

THE PRESBYTERIAN ELDER.

MR. EDITOR,—As the position of the ruling elder in the Church has lately become a matter of discussion, kindly permit a few further observations on the above theme. One of the ablest and most scriptural definitions of the elder's position in the Church that I have yet seen is that given by the Rev. Principal McVicar, at the opening of the Presbyterian College, Montreal, on the 1st of October, 1879. The result of my own investigations is so ably expressed in a few words, that I cannot do better than quote. He says, "Let us try to understand for a moment the status of our elders according to Scripture and the practice of our Church, that we may see wherein any of them seem to come short of it. Our elders are not mere laymen, but ecclesiastics, as truly so as was the Apostle Peter, who said 'The elders who are among you I exhort, who am also an elder.' They are elected by the voice of the people according to apostolic practice, and solemnly ordained, not to a secular but to a sacred office—an office which we are accustomed to designate the highest in the New Testament Church. . . . We go further in this argument. We show that in apostolic Churches, whose practice we are bound to follow, there were a plurality of elders or bishops, a single congregation having had not one, but possibly a dozen bishops, all holding the same office and rank, and exercising the same authority within that congregation."

Professor Witherow comes substantially to the same conclusion as to the elder's position in the Apostolic Church, and honestly shows that he has been deprived of his powers and privileges by the legislation of the Church. The only part of the above quotation I demur to is, where it is insinuated that the practice of our Church is in line with that of the apostolic. A brief contrast will show that it is not.

The apostolic elder was by Divine authority ordained by the laying on of hands; our present practice is to set apart the elder to that office without that formality. The apostolic elder was commanded to feed the flock, etc.; our present Church forbids him to do so, as that is the duty of the teaching elder. The ancient elder was required to be apt to teach; his modern namesake is told by the Church that that is no part of his duty. It was the privilege of every Presbyter in the Apostolic Church to lay on hands in the ordination of a brother elder; the Church of the present says that the hands of the teaching elder only shall be laid on. In short, our present elder appears to be a spiritual office-bearer according to the Divine constitution of the Church, but by the legislation and practice of the Church prevented from performing any spiritual duties beyond what any private member may perform, except that of ruling. In this department of duty it might reasonably be expected that he would be the equal of his teaching brother. Not so, however; he is only allowed to take a very subordinate part in the ruling of the Church. For example, and to illustrate: within the bounds of the Toronto Presbytery (according to the last statistics) there are about 300 elders and forty-nine ministers, and these 300 elders are only allowed to be represented in the Presbytery by forty-one of their number. Therefore, in voting power one teaching elder is equal to seven ruling elders. Where is the parity in the eldership? If the Apostolic Church is the model upon which our system of Church government is formed, why has not every one of those elders the privilege of taking his seat in the Presbytery?

But the most marked brand of his inferiority is in virtually declaring that he cannot be trusted under any circumstances, even temporarily, to preside over the Session of which he is a member. Now, it appears to me that any argument that can be brought forward to sustain this change in the form of government from its original institution would sustain a further division of the eldership by elevating a few to be diocesan bishops.

Will some of our learned teaching elders give us more light on the subject? AN ELDER.

THE sixteenth annual meeting of the Church of Scotland Association for Augmenting the Smaller Livings of the Clergy was held in Edinburgh on the 24th ult., under the presidency of the Lord High Commissioner, the Earl of Aberdeen. The report showed a slight falling away in the ordinary income, but subscriptions to the capital fund to the amount of £10,500 were announced.

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

THE FRIENDSHIP OF CHRIST.

A man, blind from his birth, being asked what he thought the sun to be like, replied, "Like friendship." He had seen nothing, and therefore could not liken the sun to any external object; but he had felt the warmth of another's friendship gathering around his heart, and it was the best thing of which he had any experience; so when asked whereunto he could liken the sun, remembering how, like Milton, he had sat rejoicing in its warm beams, he compared it to friendship. Touching and beautiful is the blind man's simile of the sun.

And the converse holds good; friendship is like the sun. It diffuses a glow about the heart on which its sweet influences fall. It is like the sunbeam beneath which a man's nature expands, and opens, and rejoices. Friendship is sunshine in the heart. How often is the countenance of a friend as the breaking forth of the sun; it suffuses everything with its radiance.

There is a fine old scriptural simile which likens God's favour to the breaking forth of the sun—"The light of His countenance." From it we may deduce the sublime and glorious truth that God's friendship is the sun of the soul.

In darkest shades, if He appear,
My dawning is begun:
He is my soul's sweet morning star,
And He my rising sun!

"In His favour"—friendship—"is life." The soul does not know what life is till it feels God to be its friend. Then it "delights itself in the Lord," and comes to speak with him "as a man speaketh with his friend." Here is the secret of fellowship, the soul of communion with God. Then does a man begin to live when he realizes that God is his friend.

There is ONE who is the common friend of all hearts that gather to him—Jesus, the God made manifest. In Him the springs of true friendship are found. The tenderness and strength of love are central in His heart. The depressed spirit may feel lonesome and desolate, but this friend is standing by. We may have lost all other friends, by change or death; but He loveth ever and changeth never. Other friends may not understand us, nor enter into our feelings; He "knoweth us altogether," and "He is touched with the feelings of our infirmities." Our "brother" may be lacking in sympathy, or may fail in faithfulness; but He is "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

In time of fierce trial—when misrepresented and maligned, or when overwhelmed by calamity—we want a friend who will "stick" to us. For then weak friendships so often fail; the friend in fair weather falls off in foul. Even a brother may fail us then. Christ Jesus is the "friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

His friendship is like sunshine in the soul, and brings comfort, and hope, and gladness.

How real this is! How does the Lord verify Himself and His love to hearts that open to Him? We are filled with "peace in believing," with joy that is "unspeakable and full of glory." The unseen Christ becomes a "real presence." Then we "know and believe the love that God hath to us." Then we are enabled "to comprehend with all saints what is the height and length, and depth and breadth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." Strange, paradoxical, that seems; but it is explicable to the heart to whom Christ reveals His loving fullness. Such an one "knows" what else "passeth knowledge," and feels the sunshine within.

Friend of all friends art Thou to me,
Whom, loving, yet I cannot see;
For Thy felt presence doth impart
The sweetest sunshine to my heart;
And love lifts up the inward eye,
Thee to discern, and own thee nigh.

And Thou, blest Vision of my soul!
Hast made my broken nature whole;
Hast purified my base desires,
And kindled passion's holiest fires;
My nature Thou hast lifted up,
And filled me with a glorious hope.

Nearer and dearer still to me,
Thou living, loving Saviour be;
Brighter the vision of Thy face,
More charming still Thy words of grace;
Till life shall be transform'd to love—
A heaven below, a heaven above.

—Good Words.

MIND YOUR OWN CHILDREN.

George Macdonald, in his latest story, expresses the opinion that the position of the children of the poor is often more favourable to the development of the higher qualities of the human mind than many of those more pleasant places for which some religious moralists would have us give the thanks of the specially favoured. For one thing, he says, they love their parents more than children given over to nurses and governesses love theirs; and herein they certainly have a vast advantage over those who are imagined to be more happily situated. The family is the pivot of the whole human constitution. A Scottish statesman is reported to have said that if he were permitted to write the songs of a people he cared not who made the laws. With infinitely greater certainty might he speak who would say, "Give me the administration of the family, and who will may sit upon the throne." Failure to apprehend this has been fraught with incalculable harm, and so the reins of this central kingdom have been thrown to whoever cared to take them up. Since Dickens invented his representation of a woman with a mission, who was interested in everybody but her own children, and countenanced all societies for the amelioration of humanity at the expense of her own household, who was never so much at home as away from home, and who allowed the charge God had plainly put into her care to go to ruin while she hied about to missions and meetings and societies that would have been much better without her—who does not know the type and pity the home? But are there no other transgressors? Are fathers any more justified than mothers in vacating the chair of authority? Are political meetings and lectures and philanthropic societies not allowed oftentimes to supersede the claims of those who ought to find in the father their guide, counsellor, friend, teacher, and example? If God has given you a family, imposed on you the solemn trust of father or motherhood, then know that there pre-eminently and first of all your duty lies, and in its discharge you ought to find your labour and your joy. In your home is your work, outside is your dissipation. We are strongly convinced that, as a rule, Christian parents in all ranks of society spend too little time with their children, and leave them to the chance influences by which they are surrounded. It is felt to be a kind of infraction of dignity to be seen with one's children as companions, a kind of supercession of the nurserymaid or schoolmaster. The younger the child's mind, the more susceptible of impressions it is, and unless you begin to mould the character early you can do little with it except for evil. Men have been heard to say, "While I am doing the Lord's work, He will take care of mine." But very many, under the idea they are doing the Lord's work, are simply following their own inclinations and pleasing themselves, to the neglect of what is right in other matters as well as this. We are very far from blaming all parents for the aberrations and sins of their children who have gone astray, but we can quite understand how the best of men, in the absorption of public business and the claims of great and important interests, never see their children or young people but in the most casual way. When they pay school bills, and masters, and maintain a good house and table for them, they imagine they have discharged their duty; whilst all the time the gravest irregularities are going on, and the good man is overwhelmed with amazement when the black strain comes out. Mind your homes, brethren; mind your own children. —Christian Leader.

FILLING UP THE CHURCH.

Is it fair to expect the minister alone to fill up the church? It is an excellent thing to have a minister who can attract, and who, when people find him out, will be drawn to hear him. But there are so many people who have no church-going habits, who are not hungry for sanctuary food; people who seldom or never go anywhere to church; who have not, it seems, even curiosity enough to visit the house of God and hear the minister and see for themselves whether or not he be an acceptable preacher; so many, we say, are there of these that it is not fair nor just to expect the minister, with little or no aid from the membership, to gather up and retain a full house.

The indifference of many people with regard to attending church needs to be met and overcome. And