

And why should not our elders be found acting the part of teachers? Will any one who knows the state of our congregations and of the general community affirm, that there is not need for a much larger staff of men who are "apt to teach" than we can have in the field were even all our congregations supplied with pastors? Will any one who knows whereof he affirms, say that a minister is capable of properly preparing two sermons a week, and attending to all the numerous incidental calls which are made upon his time and talents for the service of the church and of the community in which he lives, and after that find time to visit the sick, and catechise a large congregation from house to house? Why should not our elders regularly visit and catechise an allotted district of the congregation? Why should they not always be found taking the lead in Sabbath Schools? And when the minister is absent from his flock, labouring, it may be, in some destitute locality, why should not the other elders take the pulpit, and show that they are "apt to teach." We know of no reason either from Scripture or common sense why the church should not have the full benefit of all the sanctified talent which she possesses. And certainly we are strangers to any reason why her congregations should be scattered abroad on the Lord's day when there is a whole bench of elders idle, all of whom should be able to exhort and convince the gainsayers by sound doctrine.

It is sometimes said that our people would rather not have such preaching—that they would rather stay at home than come and hear it. To this we reply, we would like to see the experiment made before we can admit the force of this objection. We cannot bring ourselves to believe that our people generally would prefer going to other churches, where not unfrequently, at least in many localities, they patiently endure the harangues of men who have not a tithe either of the learning or Scripture knowledge possessed by the generality of our pious elders.

No doubt the great difficulty to be encountered at the outset would be to persuade our elders to make trial of their gifts. But if the thing is right it can be done, and it should be attempted. No custom, however long continued, should tempt us to muzzle the mouth of an elder who is "apt to teach."

A low state of religion has, among Presbyterians, always been accompanied by low views of the work of the ruling elder. And a revival of religion has always been followed by higher views of this Scriptural office. We have already made some progress towards a correct estimate of the importance of the ruling eldership; and in not a few of our congregations there are men who make an approximation to the primitive ideal of an elder who rules well. Much more however remains to be done. Nothing, except an outpouring of God's Spirit, is more essential to the prosperity of our church than a thoroughly efficient eldership fashioned after the New Testament model. If our church is therefore ever to "look forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners," she must raise the *status* of her ruling elders to a very different point from any they have yet generally reached. The church must no longer delegate her teaching functions in each congregation to one person, but commit them, as of old, to a body of faithful men "apt to teach," and able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.