

**THE SCHOOLS. OR, A COMPARATIVE
STATEMENT OF THE RELATIVE POSITION
AND DISTINCTIVE
PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW, OLD, OLDER,
AND OLDEST, SCHOOLS OF
PRESBYTERIANS, IN THE UNITED STATES**

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The Schools. Or, A Comparative Statement of the Relative Position and Distinctive Principles of the New, Old, Older, and Oldest, Schools of Presbyterians, in the United States by Alexander Blaikie

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ALEXANDER BLAIKIE

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IN THE UNITED STATES.

BY A PRESBYTERIAN.

Rev Alexander B. Lee
now of South

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THE SCHOOLS.

To one of these three classes, (and their compounds,) Congregationalists, Prelatists, and Presbyterians, the varied Christian sects belong.

Though "a Congregational society was formed in the house of Nicholas Fox, in Alden Lane in London, in 1592, yet the oldest records of this species of church order are said to exist in Massachusetts," and "the manner in which Congregationalism took its rise in New-England, renders it sufficiently divine."—*Cong'l Year Book for 1853.*

As a form of church government, it includes Orthodox, Baptists, Universalists, Unitarians, and all who have neither bishop nor presbytery to rule their churches.

Prelacy embraces Popery, and all other churches which are governed by bishops, and have no ruling elders ordained "in every church."

Its "tactical succession," says the official calendar of the church, "may be traced through three distinct channels, — all emanating from Jerusalem, and combining in England. The first by the apostle who carried the gospel into Britain in the beginning of the Christian dispensation; the second coming through Arles in France; the third through the Italian church, and even a fourth may be traced through St. David's in Wales."

The *addenda* to this official calendar says, "The Methodist Episcopal Church preserved the office, although they could not get the outward divine commission in tactical succession." — *Philosophy of Sectarianism*, p. 341.

Keeping these things in view, it will be seen that Presbyterianism, as a form of church government, is entirely distinct from both these orders in their diversified divisions and combinations. The one places the power to rule a church in a bishop, or his superior; the other in the votes of the majority of a single congregation.

Presbyterianism, depending for its very being on having elders ordained in every church to feed the flock of God, enjoins, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine."

After the order of the synagogue, this form of church government was adopted by our Saviour, established by the Holy Ghost, and applied by the apostles, and other ministers of Jesus Christ, before the close of the canon of divine revelation.— *Acts xiv. 23*; *Tit. i. 5*; *Acts xx. 17, 28*; and *1st Peter v. 1*.

Being, however, entrusted to men who are sanctified but in part, it has its divisions. Of these, the more prominent in the United States, are the New School, Old School, Older School, and Oldest School. The term school is applied to their respective combined variations of doctrine, worship, and discipline.

The distinction of New and Old Schools originated in consequence of an unscriptural union, formed by the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, with Congregationalists, in A. D. 1801, which came to maturity in thirty-six years, when it was discovered that no less than sixteen doctrinal errors were taught in the denomination, and a majority of their General Assembly, on May 23d, 1837, abrogated said "Plan of Union."— *Baird's Digest, p. 716*. Consequently, on May 17th, 1838, two General Assemblies were constituted in Philadelphia, and the New and Old Schools became from that day distinct religious bodies. The New School, maintaining

that, as they had never been arraigned and tried constitutionally, they alone acted constitutionally, and declared themselves to be the Constitutional Church. Their Assembly forthwith elected their Board of Trustees, and claimed both the property and the name of the previous General Assembly.—*Ib. p. 772.*

When to them was adjudged, by Judge Moulton Rogers and a Jury in *Nisi Prius*, both the name and property of the original body,—the only appeal being then to the full bench in bank, when a new trial was “awarded,”—it was mutually agreed that the property in the different localities should be held by the previous occupants, and the assemblies were designated by the prefix or suffix of Old or New School.

The name, “Old School,” was imposed judicially by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, on May 8th, 1839, and announced by Chief Justice Gibson, thus: “The division which, for purposes of designation, it is convenient to call the Old School party.”—*Dig. p. 796.* Consequently, while they keep up their separate parallel organizations, neither *party* can legally nor honorably assume absolutely the original designation of the formerly united body.

These schools agree generally, in their discipline by sessions, and in their manner of worship.

For some years immediately previous to A. D. 1856, they each employed as the matter of their praise to God, beside the Imitation of the Psalms, by the Rev. Dr. Watts, and hundreds of other un-inspired hymns, at least one hundred and twenty human hymns, used in common with them by Universalists* and other Congregationalists, and they use these still on every Sabbath. To these, in all in number about eight hundred and thirty, in that year the Old School added *selections* from parts of forty-six of the Psalms, — from the version used by other Presbyterians for above two hundred years, and used also by their fathers, previously to A. D. 1753. Since the organization of the parent General Assembly, in 1789, these had been gradually and generally superseded in her congregations and families, by Mr. Joel Barlow's revision of "Dr. Watts' Imitations of the Psalms," — *Dig. p. 208*; and in 1802, it was "thought expedient that the hymns of Dr. Watts," and the "hymns selected by Dr. Dwight from various authors," should be cheerfully allowed where a sentimental "taste" preferred them, to the version of the Psalms of the Kirk of Scotland, — *Dig. p. 208-9*, — which had been used by all other Presbyterians in America previously to the year 1774.

The New School, differing in doctrine so entirely

* Compare Old School hymns with those of Hosea Ballou, 2d.