

people to see the propriety of it, speaking of his brother as "our pastor," cheerfully according him preeminence in all departments of church life, co-operating with him in spiritual inspection and general administration.

Perhaps long usage has dulled the elder's notion of his own dignity—the honor and responsibility of his office; he feels himself to be a sort of ecclesiastical convenience, especially about communion time. He has every confidence in the teaching elder, and is assured that things will be kept moving by him, and that all he needs to do is to be a feeble assistant in a most general way. He is harried with commercial cares, and it may be, domestic trials; sometimes he is sorely perplexed and disheartened by the cross purposes in his lot, so he slips along softly in his eldership, lamenting his uselessness, and half afraid that the lamentation is echoed throughout the parish.

But the dear man is a thousand times more precious than if he were to magnify his position, so as to be an offensive, aggressive, and destructive force in the church which professes to serve, but in fact is ambitious to "run." The consequential, dictatorial, and scheming spirit which shows itself now and then in the ruling as in the teaching elder, deserves sharp rebuke in both; and if this be in vain, then it should be escorted to the door in the interests of piety and peace. The man who so exalts himself, ought to be abased. He is a chronic irritant, and does work for the devil oftener than for the Lord.

But surely there is a middle ground where the ruling elder may be more than an ecclesiastical convenience, and considerably less than an ecclesiastical nuisance; and this ground has been traced in the ninth chapter of our Book of Government, where the Session is charged to preserve the purity and order of the Church by the wholesome exercise of discipline, "and to consort the best measures for promoting the spiritual interests of the congregation." Our elder must then be useful not alone in his judicial capacity, but also in a religious and evangelizing capacity; he is to help devise measures, and lend a hand in their execution. These measures should be adapted to the church and its neighborhood, growing out of the needs, tastes, habits, and social positions of the people; and he should have such knowledge of his parish, get such knowledge of how work is being done in other parishes, be animated with such zeal for his own constituency, as that he will ever and everywhere be found alert in mind, heart, and hand for all that will be likely to advance the general prosperity of his church.

In addition he will be faithful in routine

work, visiting the sick and afflicted, cheering the aged, keeping track of the baptized youth, and trying to lead them into the higher consecrations of the Christian life; laboring in the Sabbath-school, where he never forgets that his own childhood needed patience, gentleness, and fidelity; praying in the week meeting, and learning to pray unto edification; organizing and developing cottage meetings and missions, as means of grace for non-church-goers—in short, he will aim to keep ahead of the common level in things Scriptural, spiritual, and saving, so that if a day should come when the teaching elder is absent or the pulpit is vacant, he may stand and preach the truth, or read it as arranged by another, unchallenged by the most spiritual member of the Church, honored or admired as a true and zealous servant of Christ Jesus ministering in His name.

It may be said that this is the ideal elder, not the actual; the impossible rather than the possible. But some of us know of men who have actually come far up to this standard; men of faith and of the Holy Ghost; men directly from the common people, endowed with sanctified common-sense and inspired to walk worthy of their high vocation; men who have lived, toiled, and succeeded in their solemn trusts until released by the Master and brought into His immediate presence on high. They proved to be the right men in the right place. The mistake everywhere is because of the wrong man. Political, social, financial, and other considerations of a purely secondary character occasionally fill the offices in the church as they fill them in the State. The right man is passed by, he is as modest as he is meritorious, he is not anxious to be put in the white light, and the result is conspicuous inefficiency and poor work by the wrong man.

A good way for correcting such blunders has been devised in the rotary plan, which is supposed to revolve until it evolves the best material for the Church Session. If the teaching elder can be retired for failure, certainly the ruling elder should be liable to the same fate for the same cause. But many a minister has had to go, go with a breaking heart and heavy step, while the elder who might have helped him to stay and render grand service, stays on himself to help officiate around another victim.

Yes, you want good and true men in the Session, and as they touch shoulders and hearts and hands, and by their concerted, compacted strength carry the religious welfare of the church, they will present to the world such an association of gracious wisdom and strength as shall command universal respect, admiration, and love.