

Church and even members in full communion with the Church are utterly unknown to them. This is surely not feeding the flock of God over the which the Holy Ghost hath made them bishops; and the result is that their work is allowed to fall with crushing weight upon the teaching elder, which inevitably impairs his power in the pulpit because he has not the requisite time to make his sermons what they should be, impairs his health and usefulness, for he cannot with impunity perform the duties of several men, breeds discontentment with minister and people, leads to short and unsatisfactory pastorates, stunts the intellectual and spiritual growth of young ministers, and generally inflicts weakness upon our Presbyterianism. Is it Presbyterianism at all when the majority of Presbyters simply hold office and do little or nothing? I utter no censure. I merely state facts.

Then as to the higher courts of our Church, have they not through the supineness and absence of ruling elders, through some cause or other, virtually become clerical? This is a great weakness. It is well known that Presbyteries often sit without a single ruling elder. And the attendance of such in Synods and General Assemblies is comparatively small. Of the ruling elders appointed commissioners to our last General Assembly sixty-five failed to attend, and usually many of those who do put in an appearance remain only a few days. How is this? Who are to blame? Ministers, or elders, or both?

Elders say that they are not familiar with our technical forms of business, and, therefore, feel little interest in it. Let them master these simple forms. They are based on common sense and Scripture, and are printed and accessible to all. Let Sessions and Presbyteries see to it that all their members possess and study the little volume just issued by our General Assembly known as "Rules and Forms of Procedure," and this difficulty will speedily disappear.

Elders sometimes whisper, if they do not frankly speak it out, that they cannot endure the domineering spirit, and wordy debates of the clerical members of these courts, and hence their absence. Well, it seems a pity that they should be so timid. They are not always so in other walks of life. But without defending or condemning the discussions and the verbiage of ecclesiastics, I may be allowed to say that these good brethren have the remedy in their own hands. Let them rise in sufficient force and put down this domineering spirit at the same time showing themselves patterns of meekness, and let them speak and move with so much clearness and point as to make transparently manifest the folly of wordy disputations.

But elders sometimes say they have no time to attend ecclesiastical Courts. This may be true in the case of poor men and of those who are not their own masters and who live far from the place of meeting; but all our elders are not in this condition, there must be a large number of them neither poor nor servants, but thoroughly free and able were they so disposed to give all the time that is required. But whatever may be the cause, and whoever may be to blame, what I venture to allege is that in so far as there is failure to appreciate the spiritual functions of the eldership and to render a full measure of service by those who hold the office this is a serious departure from our fundamental conception of the constitution of the Church—a decided weakness and great hindrance to the spread of Presbyterianism.

III. A third hindrance is the imperfect exercise of discipline. Imperfect in two ways, by excess and by defect. We have sometimes too much Episcopal supervision by the congregational and the district Presbyteries, and sometimes too little. Discipline is defined in our Book of Procedure as "an exercise of that spiritual authority which the Lord Jesus Christ has appointed in His Church. Its object is threefold; the glory of God, the purity of the Church, and the spiritual good of the offender." I do not think that discipline should be limited to offenders, and it should certainly aim at the edification of the Church, its guidance and growth as well as its purity. But this in passing.

It is obvious that Sessions and Presbyteries in the exercise of discipline may go beyond their province, may "intermeddle with matters which are purely civil," or show "an undue solicitude to pry into the private conduct or family concerns of individuals," and an unwise readiness "to interfere officially in personal quarrels, or to engage in the investigation of secret wickedness."

It is possible, moreover, that these courts may exhibit a disposition to ignore the well-defined rights of the people. There is grave danger in any such tendency in the present day. Respect and veneration for authority of this sort has passed away, and it is well that it should be so, whatever ecclesiastics may think about it, because it was only a religious superstition which held sway as the Church was ignorant, inactive, and corrupt. The truth is, that in the Apostolic Church the people exercised their power not only in the election of all office-bearers, but also, under certain restrictions, in maintaining discipline, in seeking the edification of the Church, and in determining doctrinal matters. It was to the people, and not to ecclesiastics, to the whole "Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ" that the Apostle Paul wrote: "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do" (1 Thess. v. 11). As if he had said, I have entrusted to you the delicate offices of mutual spiritual consolation, and the arduous task of edifying or building up one another in your most holy faith, and you have successfully performed them both.

It was also to the people, to the church at Rome, that he wrote: "Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine ye have learned, and avoid them" (Rom. xvi. 17). You are competent to understand and to judge touching my doctrine, and you are to cut off those who practically set it at naught by avoiding them, by shunning them, by refusing to have any fellowship with them. And still more directly he says to the people, the church at Corinth: "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor. v. 13). "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment which was inflicted of many" (2 Cor. ii. 6). Passages which make it plain enough that while Presbyters, or Bishops, are the executive in the exercise of discipline, yet the people are not to be ignored, their aid is to be invoked in an orderly

way for the practical enforcement of discipline, and it can only be effective when their intelligence and spiritual life are sufficiently high to carry out with vigour the decisions of the Presbyters. Not only so, but you recollect how in grave doctrinal matters the people were associated with the apostles and elders. The decision touching the case from Antioch before the Synod of Jerusalem is formulated in these words: "Then pleased it the apostles and elders with the whole Church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas" (Acts xv. 22); the utmost care being taken to guard against the slightest semblance of anything looking in the direction of an Hierarchy, and to bring out the idea that the Church of Christ is not so much a *potestas* as a *libertas* in which the rights of all the people and even the feeblest member are most fully secured. This is the true Presbyterian, and, as we believe, apostolic, conception of the Church; and hence Presbyterianism rightly administered secures all the freedom, and popular rights, and spiritual purity of communion which can be claimed for Congregationalism without its facilities for disintegration, its incapacity to deal with heresy and ministerial aberrations, and its practical denial of the visible and organic unity and true catholicity of the Church.

But has Presbyterianism been always administered in this liberal spirit, or has not mere ecclesiasticism been sometimes unduly magnified? Have we sufficiently emphasised this conception of the church as a *libertas*—a living spiritual body in which every member has his own functions and inalienable rights? We may be sure of this, that all unwarrantable ecclesiastical meddlings with the Scriptural rights and powers of the people are grave hindrances to the growth of our system, especially among intelligent, educated and independent people.

I do not forget, however, that failure in discipline may occur through defect, through laxness, as well as through the excessive exercise of power; and probably there is not so much uncomfortable fidelity in our day as indefensible remissness. The tares are allowed to grow among the wheat pretty freely and rankly in certain portions of the field. Some sins, indeed, are deemed disgraceful but others pass muster as very reputable. While drunkenness and flagrant immorality are openly denounced, meanness, covetousness, secret dishonesties which lead to public disasters, extortion, extravagance, worldliness, and wily defrauding of the Lord's treasury are not often dealt with as sins of special heinousness. I do not mean to say that these are easily laid hold of as matters of discipline or even as subjects of reprobation from the pulpit. They are so respectable and so closely wedded to religious matters in many communities as to be unpopular themes of discourse. And I do not say that we can suspend a man from church membership on the mere suspicion of his being secretly addicted to any one of them. We cannot cut him off because we know that he has hundreds of thousands in precarious bank stocks and such like, and yet pleads instant and helpless poverty the moment he is appealed to for the Lord's work; but we may try to teach him common truthfulness and honesty and get him to cease saying that he is poor and helpless when he is only close and mean. I do not say that discipline can make the Church immaculate. It argues supreme conceit and self-righteousness in any church to say that she can get wholly rid of canting hypocrites and subtle religious frauds, or of men who at heart love the world better than Christ and prize a comedy or a tragedy more than a prayer-meeting. We cannot discipline men for faults of heart—invisible sins—and we cannot expel impalpable devils. But we can denounce their works in scripture terms; and we can by acts of discipline, too, make it understood that the Church of God is not a shelter, a refuge, a hiding place for respectable impenitent sinners. We can give it out with peculiar emphasis that the Church and the world are not one, that spirituality of heart and life, honest cross-bearing and cheerful submission to the law of Christ are the conditions upon which men can retain their status in His kingdom; and we can make it just as hard for the disorderly, insubordinate, excommunicated man of broad acres and high social standing to pass from one congregation to another as it is for the rejected penniless man. We can show with all kindness but with all firmness that just as God is no respecter of persons, so sin and ungodliness when indulged in wholesale and in high places find no more tolerance or approval with the Church than when clad in rags. And we may be sure again, that in so far as discipline breaks down in this direction, through partial, feeble, time-serving laxness the spiritual life of the Church is impaired and her real progress hindered as thoroughly, and it may be more so, than by the excessive exercise of ecclesiastical power.

And is it too much to hint that Presbyterial supervision of ministers and congregations is seldom excessive? To put the matter mildly and cautiously, are there not cases in which the people feel keenly that ministers are continued in charges as well as on the Probationer's roll long "after their usefulness is gone?" And cases in which ministers justly complain that the people are allowed with impunity to repudiate their righteous obligations and to resort to the starving-out process which is by no means unheard of in Canada and the United States? And in the distribution of congregations are there not anomalies thoroughly indefensible on any sound principle of business or common sense resulting in enormous waste of money and of intellectual and spiritual power? Do we not all know villages and towns, for example, with ambitious looking church edifices struggling under intolerable burdens of debt, feebly supporting, or thoroughly starving two or three ministers—perhaps not all Presbyterian—where one could do the work much better than three, and in a sweeter and more Christian temper of mind? How much better in such cases that men should be scattered abroad and go to the heathen, or to aid honoured brethren in the rough fields of Canada where one man is sometimes left to struggle amid the duties of five or six? Now, all these things are theoretically under Presbyterial jurisdiction, and, without insisting upon them further, it seems to me that imperfect discipline in the forms indicated, and in others that might be mentioned, is no small hindrance to the spread of Presbyterianism.

IV. I notice, fourthly, hindrances which spring out of cer-

tain erroneous notions respecting the ministerial office. There are two opposite errors in this connection which damage our cause, viz., making too much of the office and making too little of it.

Both ministers and people sometimes think that official dignity is the main thing. This comes natural and easy to the pride of man's heart. Who does not like to be dressed up in a little official dignity, be it as a magistrate, an alderman, an editor, or a divine? Besides, mere official elevation readily fits into the natural indolence of man. It is far easier to put on airs than to hold a position by honest service and downright hard work. And we must not forget that this sort of thing is promoted by the prodigious influence of the Latin Church, by State Churchism, and by Sacerdotalism, all of which exercise an untold moulding power in this direction. They set the fashion in ecclesiastical matters, and determine the general style of our churches and all their appointments. They settle the form and meaning of all the little extras in posture and dress that make public devotional services aristocratic. They see great beauty and religious significance, for example, in the absence of the ordinary collar from the minister's coat, and in his bandaging his throat in a special manner, and making a clean sweep of his beard, and wearing certain variegated habiliments in the house of God. And people like to have clergymen clothed in seemly robes of office and adorned with goodly sounding titles that they may look up to them with special reverence. We have nearly everywhere a few aspiring persons who have a secret craving after this sort of thing; and it is not surprising that plain Presbyters, compassed with human infirmities like other men, seeing this kind of thing is demanded, and is so easily supplied, requires so little brains and education—I say it is not surprising that they should be tempted to yield to it, and grow into the idea that they are not simply "your servants for Jesus' sake," but "lords over God's heritage."

But it is a mistake on our part. It is neither Christ-like nor apostolic. It widens the gulf of separation already existing between ministers and the masses and disgusts vigorous thinking minds from whose ranks Presbyterianism must grow. Besides, we cannot go far enough to meet the wishes of the unthinking ones who take this direction, and hence when they ascend to a sufficient height in fashion and in the social scale, and descend a sufficient depth in ignorance and forgetfulness of God's truth they take leave of us altogether in order to gratify their longings to the full.

Here is one extreme, certainly alien to our system and injurious to our progress, the attempt to make too much of our office. But the opposite extreme is equally hurtful, the tendency to depreciate and degrade the office. It is plain, for example, that it is a degradation of the pulpit to turn it into a stage. In this case there is neither gospel instruction nor successful sport. The comedy and tragedy furnished in the pulpit in response to the desire manifested for such in certain quarters is of an inferior order. Theatre-goers are not to be attracted or converted by chaff. They know very well that they can get something far better and more to their mind from professional artists who are supplied with the appropriate music and scenery to set off their plays.

It is also a lowering of the sacred office for ministers to undertake the work of the daily press, to discuss science, and politics, and literature, and secular themes generally instead of proclaiming God's saving grace.

And why cannot congregations see that it is a ruinous waste of a minister's time and a degradation of his office to be obliged to attend all the paltry meetings some eccentric people may wish to have in his parish? Deacons and committees of management should certainly know that he is not solemnly ordained by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery to attend countless tea-meetings, and make funny speeches, and be the patron of petty shows, small imitations, under a religious name, of the big travelling shows of the country.

Is it not a degradation of the office to have a minister hired, paid as much as he is worth, as it was lately expressed in a religious paper, to be virtually the manager of a commercial concern under the name of a congregation of the saints, and to be esteemed very highly for his work's sake so long as he can secure a good dividend to the shareholders in the form of pew-rents, or show himself able to hold the mastery of the mortgages on the church in spite of the hard times; but failing this, to be dismissed—reduced to the rank of "stated supply" in the United States and in Canada to the "Probationers' list"?

Is not the office degraded by the people when, with the utmost comfort, and competency, and, in many instances luxuriance, in their own homes, they compel the minister to live among them in circumstances which would be quite appropriate were he in the heart of paganism? For no one can deny that we are all, laymen as well as ministers, free to go to the heathen and to live among them as tent-makers or corn-growers, clad in sheep-skins and goat-skins, dwelling in caves and dens of the earth, and counted off-scourings of all the things, while we seek to save their souls. These things may be inevitable and pre-eminently meritorious among savages. But they are not the style of things for highly favoured Christian lands. I cannot think that it is fitted to promote the success of the work at home or to induce you or your sons to enter it, that it is a fair interpretation of the Lord's mind, a correct exegesis of His words, "that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel," "that the labourer is worthy of his hire," to have ministers settled in parishes with great solemnity, and "under very promising circumstances," as it is usually expressed in the papers on such occasions, and then to receive as the united offerings from their flocks something less than the income of clerks and carters. But without pressing the matter further, what is to be done in the premises? How are we to check this tendency to official assumption on the one hand and degradation on the other? Very many things may be necessary for this purpose, but one especially. By our own conduct—those of us in office or seeking the office—we must give the people the true idea of the minister of Christ. We must show them that he is a man, every inch of him, not dependent on dress and surroundings—a man of God to the core—consecrated soul and body to the Lord; ordained to speak the truth before God in Christ; licensed to preach the gospel, not licensed to serve