

gaging manners. None, therefore, ought to regard themselves as having a call to the ministry, except such as have rational ground to conclude that, besides personal piety and good intentions, they possess capacities and qualities which are likely to render them useful. Again, as there must be first an inward call from God to devote oneself to His service in the Gospel, founded upon these considerations, and also an outward call in His providence from the church, to constitute a valid authority to exercise the functions of the ministry; and as the pastoral relation cannot be legitimately formed without the consent of the people, it becomes the solemn duty of a congregation, intending to invite one to be over them in the Lord, to be well assured of the good character and piety of the person whom they would select to that high and awfully important office, and to ascertain by personal experience his ministerial gifts; nay, it is incumbent upon them in these circumstances to "try the spirits," and as those who consult the glory of God, the good of His church, and the welfare of themselves and their posterity, and know that the matter is in the hand of God, to be faithful in making it the subject of calm and prayerful consideration, and conscientious in not asking any one to take the spiritual oversight of them and their families, but a person who is well approved among men, seems to be the best fitted that they can obtain to edify themselves, and appears to be really sent of God. And after a minister has been installed in his office, the people ought to remember that they have a duty to perform to him, as well as he to them; and to give him all due encouragement in the Lord, not only by supplying him liberally with whatever his temporal necessities demand, that he may give himself wholly to his work, and that he may be raised above those cares which are in a thousand ways injurious to its success, and to the best interests of the people themselves, but also by striving with him in prayer to God for a blessing, co-operating with him in his plans of usefulness, and strengthening his hands for his high, arduous, and evangelistic labours.

3. The peculiar function of the Ruling Elder, is to govern. "To him it belongs not to preach or administer the sacrament, nor assume any of the duties of the Pastor, nor unnecessarily entrench upon his work." There are, however, various duties besides these connected with government and discipline, which it is not only competent for the Ruling Elder to perform, but which, for the advancement of truth and godliness, he is called in his office to discharge. On this subject, our synod has already put forth the following deliverance: "Let the Elders be admonished that their work does not consist in attending to the collections, or any merely external regulations of the house of God, though in the absence of other office-bearers they may be charged with these concerns, in addition to their own peculiar and indispensable duties,—that their office is to watch for souls, to rule in the church, and especially and peculiarly to assist the minister in visiting the sick, instituting and conducting prayer meetings, inquiring after the fruits of the preaching of the Word, superintending Sabbath Schools, promoting the observance of family worship, and in faithfully administering the discipline of the church."—*Minutes of Synod, 10th Oct., 1844.* More particularly according to Guthrie, "the duties of the Eldership are those that belong to watching over and ruling of the flock, and they be of two sorts,—some that they are to perform by themselves alone, and so may be called more *private* duties; others, that they are to perform jointly with the rest of the overseers of the house of God, and may be called more *public*. The duties of their calling that be more private, are all those that private Christians are bound to perform each of them unto another by the law of charity and love, and these are to instruct one another—to exhort, and stir up one another, to provoke unto love and good works, to admonish and rebuke one another, first privately, and if they will not hearken, then

before witnesses; and if yet they will not hearken, then to tell the church; and if they will not hear the church, then let them be unto us as heathens and publicans—to comfort the afflicted and support the weak—to restore those that are fallen—to reconcile those that are at variance—to pray one for another—to visit the sick, and those who are in bonds and distress. All these duties Elders are to perform to the several members of the congregation, by virtue of their calling. The scriptures do expressly mention some of them as incumbent upon them, to wit, admonishing those over whom God hath set them visiting and praying over the sick, feeding the flock by instruction, exhortation, rebuke and comfort, in such a way as is competent to their station. The rest we may warrantably gather by analogy and proportion, from these. And if private Christians be obliged thereto, much more are Christian Elders, who have charge of souls in a special way of light thereto. * * * The duties of Elders which are more public, and which they are to perform jointly with others, are those which be upon them in the assemblies, or courts of the church, which are made up of preaching Elders, Teaching Elders, and Ruling Elders. * * * In all assemblies of the church,

Ruling Elders being thereto rightly called, have power to sit, write, debate, vote, and conclude in all matters that are handled therein. The things which are handled in the assemblies of the church, be either matters of faith, matters of order, matters of discipline, or that which concerneth the sending of church officers, according to which they have a fourfold power. (1) That which is called *Dogmatic*, whereby they judge of truth and error in points of doctrine, according to the Word of God only. (2) That which is called *Dialectic*, by which they discern and judge of the circumstances of those things that belong to the worship of God, as times, places, persons, and all such particulars in ecclesiastical affairs as are not determined in the Word, according to the general rules thereof concerning order and decency, avoiding of scandal, doing all to the glory of God, and the edifying of the church. (3) That which is called *critic* or *corrective*, by which censures are exercised upon the scandalous and obstinate, and such as are penitent again admitted to the ordinances, fellowship, and society of the church. (4) That which is called *Executive*, by virtue of which they send, authorize, and give power to church officers to serve in the house of God. All assemblies are not to exercise all these powers, but to keep themselves within due bounds; the inferior leaving those things that are of more common concernment to the superior, but in all these powers Ruling Elders have a share, and do put forth the same in exercise according to the measure that belongs to the assembly whereof they are members. Howbeit the execution of some decrees of the church assemblies, such as the imposition of hands in ordination, the pronouncing the sentence of excommunication, the receiving of penitents, the intimation of the deposition of ministers, and such like, do belong to ministers alone."

Such being the duties of the eldership, let us next inquire, what are the qualifications requisite for holding the office? Although age may be expected to furnish gravity, experience, and respect, yet "multitude of years does not always teach wisdom," neither is advancement in life indispensable. Grace and maturity of wisdom are the main qualifications. The scriptures inform us that "an Elder must be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; not accused of riot, or unruly, not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre: but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate, and sound in the faith, in charity, in patience." Hence, it will appear that the Ruling Elder, as well as the Pastor should be possessed of piety, because no other qualification can make amends for the want of grace, because his office which is spiritual demands it, and it is

practically necessary to the right discharge of his duties,—that he should be intelligently orthodox in his creed, in order to be able to detect, improve, and endeavour to repress the first risings of error in doctrine; that, if possible, his views of things be by nature and education more enlarged than those of men in general, so that he may be able to maintain legitimate influence and authority, and take a lead in matters pertaining to religion; that he be possessed of the grace of prudence and good judgment for the right discharge of his often difficult and delicate duties; that he be faithful in the government of his household, and in the observance of family worship; that he be exemplary in his outward conduct, not allowing his good to be evil spoken of, nor any reproach to be brought upon religion by indiscretion on his part; that he be a man of energy, zeal and liberality, so that he may seek to promote both the purity and extension of the church; that he possess an enlightened attachment to the principles and constitution of the church to which he belongs, in order that he may be able to defend his personal position and acts, and resist innovation in church government, hurtful to the cause of the Redeemer, and inconsistent with scriptural authority; and, that above all, he be a man of prayer, so that his office may be ever put forth in dependence upon the grace and aid of Him through whom alone they can become successful.

And while the Elders are charged to be faithful, we would remind you, that it is not competent for any one spontaneously to assume this office, but men must be regularly called thereto, and set apart for it by the church. It therefore becomes those who are in circumstances to designate persons to this office, to be especially carefully to select such as they believe will fill it with credit and efficiency. And as no church court may lay hands on any man, and ordain him to the ministry, contrary to the will of the congregation over which he is to be placed, so neither may it obtain any man to the eldership, without the people's consent. When the session has resolved to add to its number, the initiative in the appointment should begin with the congregation; at any rate, their consent must be obtained before any decisive step can be taken towards the ordination of new elders. Therefore, let the congregations of our church consider how responsible and momentous is the duty of nominating men to such an office, when the result may be either most beneficial or most disastrous to the interests of religion. And in the appointment of new Elders, in any case, let the Christian people, as those who would be faithful to a sacred trust, and who have an intelligent concern for the welfare and future prosperity of the church, set all prescriptive ideas, and private considerations aside, and look out for men of faith, and piety, and zeal, who will prove in all things examples to the flock, and foremost in every good work. Let them at the same time learn, that as Ruling Elders have been regularly called to their office, they are invested with power, not indeed in temporal matters, but what is not the less real on that account, with an authority in matters of religion and conscience—a spiritual power "which is given to them for edification and not for destruction," and is to be used with all holy discretion, meekness and charity,—a power which is as necessary and is as clearly set forth in the word, as authority to preach.—Matt. xxi. 19. The Elders are called by the people, yet let it be borne in mind, that they receive not their power from them. The very act of ordination by the ministers of the word, after election by the congregation, shows that their power is derived from another source. They are set apart in the name and by authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as their official power is conferred by Him, so they are accountable to Him, and not to man, for the manner in which they discharge their duties. It is indeed at all times competent for any individual to bring forward well-founded charges against any of the office-bearers of the church; and these will be patiently listened to, fully con-