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## Contributors and Correspondents.

### ON THE QUALIFICATIONS AND DUTIES OF THE RULING ELDERS.

A PAPER PREPARED TO BE READ BEFORE A PRESBYTERY OF THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BY AN ELDER.

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church makes wise and scriptural provision for its Government by Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, and General Assemblies. A session, composed of the Pastor and Ruling Elders of a particular church, is the lowest ecclesiastical court; the Elders representing the people by whom they are chosen, and possessing, in the various judicatory of the church, an equality of power with the Clergy, Episcopacy and Independency, have each sought to invalidate the authority of the Ruling Elder, but the Constitution of the Church before the advent of our Saviour,—when Rulers in the synagogue, and Elders of the people formed a large part of the synagogue organization—was not likely to be departed from by the Apostles, who had been brought up under the ancient dispensation. When forming the basis for the new, any needless deviation from the forms and usages of the ancient church would be avoided by them, that the prejudices of the people might not be aroused against the infant church; accordingly we find Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians chap. xii. 23, in referring to the different offices established in the church, says, "God hath set some in the church, first Apostles, secondarily Prophets, thirdly Teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, Governments, diversities of tongues." Governments are here presented as a distinct office, belonging not to the civil, but the sacred affairs of the church. In Romans, Chap. xii. 4-8, the Apostle, describing the church as a body composed of various and distinct members says, "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ and every one members one of another, having their gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophesy let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith, or ministry, let us wait on our ministering, or he that teacheth on teaching, or he that exhorteth on exhortation, he that giveth let him do it with simplicity, he that ruleth with diligence, he that showeth mercy with cheerfulness," and again in writing to Timothy, 1st Epistle and verse 1 and 17 he says, "let the Elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in word and doctrine," evidently making a distinction between those who teach, and those who are taught.

Since then it appears the Ruling Elder formed part of the organization of the Primitive Church—overlaid by the darkness and corruption of the middle ages, when the clergy arrogated to themselves all spiritual dominion, but restored in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church and by other churches now sought to be engrained on theirs, under the term "lay delegation." Let us for a short time examine into the qualifications requisite in those who would worthily fill this office, and the duties incumbent on them in its exercise.

The office being spiritual and the duties belonging to it of a strictly religious nature, sincere piety is indispensable; the sincerity of any one aspiring to, or holding the office, ought to be ascertained by a careful examination of its origin. Is it inspired by the breath of God in the new creation, is it derived from the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and not from mere conventional usages, in its exercise does it seek closer communion with God, and in its aim does it seek only the glorifying of God, and the promotion of the best interests of our fellow-men, is it manifest in works of faithful labours of love, even when these are unseen and unknown but by the Searcher of hearts—in fine, is it a fountain of life in the soul, producing the fruits of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, with meekness, temperance?

Spirituality is another requisite in those who would rule well in the house of God. He dull, negative goodness that consists simply in keeping within the proscribed lines of morality, like the marble statue, may be beautiful in form, but destitute of life, cannot exert an influence on surrounding objects; there must be life and vitality in our religion, if we would affect others; must savour of close communion with God, notwithstanding the temptations to worldliness by close contact with men of the world, engaged in the same avocations; the keen rivalry in every line of secular life. The keeping of the heart with diligence must never be relaxed; constant communion with God must be exer-

cised, and the things of this present life hold their appropriate and secondary place in the heart.

Those who are called to rule in the house of God should also manifest by self-government the vitality of piety within them, not only in controlling and restraining sensual appetites and passions, but also in subduing temper, which in "signal manner distinguishes the every day-aspect of the man, when well-regulated it conceals almost every defect, and when unrestrained it hides and neutralizes almost every virtue. He that ruleth his own spirit is mightier than he that taketh a city; it is the every day aspect by which an individual is distinguished, and according as it is well or ill-governed he secures esteem, or excites contempt; he who does not subdue and manage his own spirit neither deserves to nor can acquire influence over others—every thing like moroseness, impetuosity, or irritability should be cautiously avoided. Moroseness throws an atmosphere of gloom around its victim which causes him to be shunned; no one chooses the companionship of the sour and the sullen, none seek to open the heart to such, and seek counsel under heart troubles. An unfavourable specimen of the effect of Christian principle and an undesirable companion, the morose man will never attract to himself those who need counsel, and should not be raised to a sphere where his influence will only repel those who need counsel and direction. Impetuosity is another defect in temper which should not be found in connexion with the Eldership, even in secular affairs the haughty man is not honoured from love, but fear, and those who rule in a dispensation the foundation of which is love, should be gentle and humble, esteeming others better than themselves, not seeking to break the bruised reed or to lord it over God's heritage. Irritability of temper is even still more objectionable in an Elder. Want of self-command is no where more readily exhibited than in that peevish fretfulness that stands ready on all occasions to take an affront, that is ever ready to resent a seeming discourtesy. Such manifest faults display a weakness of character that should never hold rule in the house of God.

The piety of one who is to rule in the church should evince its earnestness by active zeal, abounding in mercy and good fruits by personal contributions of worldly substance in such proportion as an enlightened conscience and the wants of the church may dictate. An Eldership of penurious and contracted spirit, will not only counteract the efforts of a minister, but render the church over which they preside utterly useless, as respects the benevolent projects of the day.

A Ruling Elder should also have a good report of them which are without; the world is ever closely watching the conduct of those set in high places in the church—any inconsistency on their part will be sure to be marked, and made an apology for irregularity by those who reject the Gospel.

Gravity is a trait that should be found in the bearing of a Ruling Elder, not demureness or sourness of aspect—for cheerfulness becomes every child of God, and especially those who are actively engaged in his service—but a chastened soberness of spirit, resulting from deep and uniform impressions of the presence and love of God, the uncertainty of life, and the nearness of eternity. The very reverse of that boisterous merriment which is folly, and the jesting which is not convenient, such gravity becomes an Elder.

Precision not merely in managing their worldly affairs, but in religious intercourse, and discharge of official duties should characterize a Ruler in the house of God. A zeal without knowledge may prove as injurious as absence of all zeal; an ill-timed or ill-expressed admonition or rebuke, may breed hatred or contempt in a heart that might have been gained by meekness and gentleness. May not the persecution for righteousness sake, to which some usages they are subjected, be merely the natural result of censoriousness and imprudence.

An Elder should have a good report from without in relation to his secular transactions; a Christian Elder should not leave his christianity behind him, but carry it with him in all his dealings with his fellow-men, avoiding not only direct dishonesty, but those pitiable frauds which many consider justifiable in trade, must be avoided, and candour and honesty be conspicuous in every transaction; truth must be regarded, and anything like slipperiness should never be suspected of an Elder, and should misfortune overtake, and circumstances prevent the fulfilment of obligations, no intentional dishonesty or culpable misconduct should ever even appear to sully that integrity which should be a prominent feature in his character.

Generosity is equally essential, sparing every thing like meanness, parsimony, or close dealing, which would not take advantage of the embarrassments of others, by exacting inordinate interest; opposed to the love of filthy lucre; and an exemplification of the graces of humanity and christian charity.

An Elder should have a good report from without in relation to the government of his family. He should be one "that ruleth his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity, for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God." This argument of the Apostle is conclusive, and the qualification it is intended to enforce of the first importance. The worship of God in the family, and the moral and religious instruction of the household, training them in the very way they should go, and endeavouring to lay a good

foundation of christian knowledge by familiarizing their minds with reading of the word of God, using the help to be found in the Catechisms and standards of the Church, with affectionate exhortation, and fervent prayer for the divine blessing on these instructions. The families of the Eldership should never be found readily complying with the questionable customs and amusements of the world; the bar-room and ball-room should be strange places for them. Professing christians have been known to plead in extenuation of their lax home rule that children of ministers and elders were to be seen at the theatre and midnight bout. Such should not be; the people of God must be peculiar, they must be separate from the world, and the leaders of the people of God must set the example. "Touch not, taste not, handle not."

Intelligence is another qualification requisite in an Elder, not that which is termed learned knowledge, the circumstances of the case frequently forbid this, but no one should accept a station of the duties of which he is ignorant, or who has not such a degree of information on subjects relating to the official duties of his station as would distinguish him above the ordinary christian. The apostle, among other things, says he should be no novice, he should be acquainted with the order and discipline of the church, be at no loss for a reason for his preference of Presbyterianism to Episcopacy and Independency, and not need to depend on the knowledge of the clergy in cases where an intelligent study of the form government, books of discipline, and forms, would qualify him to give an independent judgment. Sound discretion should characterize the whole conduct of an Elder in the discharge of his official duties; a line of action which in some cases would be productive of good, might in others be most disastrous—the example of Paul of becoming all things to all men must here be imitated.

Turn we now for a little to the duties of ruling elders. As men are not to be selected for the Eldership from the mere circumstance of wealth, station, or worldly respectability, or because they may be covetous of the distinction, and when solemnly chosen, they should never regard their office as a sinecure; too many thus seem to regard it, they may occasionally be found at meetings, or assisting at the distribution of sacramental emblems, but the more spiritual duties of their office do not receive from them that cordial and unswerving attention their importance demands; in the discharge of these the ruling elder should heartily co-operate with his pastor, in giving efficiency to the measures which immediately relate to his particular Church. One of his most particular duties is to encourage by his presence and aid, meetings for social worship; when these are neglected, religion languishes, and the public ministrations of the word come home to the heart with less energy and effect; to promote and enliven these meetings, elders must attend constantly and conscientiously, and engage fervently, and devoutly. Scarcely a valid excuse for absence, except serious bodily indisposition, can be admitted here. Their presence or absence will usually be marked and followed by the people, this being the fact how great their responsibilities, how aggravated their criminality if through their neglect, the people forsake the assembling of themselves together, and cease to be instant in prayer.

Another duty incumbent on Elders is the instruction of the youth of the Church. The youth of a Church are its hope; if their minds are early stored with religious truth, the Church will increase in influence and power for good. Too many parents are apt to neglect the religious culture of their children; and if the office-bearers are also indifferent to the spiritual well-being of the rising generation, what but declension in religion, and spiritual barrenness can be expected, exposed as our youth are to the blandishments of the world. Without strong christian principles firmly implanted, with the world they will go, and their talents, means, and influence be lost to the cause of Christ, to the hindrance of his kingdom, and the shame of those who should have striven by every means in their power to build it up. We watch for souls as they that must give account, and should not only seek to retain the lambs of the flock, but gather those who have never been within the fold.

Visitation is another branch of an Elder's duty. They should be familiarly acquainted with not only the communicants, but every individual in a church; this can only be attained by systematic visitation. Many heart-burnings might be removed by this means, and matters that might grow into subjects of discipline adjusted, and the peace and harmony of the congregation promoted; specially by the bedside of the sick and the dying should the elder be found; here his own christian experience will be largely increased, and his spiritual growth and advancement in the divine life promoted.

It is frequently beyond the power of the pastor to overtake every case demanding sympathy and counsel in season of affliction, and it is not only an unquestionable duty, but a most precious privilege of the elder to be associated with him in this God-like work. Elders should faithfully co-operate with the pastor in the admission of individuals to the sealing ordinances of the church. The personal piety of those proposing themselves as candidates for church fellowship, requires to be carefully inquired into, and the elder from his position has frequently better opportunities than the pastor to detect any obliquities there may be in the walk and conversation of such. The kingdom of Christ is not strengthened by accessions of members zealously, but by accessions of the right kind. A just of numbers, it is to be feared, tends sometimes to laxness in this respect, and all seeking admission within the pale of the church were by that fact eligible candidates. The church in our day is in comparatively smooth waters. It is rather creditable than otherwise to be a

member of a christian church; so much the more need those having the oversight in the house of God, should exercise vigilance, and receive applicants with piety, prudence, and charity.

It is the duty of an Elder, further, to sustain the minister and increase his influence; every proper measure should be heartily sustained, and hearty co-operation given in carrying out, whatever in the circumstances may seem best adapted to promote the success of the preaching of the word, and the conversion of souls. And especially in the exercise and discipline of the church, should the pastor's hands be held up, that the ordinances of God's house be not brought into contempt, while this should be done with firmness and decision, it should also be exercised with great discretion and tenderness; many hearts may be broken and subdued by such dealing that would only be hardened by carrying out harshly the letter of the law. Needless exposure should always be avoided; the rule of our blessed Master, first to speak to a brother alone, should never be departed from; by this means he may frequently be gained, when a public demonstration would alienate him, and wound the body of Christ.

Such are some of the duties of an Elder, in connexion with the particular church of which he is a member. One or two things relating to the Church at large may now be given. The first is promptness and zeal in sustaining religious institutions; some of these are more general in their character, embracing christians of different denominations. Of this the Bible society is a prominent example; the Word being the foundation of every christian's faith, all can cordially join in extending its circulation with out note or comment. The circulation of religious tracts is another department of christian work in which all can co-operate, and all these institutions which have for their object the raising of fallen humanity, and elevating our race to that position in the scale of being it is capable of being fitted to occupy. But there are institutions more particularly belonging to the Presbyterian church, of which the Eldership ought to be the unflinching supporters, their missions, home and foreign, should always find in them enlightened advocates, and liberal contributors. For collegiate institutions are also largely dependent on the money contributed, and the moral influence exerted by them for success. Another duty which Elders owe to the Presbyterian church, is a punctual and faithful attendance upon the higher judicatories; not only is it their duty to attend regularly the meetings of Session, but meetings of Presbyteries, Synods, and where specially appointed, General Assemblies. While other denominations are discussing the mode and extent of lay delegations, our elders too frequently neglect to use the equitable, and scriptural privilege our enlightened forefathers established in Presbyterian church government, the lay element being far deficient in numbers, and utterly insignificant in influence in our higher church courts.

These being some of the qualifications and duties of a ruling elder, it becomes these occupying this honorable and responsible position to say with the apostle "Who is sufficient for these things." Blessed be God, the same strength is available in both cases, and if there is a steadfast looking by faith to the same unfading source, the elders of the Presbyterian church may, with him, rejoicingly say "We can do all things through him that strengtheneth us."

## Mr. Inglis and "Ruling Elder."

EDITOR BRITISH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN

Sir,—I have to thank "Ruling Elder" for the information given. From the favourable reviews of Mr. Stewart's book I have several times intended to buy it. Certainly I should never have dreamed that a book especially on Presbyterianism would discuss the "Headship of Christ." Is this a dogma held only by Presbyterians? The point at issue with me is not what Mr. Stewart says, or any other respected writer, but what says the C. P. Church? I ask this, not so much with a view to the proposed Union, as having a good conscience. What I fear for the future is Broad Churchism—signing a creed—in a sense. It is quite possible that the interminable discussions of the past may produce the revenge in the minds of many disgusted with hair-splitting.

I have no desire to present myself as an ecclesiastical hedgehog, yet am unwilling to allow such prickly characters to block the way. I again ask, What does the C. P. Church mean by the Headship of Christ? Yours truly,

WALTER INGLIS.

The Jesuit missionaries are vigorously pushing their way into Madagascar. In the central province they claim to have seventy-four places of worship, and forty-four priests.

The Moravian Brotherhood have in Dutch Guiana a mission begun in 1765, when, carried on with great sacrifice and suffering on account of the climate, has been ripe with results. In the town of Paramaribo, the capital of the colony, the missionaries have a congregation of 6,000, and there was a number of other congregations near the coast. In 1873 the mission had 13 stations; 65 missionaries, missionaries' wives and mission agencies; 406 native assistants; 5,507 communicants, and a total of 22,707 adherents. The missionaries defray much of the expense of the mission by their own labor.

## Students' Missionary Society, Presbyterian College, Montreal

At the annual meeting of the above society, held in October, the following officers were elected:—Pres., James Cameron B. A.; 1st Vice Pres., E. F. Torrance, B. A.; 2nd V. P., W. D. Russell, Rec. Sec., Wm. J. Day, B. A.; Cor. Sec., Wm. MacKibbin; Treas., A. C. Morton.

Committee.—T. R. MacLeod, G. F. Walker, D. MacIsaac, T. Bennett, and T. Froullette.

The annual report shows the Society's work to be in a flourishing condition in all its departments; six missionaries were in the field during the past summer,—the fields occupied being North Hastings, Coaticook, Upper Gatineau, Alexandria, Summerstown, and South Branch, (the last three are in Glengary).

The mission to Coaticook, which was merely tentative, has been abandoned, but the other stations are in a prosperous condition.

Mr. H. Hamilton gives an interesting account of his work among a mixed population of French and English at the Desert on the Upper Gatineau, Alexandria was occupied during the summer by Wm. D. H. MacLennan, B. A., and as a result of the Society's labours there, Alexandria Station has been greatly enlarged and strengthened; and since the annual meeting of the Society Rev. K. MacDonald has been settled as pastor of the congregation and missionary to the Roman Catholics of Glengary. Wm. J. R. MacLeod had considerable success at South Branch. There was evidence of an outpouring of the spirit upon the people among whom he laboured.

Summerstown was occupied part of the summer by Mr. W. MacPhoe; and part of the time it was worked (by Mr. MacLeod) in connection with South Branch. Mr. W. D. Russell occupied a very interesting group of stations in North Hastings, his labours were attended with marked success. All the fields at present under the care of this society are promising fields.

Below we give the various amounts collected, along with the names of the collectors:—

R. D. Frazer, Montreal, \$32.50; Norman MacPhoe, Cumberland, \$31; Goodwin Gibson, Montreal, \$23; C. Brouillette, New Glasgow, \$14; D. MacIsaac, Indian Land, \$5.50; J. J. Cochran, Houttingham and Covey Hill, \$12.55; J. S. Langlier, Illinois, (U. S.), \$1; W. H. Gray, Dallousie and Sherbrooke, \$10; Findlay MacLennan, Megantic and S. Winslow, \$20; T. Brouillette, \$3; D. H. MacLennan, Alexandria, \$142.50; R. Watt, Chateaugay, 46; Wm. MacKibbin, Coaticook, \$32; J. R. MacLeod, Summerstown and S. Branch, \$70.82; Miss M. Hodge, Cornwall, \$31.50; W. D. Russell, Wallaston and L'Amable, \$167.75; J. Wallwood, Montreal, \$62; J. Cameron, Montreal, \$10; A. C. Morton, Guelph, \$45.35; A. C. Morton, Chatham, \$43.70; A. C. Morton, Paris, \$12; A. C. Morton, Woodstock, \$10; A. C. Morton, London, \$9; A. C. Morton, Bothwell, \$5; Geo. F. Walker, Scotch Pres. Church, Waddington, (C. S.), \$27; A. C. Morton, Miscellaneous, \$2.60; T. Bennett, L'Amable, \$15.78.

## Presbytery of Brockville.

This Presbytery met at Prescott on the 3rd inst. A motion to adopt the Basis of Union *simpliciter* was carried by a majority of one, over an amendment to insert an article on the Headship. The reports from sessions and congregations excepting two, were all good. The delegates appointed to the assembly were Messrs. Melville, Glendinning, Morrison, and Hastie, ministers; with Messrs. Ballandon, Thos. Colthorpe, John Ferguson, sr., and Walter Kerr, elders. The Presbytery declined to agree to the proposal of the Kingston Presbytery to change the place of the Synod's meeting from Ottawa to Montreal, but that the appointment should stand as it is. On motion of Mr. Fraser the Rev. Thos. MacPherson, of Stratford, was nominated moderator of the next General Assembly; and Rev. Wm. Lochead, sr., moderator of Synod. Rev. Mr. Hastie and Mr. Ballandon were appointed members of the Assembly's committee on bills and overtures, and Rev. J. Douglas, with Mr. Walter Kerr, elder, of the Synod's committee on bills and overtures. It was decided to consider at next meeting a proposal to reduce Mr. McIntyre's field, by disconnecting Colquhoun's from Osnabrook and uniting it to Dunbar, and all the congregations were cited to appear there for their in crets. A circular was read from the Guelph Presbytery, intimating their intention to apply to next Assembly for leave to receive the Rev. John Henry Perkins, a minister of the Presbyterian Church of the United States. A conference on the state of religion was appointed for next meeting; Messrs. Melville, Morrison, and Lochead to introduce the subject. Mr. Rowat was appointed to dispen the Lord's Supper at Dunbar, to ordain elders there, and to be moderator of Session when it is formed. The Presbytery adjourned to meet at Ottawa (upon the Synod's assembly) on the first Tuesday of May next, at 2 p.m.—J. Hastie, Pres. Clerk.

The Fijians take to Christianity with amazing docility, and to-day the converts number 100,000, while there are 50,000 native children learning to read and write in the mission schools.