

## THE ELDER AND HIS WORK.

BY REV. J. M'LAREN, D.D.

Of all the well-known features of Presbyterianism, none is so characteristic as the eldership. Our Calvinistic creed, our simple form of worship and the diaconate, though from long historical association apparently inseparably bound up with our Church polity, are, after all, in no way essential to it. For are they necessarily permanent. They are the product of time and circumstance, and liable to change and pass away. Our austere puritanical worship may make room for an elaborate ritual, the diaconate may be exchanged for a board of managers, and even that which appears to many to be a fixture, the Westminster Confession of Faith, may undergo revision, and be so transformed, that our stern Calvinism will assume the aspect of bland Arminianism or sceptical Arianism. It will not do to exclaim, Never! and ostrich-like hide one's self from passing events. The truth is that Presbyterianism has taken quite a few strides in most of these directions already. Could our forefathers arise from their graves, they would be aghast to hear "the kist o' whistles" in most of the churches, the reading of "collects," and committees tinkering with our venerable Standard. But no such change can possibly take place with regard to the eldership; it is essential to Presbyterianism; it is the *sine qua non* of our denominational existence; it is the foundation on which we build our ecclesiastical superstructure. If that be impaired the edifice is endangered, and may eventually fall to pieces; on the other hand, whatever strengthens it is for the welfare of the whole Church. It is therefore of the utmost importance to us as a denomination to ascertain what defects may be found regarding the eldership as it is amongst us, and discover the necessary remedies.

Exclusive of ministers of the Gospel, there are within the Presbyterian Church in Canada in round numbers 7,000 elders; the counterpart of that 7,000 in Israel who never bowed the knee to Baal. They have been solemnly set apart for the