

declares this. One of the complaints frequently made is that children do not prepare their lessons at home. And closely and naturally following upon this is the neglect of church attendance, especially by young men. Over and over again, statements are made by reliable persons, who make it their business to find out, that but a small percentage of young men attend Church in our cities. They are immersed in self-indulgence, in pleasure. Is moral progress either probable or possible under such circumstances? We assert this is an unmistakable sign of Moral Decadence. If people do not occupy themselves with religion, they must inevitably lose the advantage it imparts. Home religion is the indispensable condition of moral progress and stability, and its absence means Moral Decadence.

Turning from the home, to the general life of the community we observe a very common neglect of obligation. It is well expressed in Christ's words. "they say and do not." Promises are not observed. Personal convenience or inclination seems to be the measure of obligation. A good illustration comes from where we least expect to find it—the Church. How lightly many treat the obligation faithfully to attend the sanctuary services. Rarely are all the members of a Church committee present at its regular meetings. How many Sabbath school teachers are absent from their post in the school! There seems to be a woful lack of a sense of the sacredness of obligation.

Then, again if we observe the general conduct of men in business, we are forced to admit that there is a Moral Decadence which is not only present, but widespread. Is there not a deplorable lack of good faith in the business community? Men make promises, but do not keep them. Men are covetous before being just, or rather without being just. Where gain is concerned, they will sacrifice principle, and righteousness. They will sacrifice a brother to their greed. And even members of churches fall from the faith and the right, and miserably betray that sacred cause with which they are identified. Laws have to be multiplied in order to keep men to their obligation. Who trusts a man in business? Distrust is the rule, and every business transaction must be hedged about with every possible guarantee. And who does not acknowledge with shame the general corruption there is in political life! Surely we need go no further. There is Moral Decadence, there are very many signs of it everywhere.

Now, if our inferences are correct then the plain duty of the church is to do her best to bravely face the problem. If it goes on, society will not, cannot improve. It must grow worse. The need of the hour is to revert to the Pauline method of preaching—to preach, with like zeal, "righteousness, temperance and judgment to come." A gospel without righteousness is salt that has lost its savour. It is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Now if Felix trembled under such preaching, sinners will tremble now. And the sooner they tremble, the better, both for themselves and for the community of which they form a part. The sooner may we expect to witness an improvement, and progress in the moral tone and life of our land.

Elder-Moderatorship.

BY N. A. O.

Written for the Review.

This question as to whether Elders may be appointed to the office of Moderator of Session, Synod or General Assembly is one of chief interest because it is one that affects the practice of the Church fundamentally. To say that it is a controversial question in the Church would be to quite misstate the facts, for that it is not, and could scarcely come to be. We believe it is the *long time practice* and not the *necessary practice*, or the safety or solidity or permanence of the Church that the question touches.

Whatever may be said in this communication either favoring Elder-Moderatorship or in opposition to it, your correspondent does not wish now to appear in the light either of a champion nor yet of a critic in that regard. Meanwhile let it be agreed, "there is much to be said on both sides." But an editorial of yours has suggested some criticism of positions taken. It is in regard to the "able statement" made by Dr. Laing on the floor of the Synod of Chatham. There were a good

many who heard the arguments on both sides of the question who thought the principal defenders of the action of Hamilton and other Presbyteries in placing an Elder in the Moderator's chair were not perfectly conscious of a strong case for they seemed to argue at greater length, and with less logic than is their wont. Nor was the other side of the case presented with sufficient clearness, though with much vigor.

Now as to the four positions submitted by Dr. Laing. The first is that the Book of Forms, etc., does not say the Moderator *shall be* a minister, but is a minister; and that "the cautious wording of the statement was intentional and significant." We ask, Is there any more "cautious wording" in that book that may some day prove "significant"? The book was adopted by the General Assembly in 1889. Only now are we finding out that it is a very convenient book containing rules so worded that they are readily construed to fit the case. We submit that the Book of Forms is supposed to have crystallized and to have stated unequivocally the long standing practice of the Church, a practice either directly enjoined by Scripture or else deducible therefrom. This, notwithstanding the fact that the Assembly of '89 approved and adopted the book "as a useful guide" rather than as a law-book.

Dr. Laing's second position was, that "in any organized society, unless the constitution pronounced otherwise, every member was eligible for election to the Presidency, and there was no provision to the contrary in the law of the Church."

(What is the "law of the Church?" Where are we to find it? Evidently not in the Book of Forms which is only, it would appear, "a useful guide" exhibiting the "ordinary practice of the Church.")

But this second position the doctor takes is not analogous, as he evidently intended it to appear, but savors rather of begging the question. The Church ought to be Scriptural as regards her constitution and presumably is so. Other organized societies are not necessarily so, and seldom make any claim to Scripturalness in point of their constitution. If there is to be any copying let it be done by the societies—not by the Church. If she is Scriptural in this so essential a particular she does not need to copy. Whatever truth in this question may be get-at-able and is not already appreciated, cannot be arrived at by such an argument. And the case ought not to be in any way prejudiced.

The third position taken by the doctor is not calculated to bring much added privilege to the Eldership, for it contains two exceptions which do much to invalidate the argument intended to favor Elder-Moderatorship. The first exception he plainly states in that the existing parity between ministers and ruling Elders is not *strict* parity unless in functions of government. His words are, as quoted in your editorial of the 7th inst., "When a Presbytery is constituted there is strict parity between ministers and ruling elders except when functions other than those of government have to be performed."

The second exception is implied. It is that the strict parity posited exists only after a Presbytery has been constituted. If we have understood rightly, then *who is to constitute the Presbytery?* or declare it constituted? Dr. Laing, we believe, only weakens the case still more when he "contends that a minister is really an elder who is authorized to teach." This needs not to be contended, for the Apostles themselves not only were elders, but some of them claimed the office.

Then as regards the fourth position taken, viz., "that exceptions had occurred in the past to the use and want of the Church on this point;" your correspondent has it from the clerk of the Presbytery that was the first in Ontario to adopt the course for which the Presbytery of Hamilton is now called in question, that that particular Presbytery elected an elder as its Moderator in order that the Elder-Moderatorship question might be before the Church. Perhaps other Presbyteries, whether recently or in other days, had some equivalent reason for the step they took. In any case such evidence is only collateral at best, for it does not affect the Scripturalness or un-Scripturalness of the question at issue.

Let the question be thoroughly studied and discussed, for nothing but good can come of it.