

ELDERS.

The character and life of the Christian minister have been travestied, in the fiction of the day, to an extent which would be unaccountable, were it not that the victims of this persistent misrepresentation have the life of their Master before them, and His words, "Men shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." Of this class of literature, however, the elder has no such cause to complain. Either the authors, who set themselves in opposition to evangelical religion, do not know of the existence of such a class of ordained men, or, knowing, do not choose to recognize them. There are books, notwithstanding, in which the elder, his sayings and doings, find a place. Some of these are of a semi-religious character—a kind of moral tales, as distinguished from novels, commonly so called. Others are sketches of life and character in Scotland, the north of Ireland, and parts of America. The representation which these books give of the Presbyterian elder is a most untruthful one. It cannot be called exaggerated, because it holds forth no essential feature of the eldership; but seizes upon peculiarities that men in any position might be found to possess, and which some elders undoubtedly have manifested, and with these, as with a single daub of unsightly color, covers the whole picture. The traditional elder, whom even ministers of the Presbyterian Church, in its various branches, that have dabbled in light literature, have condescended to hand down to posterity, is a painful caricature. He is a countryman, and generally a small tenant farmer, or, if resident on this western hemisphere, the proprietor of a hundred acres of well-tilled, but unornamented land; and his thoughts are supposed to be equally divided between the church and the crops, with a strong suspicion of a balance in favor of the latter. As a rule, he is destitute of secular education, save that which he has acquired in the school of experience, and is able to go as far in ignoring the literary, scientific, and historical discoveries of the past few centuries as the good farmer on the Welland Canal, who still insists that the sun goes round the earth once a day. But his stronghold is his theology. This he has received from his parents, as they got theirs from those who went before them. It lies in the Shorter Catechism, perhaps the Confession of Faith, and a few standard religious authors of the old school. He is perpetually airing it in a hard, dry, logical form in the presence of all and sundry, and evidently with no other design than that of pleasing himself or satisfying a want of his nature. Charity he knows little of; intolerance is made a necessary result of his ignorance; and censoriousness displays itself whenever he has occasion to express an opinion upon a fellow creature. He has a ceremonial law of his own, which has come by tradition from the fathers; and to the observance of this, in every jot and tittle of it, he clings with the utmost tenacity, not scrupling to visit with severe censure any who may be found transgressing its requirements. Woe to the unfortunate who comes before him as a member of Session in the way of discipline; stern justice, but scant mercy, may be expected from him. The relations that subsist between himself and the minister are of a complex character. He possesses a certain respect for him as one who stands, towards himself, officially, in a position of recognized authority; but his confidence in the minister's piety, judgment, and knowledge, is not to be compared with the implicit dependence which he places and the satisfaction he finds in his own. For this reason he does not hesitate occasionally to speak a word of counsel to his pastor, and to make known all real or imagined ministerial shortcomings to his brother elders, whom he has already disparaged to the utmost.