it was the great object of Grotius's book to establish. Erastianism is a power not merely *circa sacra*, but *in sacris*,—a right to exercise proper jurisdiction or authoritative control in the actual regulation of ecclesiastical affairs, in the administration of the ordinary necessary business of the church, as an organized society; and this power is not only not involved in, or deducible from, the general principle of the duty of civil rulers to aim at the welfare of the church, but is precluded by all that Scripture makes known to us concerning the church, its relation to Christ and to His word, and the whole provision which He has made for its government.

These cases illustrate the distinction that ought to be made between the general principle that an obligation attaches to na-

tions and their rulers, to aim at the promotion of true religion and the prosperity of the church of Christ, and the adoption of any particular theory as to the means which may, or should, be employed for that purpose. All this tends to show that it is unwarrantable to burden the general principle with the particular applications that have often been made of it; while it also tends to afford a very strong presumption in favour of the clearness and certainty of the grounds, derived both from Scripture and reason, on which the general principle itself can be established.

It is right to mention, before leaving this branch of the subject, that the Reformers in general did not retain the whole of the intolerant and persecuting principles which they had been taught by the Church of Rome. They saw and acknowledged the unlawfulness and absurdity of the Popish principle of employing force or persecution for the purpose of leading men to make an outward profession of the truth. And, accordingly, they never gave any countenance to those wholesale persecutions which form so characteristic a feature of the great apostasy. The principal error on the subject of the magistrate's power with respect to religion which retained a hold of the minds of the generality of the Reformers, and perverted their sentiments and their conduct upon this whole subject, was the notion of the right and duty of civil rulers to punish men, and even to inflict the punishment of death, on account of heresy and blasphemy. They admitted the general principle of the right of civil rulers to inflict pains and penalties on account of heresy and blasphemy, though they would have restricted the punishment of death to those who were doing extensive injury in leading others into the commission of these sins. Now, this was a notion which, though it had no solid foundation to rest upon, and was both erroneous and dangerous, was not altogether destitute of something like plausible countenance in some scriptural statements, and especially in a natural enough misapplication of some considerations derived from the judicial law of Moses. The subject, indeed, is not free from difficulties; and it is not to be wondered at, that the notion above stated should have retained some hold of the minds of the Reformers. The question continued to perplex the minds of theologians for several generations; and it cannot be denied that, during nearly the whole even of the seventeenth century, Protestant divines in general ascribed, in speculation at least, to civil rulers, a power of

inflicting punishment on account of heresy, which is now universally rejected, except by the adherents of the Church of Rome.

Luther seems to have become convinced, that in his earlier writings he had spoken too loosely and too widely of the right of civil rulers to interfere in the regulation of the affairs of the church; though it ought to be mentioned, to his honour, that from the first he restricted their right to inflict punishment, on account of heresy or serious religious error, within narrower limits than almost any one of the Reformers. It may be worth while here to refer to two remarkable passages from Luther's later works, in the first of which he denies to civil rulers all right of authoritative interference or control in the regulation of the affairs of the church, and does so in language resembling, both in its substance and meaning, and in its tone and spirit, what our forefathers were accustomed to employ when contending, in opposition to the usurpations of the civil powers, for Christ's sole right to reign in His own kingdom, and to rule in His own house; and in the second of which he expressed his strong apprehension of the grievous injury which was likely to accrue to the Protestant church from the Erastian control which civil rulers were claiming and usurping over the regulation of its affairs, in return for the protection and assistance which they rendered to it. In a paper, addressed to Melancthon, and published in his "*Consilia*," Luther, after denying the right of bishops to exercise domination over the church, proceeds to say: "Episcopus, ut Princeps, multo minus potest supra Ecclesiam imponere quidquam; quia hoc esset prorsus confundere has duas Potestates, . . . et nos si admitteremus, tam essemus paris *sacrilegii* rei. Hic potius est moriendum, quam hanc *impietatem* et *iniquitatem* committere. Loquor de ecclesia, ut Ecclesia, distincta jam a civitate politica."* The other passage is too long to quote, but it very emphatically expresses Luther's deep apprehensions of great injury to religion from the growing interference of civil rulers in the affairs of the church. It can be easily proved that Melancthon fully shared in Luther's apprehensions of mischief and danger from this quarter. And, indeed, there are plain enough indications that the apprehensions which Melancthon entertained of injury to the Protestant church, and to the interests of true religion, from the interference of the civil authorities in

* Voetii Polit. Eccles., P. i., Lib. i., Tract. ii., c. iii., tom. i., p. 174.

the regulation of its affairs, was one of the considerations which weighed heavily upon his mind, and had some influence in producing that strong desire of an adjustment with the Church of Rome, and that tendency to the compromise of truth, or something like it, which formed so prominent a feature in his history. And we think it abundantly manifest, from a survey of the history of Protestantism for a period of three hundred years, that these apprehensions of Luther and Melancthon about the injurious tendency and effect of the authoritative interference of civil rulers in the regulation of the affairs of the church have been fully realized. The civil authorities, in most Protestant countries, aimed at, and succeeded in, getting very much the same control over the church which they professed to favour and assist, as the Pope had claimed and exercised over the church at large; and this has proved, in many ways, most injurious to the interests of true religion. Of all Protestant countries, England is the one where this claim of civil supremacy over the church was most openly put forth, most fully conceded, and most injuriously exercised; while our own beloved land—Scotland—is that in which it has all along been most strenuously and successfully resisted. Indeed, it was only in the year 1843 that the civil power *fully* succeeded in acquiring an Erastian control over the Presbyterian Establishment of Scotland, and reducing it to the same state of sinful subjection to which all other Protestant ecclesiastical establishments had long before bowed their necks.

Calvin, though he did not rise above the prevailing sentiments of his age in regard to the civil magistrate's right to punish heresy, manifested his usual comprehensive soundness and penetrating judgment in grasping firmly and accurately the true scriptural principle that ought to regulate the relation of the civil and the ecclesiastical authorities, so far as concerns the ordinary administration of the church's affairs, in opposition to all Erastian encroachments of the civil power. Mosheim's account of Calvin's sentiments upon this subject is undoubtedly correct, though, as we have had occasion to explain, he gives an erroneous representation of those of Zwingle. His words are worth quoting in the original, because they are more precise and definite than Murdock's, and much more than Maclaine's translation of them. Mosheim says: "Calvinus magistratum in res religionis potestatem angustis circumscribebat finibus, atque ecclesiam sui juris" (spiritual independence) "esse, seque ipsam per collegia Presbyterorum et Synodos seu conventus Presbyterorum, veteris ecclesiæ more, regere" (self-government) "debere adseverabat, tutelâ tamen et externâ curâ ecclesiæ magistratui relictâ."* The sentiments here ascribed, and justly ascribed, to Calvin, embody, with accuracy and precision, the sum and substance of all that has been usually contended for by Presbyterians, in opposition to Erastian claims and pretensions; and though Calvin was not called in providence to develop fully, and to apply in all their details, the principles which he professed upon this subject, yet the principles themselves, as he has stated them, and the practical applications which he did make of them to some questions of church discipline controverted between the civil and the ecclesiastical authorities of Geneva, establish, beyond all reasonable doubt, what side he would have taken in those subsequent speculations and practical proceedings, which may be said to constitute what is called the Erastian controversy.

Sec. II.—*Erastus and the Erastians.*

Thomas Erastus, who has given his name to this controversy, did not publish his sentiments till after the first generation of Reformers had been removed to their rest. He was a physician at Heidelberg, then the capital of the dominions of the Elector Palatine, and the head-quarters of Calvinism, as distinguished from Lutheranism, among the German churches; and seems to have been held in high estimation on account of his talents, acquirements, and general character. In 1568, an attempt was made to introduce into the churches of the Palatinate a more rigorous discipline with respect to the admission of men to the sacraments,—a subject which in that, and in one or two other Reformed churches, had hitherto been very much neglected. Erastus set himself to oppose this attempt at the reformation or purification of the church, and prepared, upon the occasion, a hundred theses or propositions,—afterwards reduced to seventy-five,—directed to the object of showing that Scripture did not sanction the claim of the church, as a society, or of its office-bearers, to excommunicate or exclude from the sacraments, on account of immoral conduct, men who made a

* Moshemii Institut., Sæc. xvi., sec. iii., P. ii., c. ii., § xii. Calvin. Instit., Lib. iv., c. xi., sec. 16. Revii Examen., p. 21.

profession of Christianity, and desired admission to the ordinances. These theses were not published, but were sent in manuscript to Beza, as the most influential man in the Reformed church after the death of Calvin. Beza wrote a full and able reply to them, and sent it to Erastus, who, soon after, in 1570, drew up a very full and elaborate answer to Beza, in six books, which he called "Thesium Confirmatio." Bullinger and Gualther, at that time the leading divines of Zurich,—the former the immediate successor, and the latter the son-in-law, of Zwingle,—were, to some extent, favourable to Erastus's view in regard to discipline and excommunication. They strenuously exerted themselves to prevent a public controversy upon the subject, and they succeeded in prevailing upon both parties to abstain from publishing their works. Thus matters remained until after Erastus's death, when, in 1589, his widow, who had removed to England, where such a project was sure to gain countenance, published at London, at the instigation and under the patronage of Archbishop Whitgift, both the Theses and the Confirmation of them, with some recommendatory letters of Bullinger and Gualther subjoined to them, and with fictitious names assigned both to the place of publication and the printer. When this work reached Beza, he at once published, in 1590, his original answer to Erastus's theses, under the title of "Tractatus pius et moderatus de Vera Excommunicatione et Christiano Presbyterio," with a very interesting preface, in which he gave some account of the history of this matter,—animadverted upon the sentiments of Bullinger and Gualther,—and declared his intention, though he was now seventy years of age, of preparing and publishing a full answer to the Confirmation,—an intention, however, which he did not carry into effect.

The works both of Erastus and Beza are chiefly occupied with a discussion of the subject of excommunication,—that is, with the investigation of the question, whether Scripture warrants and sanctions the exercise, by courts of ecclesiastical office-bearers, of the power of excluding from the participation of the sacraments professing Christians who are guilty of immorality,—Beza affirming this, and Erastus denying it, and arguing elaborately and ingeniously in support of his position, though obliged, from its intrinsic absurdity and palpable falsehood, to perpetrate some very considerable inconsistencies, as is explained in the first chapter of the second book of Gillespie's "Aaron's Rod Blossoming," where

there is a very interesting history of the origin and growth of Erastianism. Erastus's name, however, could not probably have been generally employed to designate a controversy which for more than two centuries has been commonly regarded and spoken of among Protestants as comprehending a discussion of the whole subject of the relation that ought to subsist between the civil and the ecclesiastical authorities, if he had confined himself rigidly to the one topic of excommunication, and to the examination of the scriptural grounds on which the right of excommunication is alleged to rest. And, accordingly, we find that, in the preface, and in the conclusion to his Theses, and still more fully in the first chapter of the third book of the Confirmation, he has distinctly entered upon the wider field above described, as embraced by the controversy which has since been called after his name. He has there explicitly ascribed to the civil magistrate a general jurisdiction, or right of authoritative control, in the regulation of the affairs of the church, and has denied that Christ has appointed a distinct government in the church for the administration of its ordinary necessary business; and these are the points on which the whole of what is usually understood to be comprehended in the Erastian controversy, and the whole subject of the authority of civil rulers in regard to religion and the church of Christ, really turn. Erastus has not only ascribed to the civil magistrate jurisdiction or authoritative control in ecclesiastical matters, and denied the appointment by Christ of a distinct government in the church; but he has indicated some of the leading arguments by which these views have ever since been, and continue to this day to be, defended. He has distinctly declared his concurrence* in the general principle which both Papists and Erastians have always been accustomed to adduce in support of their opposite views upon this subject,—namely, the absurdity of what they call an *imperium in imperio*, or, what is virtually the same thing, the necessity of there being one power and government which has supreme and ultimate jurisdiction over all matters, both civil and ecclesiastical,—Papists, of course, vesting this supremacy in the church, or in the Pope, as representing it; and Erastus, and all who have since been called after his name, vesting it in the civil magistrate. It is thus manifest, that though Erastus's book is chiefly occupied

* Pp. 159-161.

with the subject of excommunication, he really laid the foundation among Protestants of what is usually called the Erastian controversy, and indicated the leading grounds which have commonly been taken by those who have since held what Presbyterian divines have always been accustomed to designate Erastian views, on the whole subject of the relation that ought to subsist between the civil and the ecclesiastical authorities.

Erastus admits, indeed, that the civil magistrate, in administering ecclesiastical affairs, is bound to take the word of God as his only rule and standard; and in this he is less Erastian than some who, in modern times, have been ranked under that designation,—not, perhaps, without some injustice to him, but most certainly without any injustice to them,—inasmuch as the persons to whom we refer have asserted principles, and pursued a course of conduct, which led, by necessary logical sequence, to the conclusion that the law of the land, *as such*,—that is, *irrespective of its accordance with the word of God*,—is a right and proper standard for regulating the affairs of the church. But while Erastus admits that the word of God is the only rule by which the affairs of the church ought to be regulated, he denies to ecclesiastical office-bearers the right of judging authoritatively as to the application of scriptural statements to the decision of the questions which must arise occasionally wherever a church exists, and makes the civil magistrate the supreme and ultimate judge of all those questions connected with the administration of the affairs of the church, which require to be judicially or forensically determined.

There is one important point on which Erastus deviated further from the opinions commonly entertained than most of those who have been usually called after his name. Most of those who have been described—and, upon the grounds already explained, justly described—by Presbyterian divines as Erastians, have admitted a distinction of functions, though not of government, in relation to civil and ecclesiastical affairs; in other words, while they have in general contended, more or less openly and explicitly, that all judicial or forensic questions about the admission of men to office and ordinances must be ultimately, and in the last resort, decided by the civil magistrate,—thus denying a distinct government in the church,—they have usually conceded that ecclesiastical office-bearers alone can legitimately *administer* these ordinances,—thus admitting a distinction of function between magistrates and

ministers. Even the Church of England expressly excludes the civil magistrate from a right to administer the word and sacraments. But Erastus has plainly enough indicated his opinion that the civil magistrate might warrantably and legitimately administer these ordinances himself, if his other duties allowed him leisure for the work:* "Quod addis, non licere Magistratui, re ita postulante, docere et Sacramenta administrare (si modo per negotia possit utrique muneri sufficere), id verum non est. Nusquam enim Deus vetuit."

As Erastus has plainly asserted all the views which we have ascribed to him, so Beza has opposed and refuted them all, except, of course, the position which, as we have seen, Erastus conceded,—namely, that the word of God is the only rule or standard by which the affairs of the church ought to be regulated; and in the opposition which he made to them, he had the decided and cordial concurrence of the generality of the Reformed divines, and of all sound Presbyterian theologians in every age.

Erastians, in modern times, have sometimes appealed to the Reformers in support of their opinions, and have professed to derive some support from that quarter; and I have admitted that the testimony of the Reformers is not so full, explicit, and conclusive, as upon the subject of Presbyterian church government, and the popular election of ecclesiastical office-bearers,—and explained the reason of this. Still it can be shown,—and I think I have produced sufficient materials to establish the conclusion,—that the testimony of the Reformers in general is not for, but against, Erastian views of the powers and rights of civil magistrates in the administration of ecclesiastical affairs. We may briefly advert to some of the principal grounds on which Erastians have claimed the testimony of the Reformers, or some of them, in favour of their opinions.

First, they appeal to some rather strong and incautious statements of Luther and Zwingle, in instigating and encouraging—the one the Elector of Saxony, and the other the magistrates of Zurich—to zeal and activity in exercising their power to overturn the Popish system, and promote the cause of the Reformation. We admit that some of the statements referred to indicate, to some extent, a want of clear and accurate conceptions of the line of demarcation between the provinces of the civil and the ecclesiastical

* P. 265.

authorities; but we have already said enough to show that this fact is not one of much importance or relevancy, and to prove that Erastians have no right to appeal to the mature and deliberate testimony of Luther and Zwingle.

Of a similar kind, though of still less real value, is the reference sometimes made to certain statements made by our own Reformer, John Knox, especially in his Appellation or appeal to the nobility of Scotland against the sentence of death pronounced upon him by the ecclesiastical authorities. There is really nothing so objectionable or inaccurate in any statement they have been able to produce from Knox, as in some of those made by Luther and Zwingle. Knox had the benefit of the light thrown upon this subject by the comprehensive and sagacious mind of Calvin; and he has not been betrayed into any statement distinctively Erastian,—any statement implying a denial of a distinct government in the church, or an ascription to civil rulers of jurisdiction in ecclesiastical affairs. His appeal, primarily and directly, respected a matter which was in its own nature *purely civil*, and lay within the province of the magistrate,—namely, a sentence of death which had been pronounced upon him by the ecclesiastical authorities; and in calling upon the civil powers to reverse this sentence, and to preserve him from its consequence, he did not need to ascribe, and he has not ascribed, to them any jurisdiction over the affairs of the church. His more general exhortations to them to exercise their power in opposition to the Papacy, and for the promotion of Protestant truth, are all resolvable into the general principle as to the duty of nations and their rulers, which we have already explained and illustrated,—a principle held by all the Reformers. In short, no statements have been produced from Knox which favour Erastianism; and in the views laid down in the first Scotch Confession, which he prepared, upon the subject of the church, its constitution, and the principles on which its government ought to be conducted, there is enough to exclude everything which could be justly comprehended under that designation,—everything which subsequent Presbyterian divines would have refused or hesitated to adopt.

Secondly, Another consideration usually founded on by modern Erastians, is the measure of countenance and approbation which Bullinger and Gualther gave to the writings of Erastus. Their approbation, however, seems to have been extended only to what

was the direct and primary subject of Erastus's Theses,—namely, excommunication,—without including his peculiar opinions about the powers of the civil magistrate generally. And even in regard to the subject of excommunication, Beza has shown, in the preface to his answer to Erastus, by extracts which he produces from their writings, that they were very far from concurring in all his views upon this point; and, especially, that they did not adopt his interpretation of those passages of Scripture which bear upon the subject of excommunication.*

The only other topic adduced by modern Erastians, in order to procure some countenance for their views from the Reformers, is the fact, that two or three other divines of that period, in addition to Bullinger and Gualther,—though not any one of the first rank, or of great name and authority,—gave some sanction to this notion, that when there was no Christian magistrate in the church, ecclesiastical office-bearers should themselves exercise all the functions of discipline, including excommunication; *but* that when there was a Christian magistrate, exercising his authority in protecting and assisting the church, the exercise of discipline should be left to him, and should not be assumed by ecclesiastical office-bearers. We admit that this was an unreasonable and ill-founded notion, and that the men who held it entertained defective and inaccurate views in regard to the rights and functions of the civil and the ecclesiastical authorities. But it did not prevail among the divines of that period to such an extent,—viewed either with reference to their number or their standing,—as to affect the import of the testimony of the Reformers as a body. It is a notion which has been often since mooted, more or less explicitly, by Erastian writers, who, in their want of argument, seem to think that this pretence may be conveniently employed for the purpose of palliating, if not justifying, some degree of authoritative civil interference in ecclesiastical affairs. It is at bottom very similar to the distinction that has been sometimes set up in our own day,—though its authors have never ventured to make any very distinct or explicit application of it,—between a church of Christ, absolutely considered, and an established church.

But the falsehood of the distinction, and of everything approach-

* *Vide* De Moor, Comment. in Marck. Compend., c. xxxiii., § xxi., tom. vi., p. 400.

ing to it or resembling it, and its utter inadequacy to afford any countenance to any authoritative interference of civil rulers in ecclesiastical affairs, have been, centuries ago, demonstrated by Presbyterian writers, by establishing the two following positions: First, that the civil magistrate does not, by becoming a Christian and a member of the church,—by taking the church under his protection, and exerting his authority and influence for promoting its prosperity,—by conferring upon it any temporal favours or privileges,—acquire any new right or power in addition to what is competent to him simply as a magistrate, and, more especially, that he does not thereby acquire any right to assume any ecclesiastical function or jurisdiction, or to interfere authoritatively in the regulation of any ecclesiastical matters; and, secondly, that the church and its office-bearers not only are not bound, but are not at liberty, to delegate or concede, for any reason or in any circumstances, to any party, the discharge of any of the duties which Christ has imposed upon them,—the execution of any of the functions which He has bestowed upon them,—but are bound at all times, in all circumstances, and at all hazards, to do themselves the whole necessary business of Christ's house, on their own responsibility, subject to Him alone, and according to the standard of His word. These positions can be conclusively established,—they go to the root of the matter,—they overturn from the foundation all Erastian encroachments upon the rights and liberties of the church of Christ, and all the pretences by which they have been, or can be, defended,—they fully vindicate the struggles and contendings of our forefathers against the interference of the civil authorities in ecclesiastical matters,—they fully warrant the proceedings on the part of those who now constitute the Free Church of Scotland, which led to the Disruption of the ecclesiastical establishment of this country,—and they establish not only the warrantableness, but the obligation and the necessity, of those steps by which we have been brought, under God's guidance, into the position we now occupy.

Sec. III.—*Erastianism during the Seventeenth Century.*

To the Erastian controversy I have already had occasion to advert in our earlier discussions. I have had to notice the controversy between the emperors and the popes of the middle ages,

about the respective provinces and functions of the civil and the ecclesiastical authorities, or, as it was then commonly called, the contest *inter imperium et sacerdotium;* and I took the opportunity then of explaining fully the distinction between the Popish doctrine upon this subject, and that held by the Presbyterians, which is often—from ignorance or something worse—confounded with it; while, in connection with the sixteenth century, I had to give some account of the views of Erastus himself, who has had the honour of giving his name to this controversy, and of the controversy in England during Elizabeth's reign.

The seventeenth century, however, was the principle era of this important controversy about the principles that ought to regulate the relation between the civil and the ecclesiastical authorities, and to determine their respective provinces and functions,—the era at which the real merits of the whole subject, and of all the topics involved in it, were most fully developed, and the most important works on both sides were composed. The subject has been revived in our own day; and it is now possessed of at least as much practical importance as ever it had, and must always be peculiarly interesting to every one connected with the Free Church of Scotland. I shall only mention the principal occasions when this subject gave rise to controversial discussion, and the most important works which these different branches of the controversy produced.

The earliest discussions upon this subject, in the seventeenth century, were connected with the rise and progress of the Arminian controversy in Holland, and arose out of the interference of the civil authorities in the theological disputes which the views of Arminius and his followers produced,—so much so, that it has been said that this might be regarded as a *sixth* point or article in the Arminian controversy. The Arminians generally adopted Erastian views,—that is, of course, they ascribed a larger measure of jurisdiction or authority to the civil magistrate in religious and ecclesiastical matters, than Calvinists and Presbyterians generally have thought warranted by the word of God. The cause of this was partly, no doubt, because they found that, during the earlier stages of the controversy, previous to the calling of the Synod of Dort, the civil authorities generally favoured them, and were disposed to promote their views; while the ecclesiastical authorities—the church courts—decidedly opposed their innovations. But

their leaning to Erastianism had a deeper foundation than this, in the general character and tendency of their doctrinal views,—especially in their latitudinarianism, which implied or produced a want of an adequate sense of responsibility connected with the discovery and the maintenance of all God's truth; and thus tended to dispose them towards an allowance or toleration of the interference of a foreign and incompetent authority in the decision of religious controversies, and in the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs.

In 1614, the States of Holland, under Arminian influence, issued a decree imposing great limitations, amounting virtually to a prohibition, upon the public discussion of the controverted points, —very similar, indeed, both in its substance and in its object, to the declaration afterwards issued by royal authority, in England, under Laud's influence. The orthodox divines—especially Sibrandus Lubbertus, professor at Franeker—attacked this decree, at once as requiring what was sinful in itself, that is, a neglect or violation of a duty which God had imposed,—and as involving a sinful assumption of authority on the part of the civil powers. Grotius defended this decree, and the principles on which it was based, in several pieces contained in the sixth volume of his theological works; the principal of which, entitled "Ordinum Hollandiæ ac Westfrisiæ Pietas," contains a good specimen of the combination of Erastianism with the most latitudinarian views in regard to doctrine. He wrote, about the same time, his famous treatise, "De Imperio Summarum Potestatum circa Sacra," which I have had occasion to mention,—an elaborate defence of a system of the grossest Erastianism, such as some even of his Prelatic correspondents in England could not digest. This work was not published till 1647, two years after its author's death. Another branch of the same controversy originated in a work of Utenbogard, minister at the Hague, a very zealous and influential supporter of Arminianism, published in Dutch in 1610, on the authority of the Christian magistrate in ecclesiastical matters. This was answered, in 1615, by Walæus, afterwards professor of theology at Leyden, in a very valuable treatise, entitled "De munere Ministrorum Ecclesiæ, et Inspectione Magistratus circa illud," contained in the second volume of his collected works, which also include some important treatises on the Arminian controversy, especially in defence of Molinæus's "Anatome Arminianismi" against Corvinus. Utenbogard's treatise was defended,

and Walæus's answered, by two men of very superior talents and learning—Gerhard John Vossius and Episcopius. Vossius was a man of great learning, and leaned very much to Arminianism, though he did not fully embrace the whole of that system of theology. His answer to Walæus was written in 1616, in the form of a letter to Grotius; and it is contained in a very curious and interesting work, entitled, "Præstantium ac Eruditorum Virorum Epistolæ Ecclesiasticæ et Theologicæ,"—a work published by Limborch, and designed to advance the cause of Arminianism. It was also published separately in a small quarto, in 1669, under the title of "Dissertatio Epistolica de jure Magistratus in rebus Ecclesiasticis." Episcopius's defence of Utenbogard was published in 1618, entitled, "De jure Magistratus circa Sacra," and is contained in the second volume of his works. The controversy upon this subject between the Calvinists and the Arminians continued, without any material change of ground, after the Synod of Dort, in 1618–19; and there is some discussion of it, on the one side, in the "Censura" of the Leyden divines, on the Confession of the Remonstrants; and, on the other, in Episcopius's "Apologia pro Confessione," in reply to the "Censura."

A somewhat different aspect was given to the controversy, by the publication, in 1641, of a small work by Vedelius, entitled, "De Episcopatu Constantini Magni." Vedelius was a Calvinist, professor of theology at Franeker, and had written a valuable book, which was very galling to the Arminians, entitled, "De Arcanis Arminianismi," and was answered by Episcopius. He professed to reject the doctrine of the Arminians, in regard to the jurisdiction of the civil magistrate with respect to religious matters, and to assign to him much less authority,—a much more limited right of interference,—than they had done; but his views did not satisfy the generality of orthodox divines, who still thought them somewhat Erastian, and maintained that, in opposing Popish errors, he had gone too far to the other extreme, and had ascribed to the civil power too much authority in religious matters. From the very modified views held by Vedelius upon this subject, his opponents, in answering him, were led to deal more closely than had ever been done before, with the real intricacies and difficulties of the question, and with the minuter distinctions which are necessary for the more full development and the more exact elucidation of the different topics which it involves; and *their* works, in consequence,