

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

STRICTURES ON PRINCIPAL MACVICAR'S OPENING LECTURE.

MR. EDITOR,—It was with much regret I read in the "Montreal Witness" of the 4th inst., the opening lecture in the Montreal College delivered by Principal MacVicar. It is painful to think that a theological professor in one of our colleges should endeavour to disprove the plain teaching of our Standards on a vital point of Presbyterian polity. The language of the Confession of Faith and Form of Church Government indicates with great clearness that the offices of teaching elder and ruling elder are different. We read in chap. xxxi. 2. that a Synod is composed of "ministers and other fit persons." In the Form of Church Government it is said: "As there were in the Jewish Church elders of the people joined with the priests and levites in the government of the Church; so Christ, who hath instituted government and governors ecclesiastical in the Church, hath furnished some in the Church, beside the ministers of the Word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the ministers in the government of the Church. Which officers reformed Churches commonly call elders." This clearly states that these elders resemble the elders of the people among the Jews; that God furnishes such men with gifts for government, the call to exercise them evidently proceeding from the people. They are also distinguished from ministers of the Word. Further it is said: "A Presbytery consisteth of ministers of the Word and such other public officers as are agreeable and warranted by the Word of God to be Church governors to join with the ministers in the government of the Church." A Synod is said to be composed of pastors and teachers and other Church governors. The Directory for Public Worship refers to "ministers and other Church governors of each congregation." The Westminster divines quoted in support of the office of ruling elder, not only the previous existence of such rulers in the Jewish Church, from which they were evidently transferred to the Church of Christ, but also Romans xii. 6-9, and 1 Corinthians xii. 28. Now Principal MacVicar sets aside the office thus designated, and also the authority on which it is made, to rest in favour of a more modern theory; but Principal MacVicar adopts a theory not only opposed to our Standards, but also to those of all Presbyterian Churches. In the Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the following occurs: "ruling elders are properly the representatives of the people, chosen by them for the purpose of exercising government and discipline in conjunction with pastors or ministers. This office has been understood, by a great part of the Protestant Reformed Churches to be designated in the Holy Scriptures by the title of governments, and of those who rule well but do not labour in the word and doctrine." The General Assembly of said Church in 1883, decided that "the ruling-eldership is essential to the existence of the Presbyterian Church."

Without discussing formally the ruling-eldership, I desire to make a few remarks on Professor Witherow's theory, so far as it is presented in the opening lecture, and then on Principal MacVicar's application of its principles.

It is admitted that the eldership had its origin in the Jewish Church, and, as it had no connection with the sacrificial system, was perpetuated in the Church of Christ. Now "elder" in the Old Testament had a most extensive signification. It was as general a term as "officer" in the army. An officer may mean a lieutenant or a general, a bailiff or a premier. The fact that these are all officers does not prove that they have all the same duties. Some elders had a very humble sphere of duty. They were local magistrates, and they were very numerous, there being seventy-seven in Succoth alone. Others were tribal heads, councillors and governors. The nobles of Egypt were called elders or senators. Thus in Genesis l. 7: the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house and all the elders of the land of Egypt." Psalm cv. 22: "to bind his princes at his pleasure and teach his senators and elders wisdom." Some elders were civil rulers, others were ecclesiastical. Jewish elders were also representatives of the people—Deuteronomy xxxi. 28-30; Exodus iii. 14, 16, 18 and iv. 29-31; Leviticus iv.

14, 15. The Jewish elders, so far as can be ascertained from Scripture—and we have no other reliable information—were all rulers, not teachers. Hence it is reasonable to suppose that when elders were first introduced into the Church they were merely rulers.

Jerusalem then enjoyed the teachings of apostles, prophets and evangelists; and indeed, as at Corinth, spiritual gifts were abundantly enjoyed. While the ministry of gifts lasted there was no need of teaching elders; and the apostles appointed officers only when they were required. It appears that Paul appointed elders in the churches in Asia Minor soon after they were planted. These elders were probably at first only rulers such as the Jews had been accustomed to. Hence when he wrote to Titus "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting and ordain elders in every city." The meaning plainly is that he should ordain teaching elders holding fast the faithful Word as they had been taught that they might be able by such doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. Had there been no ruling elders previously appointed the delay would have been contrary to apostolic usage, and *everything* would have been wanting in the church's organization. They had previously enjoyed the labours of Paul and Barnabas, of Titus, Zenas and Apollos, and they were to expect Tychicus or Artemas, but as this was after all only temporary and casual supply, and as men competent to teach could now be obtained, the Apostle wished to have these churches fully equipped with a permanent ministry. The instruction sent to Timothy to appoint teaching elders at Ephesus may be similarly accounted for. The Apostle had no doubt appointed ruling elders during his long ministry there. Some indeed were teaching elders, but a fuller supply of such was needed as Paul and his gifted assistants could not settle down to ordinary ministerial work. While, at length, the transition from the ministry of gifts to that of teaching presbyters was gradually taking place, the former was so much depreciated that Paul had to exhort the Thessalonians not to despise prophesyings.

Surely this is more in harmony with apostolic procedure, and with the Jewish origin of the eldership, and much more satisfactory than the supposition that all elders originally laboured in the word and also taught, and that, in course of time, some were deprived of their teaching function to pave the way for an educated ministry. It also reveals gradual development without subsequent correction, and secures full apostolic sanction for the existence of both kinds of elders in the Church. That a plurality of elders in every congregation was intended to be a permanent arrangement is evident from the fact that several were appointed in every church. There was the same need for *spiritual rulers* after ministers of the Word were appointed as previously. This is further confirmed by the fact that teaching and ruling are very frequently represented as distinct functions that can be separated, and in some cases belong to different persons—to *different members of the spiritual body*. This Romans xii. 6-8 clearly teaches; it is confirmed by 1 Corinthians xii. 28, where teachers and governments are distinctly mentioned at a considerable interval; and it seems to be recognized in 1 Peter iv. 11. It is also assumed in all the passages in which teaching only, or ruling only is mentioned. In some cases as in 1 Timothy v. 17, both are united in one person. Now, if both were always united in one person as inseparable functions, the distinction would not be made. Hence as both functions are admitted to exist in the ministry, the one can be separated from the other only in the case of those whose sole duty it is to rule. This is precisely what is stated in 1 Timothy v. 17. Evidently the governors of 1 Corinthians xii., and the rulers in Romans xii., must refer to those who rule well, but do not labour in the Word and doctrine mentioned in 1 Timothy v. 17. In fact, the last passages designate them by participles of the same verb. If the identity contended for can be disproved, the case will be no better for the opponents of the ruling eldership, because they will then have a body of ministers of the Word in every congregation and also a body of rulers who govern the Church, but to whom in this case the name of elder would be denied. What then would these ministers, who have not the gift of preaching, but only of governing do? They would have no occupation.

It is to be regretted that professor Witherow should seek to pervert the meaning of 1 Timothy v. 17: when the sense in which it is understood by Presbyterians

is now granted even by Prelatists. It reveals great ignorance of Greek on his part to maintain that, because the elders of Ephesus were required to feed the Church of God, they could do this only by preaching publicly and privately; whereas, the verb here used never means to teach but always to rule. It occurs in 2 Samuel v. 2 and vii. 7. "Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel." 1 Chronicles xi. 2. "Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be ruler over my people Israel." 1 Chronicles xvii. 6. "Spake I a word to any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people." Psalms lxxviii. 71, 72; Revelations ii. 27, 29, 35. "He shall rule—feed—them with a rod of iron." Jeremiah iii. 15. "I will give you pastors according to mine heart which shall feed—*i. e.*, rule—you with knowledge and understanding." In Jeremiah ix. 15 a different word is used. It is easy then to see that to feed means to rule which is the specific duty of the ruling elder in which he can co-operate with the minister, so that both may be "overscers to feed the Church of God."

We shall now consider how Principal MacVicar carries out practically Professor Witherow's theory.

1. He proceeds upon the principle that all elders are called of God to labour in the Word and to rule. That ministers are so-called, or should be, I admit, but, if all elders are called to do both, how dare any confine themselves merely to ruling, thus failing to exercise the highest function of their office? And how could a person neglecting the principal work to which he is called be worthy of double honour, or indeed, of any honour? Do the ruling elders in our churches actually believe that they are called of God to the whole work of the ministry? If so, they should addict themselves to preaching. To say that they have the right to do the full work of the ministry in virtue of their office, while they know that they are not qualified for it, and that the Church does not call or even wish them to do it, and while they never attempt it, involves glaring contradictions. A man's right to do the whole work of the ministry must be due to his call by Christ; hence if he does not do it, he is guilty of disobedience; he declines the call and the Church encourages him in dereliction of duty.

Principal MacVicar feels bound in consistency to say that our Church rulers should have a theological education to fit them for the full work of the ministry. But at once seeing the impracticability of this he says: "It may be too much to look for such qualifications in all our elders, and as a matter of fact our Church discriminates in this respect and divides the elders into two classes, those called to rule and those called to teach." But what right has the Church to discriminate in such a manner as to require a man merely to rule when he is called by Christ also to teach? The Church is greatly to blame in this. Thus instead of finding Scripture authority for these degraded elders, he shows that their very office, as it now exists, is created by the Church. Is this the divine authority for our polity of which we boast? If the Church is competent to deprive elders of their highest function, that of teaching, why may they not still more easily deprive other elders of their inferior function, that of ruling, and give it to a prelate? These must be most unfortunate elders. They are told that they are called *not only to rule, but also to labour in the Word and doctrine*, and yet they are not conscious of it! The Church, too, persists in calling them only to rule, and thus entirely ignores their superior call; and both they and the Church believe that as a class they are not qualified to labour in the Word and doctrine, and that the qualifying of them is hopeless. The practical consequences of this must be alarming.

What the Church specially needs is the faithful rule and oversight of its ruling elders. The great difficulty is to induce them to do this most necessary and honourable work. But, instead of doing their legitimate work, they are exhorted to preach. Ruling in the Church is a spiritual and important work. What we need is an efficient body of ruling elders; and, if we cannot get men competent to rule how can we expect to get men competent to both rule and preach? The fact is that a class possessing both qualifications cannot be got, and has never been got: surely good proofs that Christ does not call and qualify such.

It is the defect of Presbyterians that their polity secures to the people, through their elders, a very large measure of self-government. But if all these elders are ministers or clergymen, the people are after all under clerical government, precisely as the whole