

tell who and where the sick ones are, or that he should run about from house to house and find them. How much better in every way the old apostolic understanding of the matter: Let the sick one call for the elders, for any or all of them, and let them pray over him. But what if they never pray at all in public? We cannot on this account change the rule. What we are to aim at is to get them to work up to this wholesome standard. We must not on account of human weakness and failure lower or rescind any moral obligation. Whatever may be the practice of elders it is still true that they are all bound to minister to the flock in this form—they are all, in virtue of their office, subject to being called for by the people in seasons of suffering, and sorrow, and death, and should, in fulfilment of the duties of their sacred office, be ready and glad to respond to such requests, and be able not merely to speak some simple words of consolation, but also to breathe the prayer of faith and power to Almighty God. It would be hazardous and wrong for me to say how far this is being done, or how many active, fervent, truly, efficient elders our Church possesses, but I am safe in saying that if it is to be truly and apostolically Presbyterian in spirit, in work and power, as well as in name, the Presbytery must not cast off the very functions and meaning of their office in this respect.

Let me conclude this discussion, therefore, by asking a few questions, especially touching those known as ruling elders, without waiting to answer them in full.

Do we exercise sufficient care to secure properly qualified persons for this office? We think not. What has been practically done in this respect? Very little. Elders are expected to undertake pastoral duties requiring the utmost Christian skill, delicacy and discrimination; but we furnish no means by Bible classes or otherwise of training them in pastoral theology. The office is not held up as one worthy of sacred ambition to which devout young men should aspire, and for which they should seek to prepare themselves by prayer and diligent study. It is rather regarded as a post reserved for old men in their declining years after they have, it is true, gained much prudence and experience, but lost the elasticity and progressive energy of youth and manhood. We would not be understood as depreciating in any degree the wisdom and goodness of aged persons and the efficiency of the services which they can and should render in the Church of God; but we would in the household, in the Sunday-school, from the pulpit, and everywhere so speak of the office of the teaching and ruling elder that the strongest and best of our lads in early youth may think of it as something to be desired and devoutly sought after.

The difficulty of securing a sufficient number of men of superior talent and piety to be ministers and missionaries is being now felt and deplored in all parts of the world, and is not the same thing true of ruling elders? It is just as well to be frank in this matter and to say that if ministers are not as numerous and high-toned as they should be, ruling elders are not unlike them in these respects. And if there are not hundreds of young men with burning zeal rushing forth to save the heathen in foreign lands, neither can it be said that the elders at home are turning the world upside down. There are reasons for this state of things which deserve the serious attention of the Church. The same thoughts and feelings that operate with the one class are equally potent with the other. The fact is that the lack of burning zeal and a vigorous spiritual life is not all that we have to look at in this connection. It is not enough to say that ours is a light and frivolous age which has expelled the serious earnest spirit which becomes an elder. No. Men are in deed earnest now, but in what direction? Secularism, the intense determination to make money at all hazards, the silent and sometimes outspoken contempt shown for those who do not make it, and who possess it only in a very moderate degree, the almost omnipotent power which it wields in determining all social and other relations, the ease with which it covers a multitude of sins, and adorns the ignorant and vulgar with sparkling charms in the eyes of the world—these are malign influences which are rapidly absorbing the talent and energies of the nineteenth century. What is the cultivation of science, art, literature and all that enters into a liberal education, and what is the sacred office of the elder, in presence of this mighty force that threatens to rule and dominate over all things?

Would it be better for the church to aim at securing men of lower qualifications than we have indicated in this discourse? It is gravely suggested in certain quarters that we should make the distinction between teaching and ruling elders more marked than it is at present by not expecting the latter to understand and accept our doctrinal standards; by preparing for them a sort of theological primer, and asking them only to master this and to assent to the so-called Apostles' Creed? What think you of this proposal? This is the sure way of causing the office to sink into weakness, obscurity and contempt. The line of progress is manifestly in the direction of raising the standard of attainments instead of lowering it. We gain nothing and lose very much by encumbering the Lord's army with officers who are ignorant, weak, narrow and non-progressive in their spirit and aspirations. Under no form of church government as much as our own can persons of this type prove an intolerable clog and hindrance. The parity of all presbyters in transacting the business of our ecclesiastical courts puts it in their power virtually to frustrate every proposal for a step in advance until their own views are enlarged and brought up to date.

Is there not more to be done by elders than heretofore in training

the baptized children of the church, and in cultivating an intimate acquaintance with the spiritual condition and wants of all persons connected with the church and even of strangers, who really need more attention and care than those fully settled in belief and conviction?

We are not prepared to furnish statistics or to say precisely what proportion of our elders show themselves "apt to teach" by being practically engaged in Sunday-school work, but we are persuaded that it is not as large as it should be. This may be partly due to the fact that men are very often too old, as we have already hinted, and their energies greatly exhausted before being called to this office. This is a serious mistake. If it is right, and the opinion is pretty universal that it is right, to have young men in our pulpits, I can see no good reason why they should not be ruling elders. Hence the question has of late been much agitated in certain quarters as to the advisability of elders retiring from office within a specified number of years, or when found inefficient through age or infirmity. Aged ministers are laid aside without much hesitation when their usefulness is supposed to be gone, but very seldom do elders withdraw from the ranks however little service they may render. At any rate, is it not of the utmost importance that we should employ the vigor of youth in the spiritual work of the church? I say spiritual work because the fact cannot be concealed that there is a strong tendency in some instances to secularize and degrade the office of the elder or to narrow the range of duties which belong to it. I have been told of elders who regard the duties of their office fully discharged by decently distributing the elements of communion among the people on sacramental occasions, by being seen reverently attending prayer meetings, baptisms and funerals and by inflicting censures upon erring and unruly members of the church. I have even heard of some who thought their functions clean gone, nothing on earth left them to do, when deacons were appointed to receive certain silver, but chiefly copper, collections on Sunday. An aged minister assured me that he was present at an examination of candidates for the office when the question was asked, "What is the chief duty of the elder?" And the answer was promptly and emphatically given by one who was afterwards ordained—"The chief duty of the elder is to watch the minister." (*Laughter.*) Happily, I have never been called to work with such elders, and the fewer of them to be found anywhere the better, for the truth is that the strength and growth of our Church, under God, is very largely dependent upon our having a vast army of able, enlightened, progressive, teaching and ruling elders, harmoniously working together for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Let young men, baptized with the Holy Ghost, inspired with the necessary faith, courage and self-denial to do the work of the ministry, be forthcoming in sufficient number and let them be supported by large-hearted elders ready, like some among us, to devise liberal things, and soon our Zion shall spread with commanding influence and life-giving power over this great country and far beyond its limits. (*Applause.*)

At the close of his lecture, the Doctor made a few announcements to the students, and then addressed the Chairman in complimentary terms, briefly referring to his recent appointment as Principal and Professor of Manitoba College.

The Moderator in replying, expressed his satisfaction in presiding at such a meeting in such a place. He had always felt a deep and genuine interest in the Montreal institution in spite of the circumstance that he lived in the West with its well-known tendency to "sectionalism." While he was grieved that he could not be present at a similar meeting held at the same time by Knox College in Toronto, he was yet glad to see tonight for the first time this capacious hall in its chasteness and beauty, especially since it had sprung from the thought of one whom he had always rejoiced to call his friend (*applause*). He spoke in touching terms of the great personal sacrifice his appointment to the chair in the North-West had called upon him to make, and playfully suggested that that not the least among the considerations which had rendered his decision so difficult, was a conviction that part of his duty involved "watching"—not the ministers—but the colleges (*laughter*). It was even his duty perhaps to prevent the Principals from burdening the church with too thorough equipment, for, as he would just like to whisper in their ears, the colleges were made for the Church, not the Church for the colleges.

Principal Macvicar, in making a further announcement in regard to the session just opened, said the number of students at present is so large that all available space must be utilized in both buildings, and even then several will be obliged to live outside. This, he thought, at least showed that "there is not too much of this college!" (*laughter*). Some people seemed to think there was, but they need not be at all alarmed if the "thorough equipment" just hinted at by the Chairman should one day be consummated; for he did most certainly anticipate the time when his own chair should be divided between three professors, himself having but one-third left.

The long-metre doxology was sung. The benediction was pronounced by the Rev. J. S. Black, of Erskine Church, and a very successful meeting was thus brought to a close.