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## Contributors and Correspondents

### HOW MAY THE CAPABILITIES OF OUR ELDERS BE DEVELOPED AND EMPLOYED TO THE BEST ADVANTAGE?

BY THE REV. JAMES MIDDLEMISS OF ELORA.

PAPER READ BEFORE THE SYNOD OF TORONTO AND KINGSTON, AND PRINTED PURSUANT TO REQUEST OF THE SYNOD.

In opening the consideration of this very important subject, I may be allowed to begin by referring briefly to my own experience in connection with the eldership of my own congregation. When the first appointment of elders was made, shortly after my settlement, about twenty-one years ago, the congregation consisted of 104 members. Four elders were appointed, of whom three had been elders before. Of these four, though all of them maintained the worship of God in their families, only two had the gift of praying outside their own families. At the present time, with a membership of 250, we have, besides, two who have retired owing to the infirmities of age, eleven acting elders, all of whom with scarcely an exception can pray with the sick, and in the prayer-meeting, some of them expressing themselves in a very pointed manner, and with peculiar tenderness and solemnity. I may say the same respecting several of the deacons. The great advance that is implied in the above statement is not owing to any special endeavour used with the direct view of inducing individuals to exercise spiritual gifts. I believe it is simply the result and evidence of a real advance, in respect of the interest that is felt in the truths of the gospel and the cause of Christ. And I have no doubt that, in referring to my own experience, I am only stating an instance of what is, to a very great extent, the common experience of our ministers throughout the Church. I have, therefore, no sympathy with those who are putting the question: "What is the cause that the former days were better than these?" They were not better. We are in many important respects greatly in advance of what we have been. And in the greatly increased number of men of intelligent piety, who are in the eldership—men capable of good work and disposed to work—we have a power for good, moral and spiritual, which if we could only secure its systematic and steady operation, would elevate the character, and thereby as in other ways, increase the efficiency of the Church to an extent we cannot calculate.

In view of what I have now said, we are warranted in setting out with the assumption that we have a large number of elders, well qualified for their office, and possessed of gifts, which, if properly exercised, make them capable of immense good in the Church. Without considering the proper place and functions of the eldership, which would be irrelevant at present and is unnecessary, I take it for granted, in accordance with their double Scriptural designation—*presbyter* or *elder* or *ruler*, and *bishop* or *overseer*—that their function is *two-fold*; that they are appointed not only to rule in the Church, but to take the spiritual oversight of its members. "Obey them that have rule over you, and submit yourselves that they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you." The design of this oversight is to promote the moral and spiritual welfare of the Church, to elevate the character of its members, to prevent its deterioration, and thereby to sustain and increase the efficiency of the Church as a spiritual power for good in the world. The question therefore is, how may elders most effectively fulfil the end of the institution of their office? Of course, the elders of a congregation, in their united capacity as a session, rule the whole congregation, and have the oversight of it as a whole and of each of its members. But it is evident that, if they are to exercise anything like a proper and effective oversight, it is necessary that the work of oversight be distributed among them. Our elders are, with very few exceptions, men who have to provide for their families by labouring in some secular calling, so that it is impossible that any one of them should exercise an effective oversight of the whole congregation. I would say therefore: Let us adopt the practice of assigning to each elder his separate district with whose oversight he shall especially charge himself. Unless we do this, our elders will continue to do very little in the way of effective oversight. The district should be of moderate extent, say including from ten to twenty families according to circumstances. Few elders, who are at all qualified for their office, would find it inconvenient, or be unwilling, to

visit all the families of such a district twice or perhaps three or four times a year. I know an elder, not one of my own, whose practice it was for many years, to go over his district in the way of visiting a family every week and worshipping with them. I would not lay down this as a rule for all. I merely refer to it as one of the ways in which an elder may keep up an intimacy with the families of his district, and as showing what a very small tax upon his time would be required.

Owing to our present prevailing want of system, probably the great majority of our elders do very little, and very many next to nothing, in the way of a moral and spiritual oversight of our people. Too many of them no doubt, are content with this state of things, satisfied with attending occasional meetings of the session and officiating at the communion. But others are unhappy, feeling that their office is little better than a name. These, and there are many of them, if each had his own manageable portion of the Lord's vineyard to attend to, and attended to it, would feel that their office was one of real and important Christian service. They would derive much personal benefit from their endeavours to raise and keep up the moral and spiritual tone of their several districts; and would have no little gratification of the highest kind in seeing that their endeavours were not in vain in the restraining and the subduing of evil, and in the promotion of morality and purity. In the faithful and diligent exercise of their oversight, they would no doubt have to meet with what might pain and grieve them. But every man must be prepared for this, who wishes to be instrumental in restraining the evil that is in the world, and advancing its moral well-being. It is the very design of the elder's office that he should come in contact with evil, and confront it with Christian weapons. An elder should look upon the congregation to which he belongs, as a part of the great army that is in conflict with moral evil, and upon himself as an officer of that army, charged with the oversight of a small company, whose efficiency for the conflict, and whose conduct in it, he is bound to look to. He ought to be well aware that the very evils which the Church is designed to contend with, for the purpose of restraining, abating, and subduing them, are apt to infect the Church; that Church members are in danger of being and doing what Christianity and its ordinances are designed to keep men from being and doing; and to feel that it is his first duty as an elder to take note of such things, and in the exercise of Christian fidelity, prudence, and love, to stir up all under his more immediate care to walk worthy of God, to keep themselves unspotted from the world, and to do their part in the great conflict between good and evil. In making and keeping himself intimately acquainted with the families of his care, he will from time to time be called to deal with cases of neglect of ordinances, intemperance, variance between individuals or families; but if he is a man of consistent piety and good sense, as every elder should be, the respect that both his character and his office command will ensure his dealing with such cases with no small measure of success. Though his success may be far short of his desire and his aim, his endeavours cannot fail to keep in check, and abate, evils that would otherwise grow in strength, and to promote those important interests that would languish but for his endeavours to promote them.

To prevent misunderstanding, and to obviate objections that might be made in reference to an oversight so close as is implied in what we have just said, it may be well here to remark that the oversight by an elder should be very remote from anything of the nature of espionage. Elders are not session spies, and their oversight is a *paternal* one. And though it may be desirable that the elder should regularly report to the session regarding the state of his district, and his work in it, he must be, and as a man of good common sense he will be, very careful of what he says, either in the Session, or to any of his brother elders, or to any other person, about his dealing with individuals in cases calling for his counsels, admonitions, or remonstrances. He would do well, in no case to let even a remote hint escape from him, unless he is fully assured that the interests of religion imperatively require it. Were such an oversight exercised by our elders, I have no doubt, that in many cases, say of intemperance, for example, the evil would be early and effectually checked by the Christian admonitions of a faithful and judicious elder, instead of growing in strength until it required session discipline—a mode of dealing with that evil, which, as we all know, is apt to have little good effect upon the individual, be-

cause of the strength which the habit has acquired by the time the session is called upon to interfere.

Though it is implied in what we have said, it may be well expressly to state, that the elder's oversight is to be exercised with a view to something higher than the good moral deportment of those under his care. His great aim should be that they live as Christians in the highest sense of that term—that they be "living epistles of Christ, known and read of all men." Aiming at this, he would do well to establish a weekly prayer-meeting in his district, using his best endeavours to keep it from being repulsive or even wearisome to the young, and to such as may not as yet be drawn to it from a desire for personal edification.

Though I have been urging but one thing with a view to the development of the capabilities of our elders, viz: the division of the work of oversight by assigning to each his own district, and that because it seems to me to lie at the very foundation of any attempt to make our elders the power for good that they might be, I would not say that in all cases without exception the elder should have a separate district assigned to him. There are diversities of gifts; and in larger congregations especially, besides the division into districts, each under the care of its own elder, there might be particular duties assigned to others. Such, for instance, as the superintendence of the Sabbath School, the oversight of young men, especially those who live in boarding-places, etc.

In urging the brethren in the eldership to do a good deal more as *bishops* or *overseers* than the most of them are now doing, and pointing out how they may do it, both to the benefit of the Church and to their own, we do not wish that ministers should do any less. It is elder's work we wish them to do, and not *minister's* work. It seems to me perfectly certain that if the elders did their work systematically in the way I have indicated, not only would the minister have more comfort in his work, but he would do more work and do it cheerfully. The general establishment of district prayer-meetings, for example, would add to his work; for there are few ministers who would not regard it at once as their duty and their privilege to visit these meetings more or less regularly. Again, the elder's intimacy with his district would often ensure the minister's learning early of cases of serious illness, and thus prevent complaints that are too frequently made of his neglect of invalids of whose sickness no one charges himself with the trouble of informing him.

Having fully occupied the time that I am warranted to occupy in opening the consideration of this subject, I shall now give place to others; and close with respectfully suggesting that as the result of our deliberations, some practical recommendations be drawn up, and urged with all earnestness upon every elder within the bounds of the Synod.

### "MODERN BIBLICAL HYPER-CRITICISM."

EDITOR BRITISH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN.

SIR,—As Mr. Gray failed to see clearly the object of the quotations in my first communication, it is not surprising that he should have succeeded in convincing himself that I have practically yielded "the main points;" that is, "the four fundamental lines of error," which he has arrayed against Professor Smith. The relevancy of the indictment which these "lines" constitute is one thing, the proof adduced in the Professor's article is another thing. The latter formed the subject of my remarks. Occasion for animadversion is not exhausted by the examples given of the reviewer's manner of leading proof, but as Mr. Gray is of opinion that "the time has come for ending for the present all newspaper correspondences," it would be unfair to advance anything that might provoke a rejoinder.

I close this correspondence firm in the conviction that, whatever be the result of Presbyterian recognition, Professor Smith will continue to have fellowship in faith with "those plain Christians who believe in such truths as miracles, prophecy, inspiration, and canonically." Yours etc.,

W. SNOODGRASS.

Queen's College, 7th May, 1877.

THERE are 250 Protestant churches in Palestine.

A holy life will produce a powerful influence for good in the world. In every relation in life, in every position we occupy, we may manifest the grace of God. The spirit of humility, meekness, and love, filling the heart, will be clearly seen, and will render our life a hymn of praise to God, while it will improve sin, and encourage piety among men.

## CRESCENT STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, MONTREAL.

The congregation, known by the name of the Cote Street Free Church, Montreal; having obtained the sanction of the Presbytery to sell the old church and remove to a more central and desirable locality, recently purchased a most eligible site on the corner of Dorchester and Crescent streets, on which they are now erecting one of the handsomest church edifices, not only in Montreal, but in the whole Dominion.

Saturday last, the 5th of May, was the day appointed for the laying of the memorial stone of the church. The weather was all that could be desired. The attendance was large, the various platforms erected being crowded by the members and friends of the church. On the upper platform we observed the following gentlemen,—Principal Macvicar, Revs. Dr. Jenkins, Dr. Wilkes, Rev. Messrs. Baxter, Black, Wilson, Scrimger, Laing, Fleck, Wellwood, McNeil, Warden, G. Laug, Wells, and Stevenson; and Messrs. J. Stirling, J. Court, Jos. Mackay, Edward Mackay, Jas. Ross, John Anderson, J. Campbell, W. McMaster, A. McGoun, P. Nicholson, H. Watson, R. Anderson, and A. C. Hutchison, etc. John Stirling, Esq., chairman of the Building Committee, presided with marked ability. He opened the service by giving out the 100th Psalm, which was sung with heartiness and spirit. Rev. J. S. Black read portions of the Scripture, and Rev. J. Scrimger engaged in prayer. James Court, Esq., after expressing regret at the unavoidable absence of Mr. David Morrice, one of the most active members of the Building Committee, read the following statement descriptive of the building:

The site for the church has a frontage of 120 feet on Dorchester Street by a depth of 170 feet on Crescent Street. The building will occupy the whole depth except a space of about twelve feet between the front and the street, and nearly the whole width of the lot. About two-thirds of the depth of the building is taken up by the Church proper, while the remaining third is devoted to the Lecture Hall, Sunday School, Class and Committee rooms, and Pastor's Study. In plan, the church is almost square, being eighty-six feet wide exclusive of the transepts, and eighty-five feet deep. This form admitting of a compact arrangement by which, although the seating capacity is between 1100 and 1200, every person in the congregation will be within seventy feet of the preacher. In the interior, the general effect will be that of a circular church, this appearance being given by the arrangement of the pews, and the octagon form of the groined ceiling. This ceiling which is the most important feature of the interior, is supported on eight clustered columns with enriched capitals. In the centre there will be a dome of coloured glass twenty-three feet in diameter, supported on an arcade and elevated about twelve feet above the level of the ceiling. The lecture hall, the floor of which is on the same level as that of the church is sixty-one by forty-one feet, and seventeen feet high; the Sunday school room is immediately over the lecture hall, and of like dimensions, but twenty-one feet in height. Class and committee rooms are placed at each end of the lecture hall, and Sunday school rooms, and separated from them by glass partitions so arranged that they may be thrown open and the whole form one room. A comfortable residence for the caretaker is provided in the rear part of the basement, which also contains the heating apparatus and storage for fuel. Ample provision has been made for egress from the building, there being six large doors, four in front and two near the rear. The principal feature of the exterior will be the front on Dorchester Street; this will have an elevation of ninety feet from the street to the apex of the gable. The lower part has a triple portal with deeply recessed jambs, ornamented by small columns and enriched capitals. Above will be an arcade and a large wheel window, enclosed in a deeply recessed arch. On one side this elevation is flanked by a tower and spire rising to a height of 210 feet, while the other side is occupied by an octagon staircase turret, surmounted by a fleche. The elevation on Crescent Street is broken by two projections, one forming a transept to the church, and the other marking the position of the Sunday school room, lecture hall, etc. Due attention has been paid to ventilation. The windows, though filled with leaded glass are arranged to open the same as an ordinary window. Ample provision is made for carrying off vitiated air by a large shaft, eleven by two feet, placed between the church and lecture hall. In this shaft the air is rarified by the flues from the furnaces, and suitable ducts connect the church and lecture hall therewith. On the whole every provision has been made for seating a large congregation, so that every person may see and hear the preacher, while the important considerations of ample means of egress and thorough ventilation, have been carefully attended to. The style of architecture adopted by the architects is French Gothic of the thirteenth century, and the estimated cost of the building, including the land, is \$100,000. The contractors for the work are as follows:—P. Nicholson, mason; L. Paton & Son, carpenters; Phillips & Wand, plasterers; J. James & Co., roofers; Alex. Craig, painter; J. O. Spence, stained glass work; R. Paton, plumber. The building was designed

by, and is being carried out under the superintendence of Messrs. Hutchison and Steele, the well known architects, of Montreal.

The chairman then read a list of the articles deposited in the jar, and placed under the stone. Included among them were copies of the city papers, the BRITISH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN, the PRESBYTERIAN YEAR BOOKS for 1876 and 1877, the Presbyterian Record, printed reports of the congregation from the beginning of its history, the silver and copper coins of Great Britain and the Dominion, etc., etc.

He then, in name of the Building Committee, presented Principal Macvicar with a very handsome solid silver trowel, made to order by Mr. R. Hoadley, silversmith, bearing this inscription, "Presented to the Rev. Principal Macvicar, LL.D., on the occasion of his laying the corner stone of Crescent Street Presbyterian Church, Montreal, May 5, 1877. The trowel was a magnificent piece of workmanship, admired by all who saw it. At the end of the handle was a beaver with a maple leaf in its mouth. The inscription was artistically engraved. Principal Macvicar, having laid the stone in customary fashion amid the applause of the large audience, delivered the following address:

This is an hour of deep interest to us all, an hour which recalls much of the past and leads us to look with hope and courage to the future. By the good providence of God, the congregation for which this church is being erected has had an honourable history. It originated in a desire to lift up the standard of evangelical religion at a time when such an effort received the cordial sympathy and support of a few earnest Christian people.

On the 6th January, 1844, twelve persons connected with various churches in the city, met in the house of the late James B. Orr, in St. Paul Street. These were the Rev. Wm. Behune, (Probationer,) Messrs. John Redpath, James R. Orr, Archibald Ferguson, David Ferguson, Wm. Macintosh, Wm. Hutchison, James Morrison, E. Molver, Archibald McGoun, Alexander Fraser, and Donald Fraser, (now Rev. Dr. Fraser, London, Eng.) These formed themselves into a committee for the furtherance of the cause of the Free Church in this city and province. Dr. McNider, A. Stevenson, James Court, and Joseph Mackay, were subsequently added.

In the same year the Rev. Dr. Burns, then of Paisley, and since deceased, visited the city and greatly stirred up the people by his powerful sermons and addresses, and raised large sums for the building fund of the Free Church of Scotland. At the invitation of the committee just referred to, the Rev. W. C. Burns, afterwards missionary in China, passed more than a year in this city and various parts of the province with blessed results following his earnest labours. After him the Rev. John McNaughton, then of Paisley, now of Belfast, spent some time in the city, and warmly encouraged the proposal to establish a new congregation.

In 1845 the Rev. Dr. John Bonar, then of Larbert, officiated for a short time in St. Gabriel street Church, and began to meet applicants for membership in the new congregation in a hired room in George Street. In about three weeks in March of the same year a temporary wooden church to accommodate from five to six hundred people, was erected in Lagachebore street, near the end of Cote street, at a cost of \$300. Dr. Bonar opened this humble edifice; and some now present distinctly remember the happy days spent within its walls. Two years later, in 1847, the present Cote street Church was opened for service by the Rev. Dr. McGillivray, of Aberdeen, and the Rev. Dr. Wilkes of this city.

Without entering into details or waiting to trace further the history of the church, it may be stated that from its formation to the present date its pulpit has been supplied by over twenty leading ministers of the Free Church of Scotland who officiated each from two to six months. It has also enjoyed the services of three settled pastors. The first was the Rev. Donald (now Dr.) Fraser, London, Eng., who was ordained and inducted 8th Aug., 1851, and continued his ministry for about seven-and-a-half years. It is stated in the reports of the deacons that under his pastorate the membership rose to 386, and the number of sittings allocated in the Church to 886.

It is proper to state that thirteen deputies from Scotland had rendered service in the Church prior to Dr. Fraser's settlement. After his acceptance of a call to Inverness, the pulpit was vacant for over two years, until I was inducted as his successor, Jan. 30th, 1851. I continued my pastorate for eight years, during which, according to the printed reports of the Kirk Session, and Deacons' Court, the membership rose to 572, and the largest number of sittings allocated was 914, leaving only nine sittings in the area and thirty-four in the galleries not allocated.

I was succeeded in the charge by the Rev. Dr. Burns, now of Halifax, N.S., who was inducted on the 4th May, 1870, and continued his pastorate for nearly five years. The events of these years are fresh in the memories of most of you who now hear me, so that they need not be recited. In referring to the career of usefulness which Cote street Church has already enjoyed, it would be improper to forget to mention that it has aided materially in founding and supporting some five mission Sabbath Schools, together with St. Joseph street Church, Chalmers Church, Nazareth street Church, and the mission at Petite Cote, and has also contributed very largely to

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