

fitted to preserve unimpaired that bond of peace which should ever connect the Session and the congregation, than when the members of the one are found coming to the houses of the members of the other—not with the consequential air, and chilling stiffness of the mere ecclesiastical official, but with all the freshness and fervour of a warm and generous friend.

2. It is the duty of Elders especially to visit those who are in sickness.

This is the very essence of pure religion and undefiled before God, "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." To every member of the General Assembly on the right hand of the throne of Judgment, will it be said, "I was sick and ye visited me." In a sense, then, this duty appertains to every genuine professor of religion, but especially does it fall within the province of Elders. They are expected, as we have seen, to act the part of shepherds; and what kind of shepherd would that be, who would allow any to remain "weak and sickly," among the flock, without endeavouring to relieve them. How does the great shepherd of the sheep act? "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and strengthen that which was sick." It was his uniform practice, as he went about doing good, to go to the house of mourning—to frequent the couch of sickness and to pour into the wounded spirit the balm of consolation. To the under shepherd, in this respect, he has left an example.

This duty devolves on the Elder even more than on the Minister. What saith the scripture? Is any man sick? let him call for—is it the presiding pastor?—no; he has many other duties to occupy him, which may often prevent his prompt attendance. Is any man sick, then, says James, "let him call for the Elders of the Church, and let them pray over him." There are some people exceedingly unreasonable. They want be satisfied unless a minister be constantly on their threshold; and should they be unwell, if he pays not a daily visit, it is a grievous oversight. Let such remember what a minister's duty principally is. We do not by any means depreciate the importance of visiting, when we give it as our decided opinion, gathered from a careful perusal of what the Bible says on the matter, that a minister's primary duty is to preach the Gospel. He is expected to give himself to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word. He is enjoined to give attendance to reading—to exhortation—to doctrine—to meditate on these things—to give himself wholly to them, that his profiting may appear unto all. How is it possible for his profiting to appear unto all, if his time be frittered away in a continuous string of visits? If, in this matter, he would have all speak well of him, he must either keep the congregation on spare diet on the Sabbath, or prematurely exhaust his physical and mental energies. We do not mean to say, that a minister should not visit the people in general, or the sick in particular. This he ought to do as much as lies in his power; and it will be found that, often, application, like a ploughshare, breaks up the fallow-ground, and constructs furrows for the reception of the incorruptible seed. The season of sickness is often the most favorable for the production of serious impressions. But we do say, that a people should make allowance for their minister, if he does not visit them as often as they might wish—and consider the visit of a pious and judicious Elder as an equivalent.

We would take this opportunity, also, of alluding to the fact, that the members of a congregation often complain both of minister and elders not visiting them in sickness, when they are kept in utter ignorance of their being sick at all. Let such find an answer to their murmurings in the scripture injunction—"Is any man sick, let him call for the Elders." So long as they do not think it worth while to give the slightest call, they have no right or reason to find fault.

The neglect, on their part, of an express Bible order, should satisfy them at once as to the side on which the blame lies.

3. Elders should take a watchful oversight of any in the congregation who show a tendency to backslide. They should reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all long-suffering. To them peculiarly is the command addressed—"Thou shalt in anywise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." One member is irregular in his attendance at Church—absent altogether without any satisfactory reason, and, at best, only a half-day hearer. Another is indulging, it may be, in its incipient stages, that vice which has proved the prolific root of all evil—filling our prisons, and asylums, and cemeteries, with blighted and blighted minutes—depriving the Church of some of its apparently choicest members, and society of its most attractive ornaments—shivering the very pinnacles in the temple of religion, and threatening to invade the sanctity of the Holiest itself, and drag reeling victims from the very horns of the altar—he is given to intemperance. Whatever be the cause of backsliding, it is the bounden duty of the Elder to call the offender to account, and, according to the nature and degree of the offence, to administer the word of gentle caution, friendly admonition, or stern reproof.

4. In connection with this we may state, that it is the duty of Elders, in their collective capacity, to administer the discipline of the Church. It was the custom with the Jews, prior to the celebration of the Passover, to remove all the leaven from their houses. So the Corinthian Church, in which an impure member had been admitted, are ordered to "purge out from amongst them the old leaven." (i. e. of impure communion.) It is specified as one of the most favorable features in the character of the church at Ephesus, "thou canst not bear them that are evil."

"It was one of the greatest glories," writes Bishop Burnet, a prominent prelate in the Church of England at the period of the Revolution "of the primitive church, that they were so governed that none of their members could sin openly without a public censure, and a long separation from the holy communion, which they judged was defiled by a promiscuous admitting of all persons to it. Had they consulted the arts of policy they would not have held in converts by such a strict way of proceeding, lest their discontent might have driven them away at a time when to be a Christian was attended with so many discouragements, that it might seem dangerous, by so severe a discipline, to frighten the world out of their communion. But the pastors of that time resolved to follow the rules delivered them by the Apostles, and trusted God with the success which answered and exceeded all their expectations. For nothing convinced the world more of that religion, than to see those trusted with the care of souls watch so effectually over their manners, that some sins which, in these loose ages in which we live, pass but for common effects of human frailty; men were made to abstain from the Communion for many years, and did cheerfully submit to such rules as might be truly medicinal for curing those diseases in their minds."

5. A vigilant oversight of the young in the congregation, is another important element in the faithful occupancy of the Elder's office. The command was given twice by the Master to Peter, "Feed my lambs." He who feels his flock, like a Shepherd, gathers the lambs in his arms, and he desires the Elders of the Church to pay special attention to them. They are choice victims—shining marks for the roaring lion—and therefore he desires them to be strictly guarded. It becomes the Elders of the Church to establish and encourage schools for the religious training of the young; themselves, if need be, to act as superintendents, or teachers, or visitors; and by every means in their power to impress an inclina-

tion on the youthful mind to the side of God, and godliness.

We would be far from dethroning the parent from his legitimate position. God says to every parent, as did the daughter of Pharaoh to the mother of Moses, "Take this child and bring it up for me." No one is at liberty to step between the divinely appointed guardian and that child, and to assume a responsibility which cannot be transferred. Still, an Elder of piety and tact, may prove an invaluable assistant to a parent in the upbringing of his offspring; while on the other hand, a parent's influence, if wisely directed, may have a most healthy re-action on the Elder in his self-denying labours.

Under this head fall, to be included, Bible Classes, which are intended to form a receptacle for those who have out-grown the Sabbath School. The period of youth stretching upwards from fourteen to twenty, and beyond it, is most critical. The passions then are strongest—opposing principles struggle for the mastery—character is in process of formation. In this country especially, a spirit of haughty and heedless independence is oftentimes induced, which has proved the curse of many a community, eaten as doth a canker into the peace of many a family, and led the impetuous youth, disdaining the slender restraints of parent and teacher, in braggadocio style, to exclaim, "with our tongues will we prevail; our lips are our own—who is lord over us?" It is of great consequence to have this rebellious spirit curbed—the passions reined in—the principles properly developed and directed, and the character, when being formed, subjected to the operation of wholesome influences. Classes for communicating religious instruction, are most advantageous for those who have advanced to this stage in the journey of life. In the absence of ministers, or when, from circumstances, they are prevented, elders may do much in the way of establishing such classes, and keeping them in healthful and vigorous exercise. In connection with this department of duty, more than ordinary care and culture are requisite, so as that interest may be excited, and respect produced. The cravings of the mental appetite, when in its most excitable state, must be satiated not by the presentation of a stone, or what the Israelites contemptuously called "light bread," but by whatsoever is good for food, and pleasant to the eye, and to be desired to make men wise.

It may be also remarked under this particular, that Elders may accomplish not a little in the way of informing ministers of young men coming to their churches, and securing for them situations, or introducing them to a circle of acquaintance, where their minds and morals may be unitedly benefited, and a practical guarantee be supplied for their preservation from the temptations of idleness, and the haunts of the destroyer. For want of such friendly countenance and reasonable introduction, many young men have had their prospects for life blasted. Falling amongst those who have no fear of God before their eyes, their moral sensibilities have been blunted—their desires after improvement strangled—their scruples of conscience turned into ridicule, till at length bereft of midder, compass, ballast, and pole-star, they are swept into the vortex of ruin, and make shipwreck of the faith, and of a good conscience. Were the Elders of the Church as fertile in expedients for engaging the attention and exciting the interest of such hopeful subjects, as are the children of this world in entrapping them, the ranks of the Captain of Salvation would be swelled, and we would have less reason to mourn over the record of moral wrecks, more deplorable by far than the most thickly clustered bills of mortality.

6. An Elder should organize and conduct devotional meetings of a social description. Prayer is absolutely essential to the Christian's being and well-being. It is to the soul as the spring to the watch—the steam