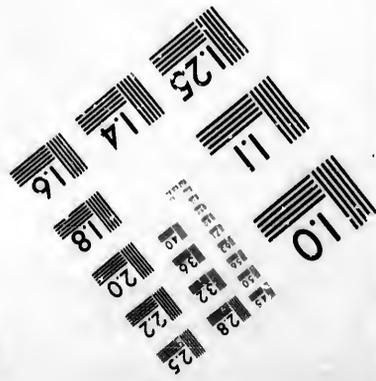
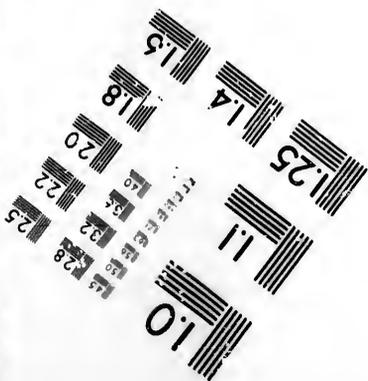
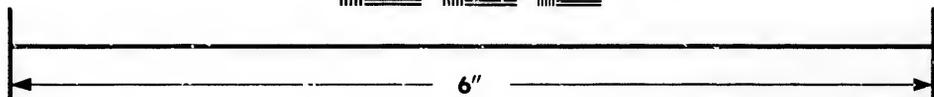
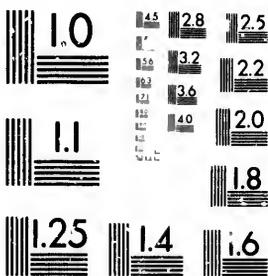


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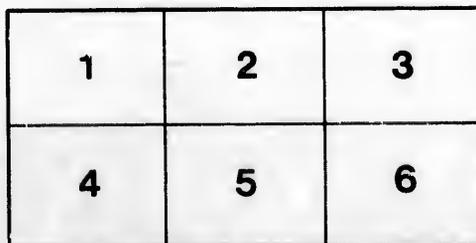
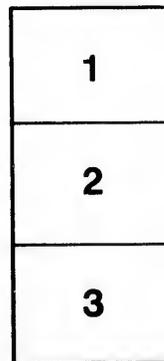
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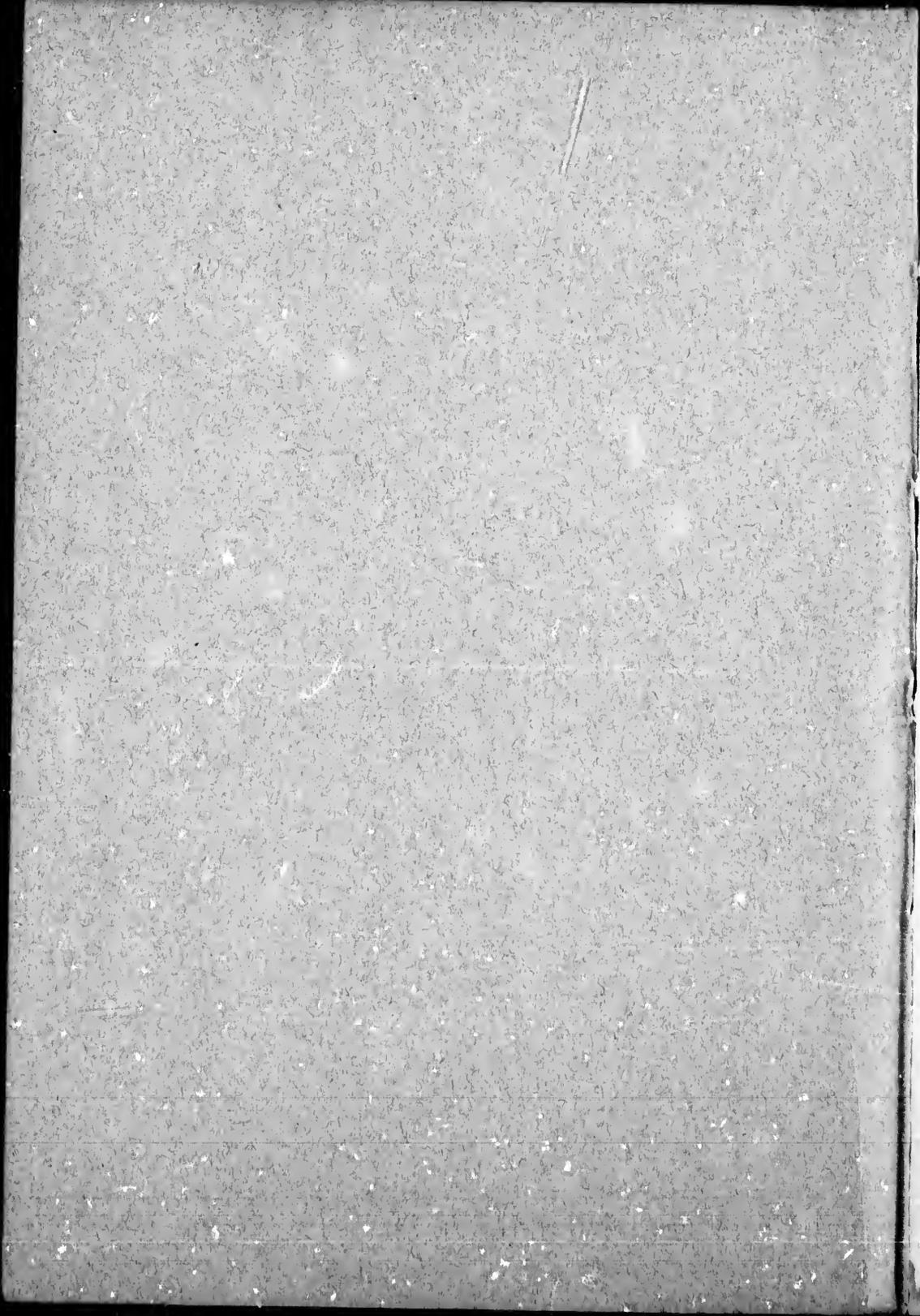
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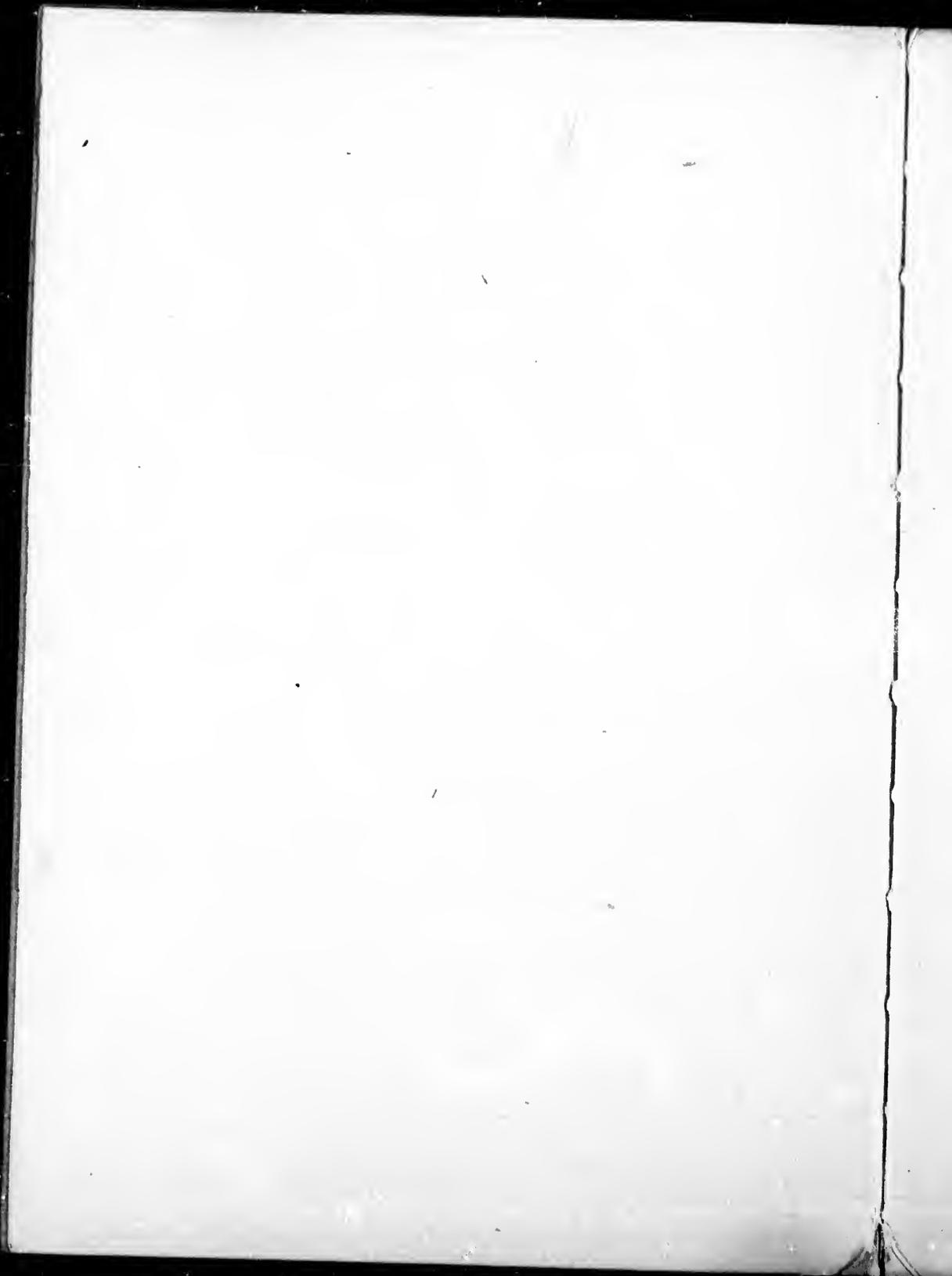
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The
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of
Elders



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THE
OFFICE AND WORK
OF
ELDERS

-- BY --
PRINCIPAL D. H. MACVICAR, D.D., LL.D.
PRESBYTERIAN COLLEGE, MONTREAL.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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1895

The following discourse was delivered in Crescent Street Presbyterian Church, Montreal, Sabbath morning, December 2nd, 1894, on the occasion of the Ordination of Elders.

It is now published by unanimous request of the Kirk Session of said Church.

D. H. M.

PRESBYTERIAN COLLEGE,
MONTREAL, Dec. 15th, 1894.

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The Office and Work of Elders.

1 PETER v. 1.—The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder (Greek—*sumpresbuteros*), and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.

In defining his own status in the Church of God Peter says, I am an elder, I am a witness of the sufferings of Christ, I am a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed; but he does not say I am the Supreme Pontiff set over all the rest of the apostles—the infallible head of the church universal. No. That was a distinction which he never claimed and never enjoyed, but which was ascribed to him by the superstition of a later age.

He was content to take rank as an elder and a witness of the sufferings which he saw the Son of God pass through in his earthly career, in Gethsemane and on Calvary, when he put away sin by offering himself a sacrifice once for all, “and made reconciliation for the sins of the people.”

Peter was content to testify to these redemptive sufferings, and to be a partaker, along with the humblest of God's people, of the glory that shall be revealed when Christ shall appear to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe. Is not this enough, and infinitely better than all the pomp and honours falsely claimed by his pretended successors?

But my wish is to turn your attention specially to the first title claimed by Peter, that of an elder. We are met this morning to ordain additional elders in this church, and it is fitting that we should think about their office and work.

In the New Testament Church, as organized by Christ and His apostles, there were two permanent orders of office-bearers, Deacons and Elders.* I do not forget that in subsequent days sundry other orders were added, an imposing hierarchy was set up by mere human authority, with Cardinals, Arch-bishops, and so forth. These were all post-apostolic, and are now acknowledged by candid and scholarly men to be destitute of Scriptural warrant. They no more belong to the simplicity of the apostolic church than the adoration of saints and angels.

With respect to Deacons, we read of the institution of the office in the sixth chapter of the Acts, when "seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom," were elected and ordained to serve in this capacity. They are not called Deacons in the record, but their character, qualifications and work correspond with what was afterwards set forth as belonging to Deacons. And that the office became universal in the apostolic church, and was designed to be permanent, seems clear from Paul's directions to Timothy touching the sort of persons to be chosen as Deacons. They "must be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience."

We are concerned, however, just now with Elders, and regarding them we may note the following points:—

I.—*They are called of God's Spirit to this office.* No man should take this honour to himself unless so called. Hence elders are persons separated and distinctly consecrated to the Lord by their high and sacred vocation. Good men, of course, but more than this as we shall presently see—men of superior intelligence, possessed in some measure of the qualifications which Christ requires of those whom He

* Vide Note A, Appendix, p. 17.

counts Elders. Every good man who leads a quiet inoffensive life, doing nothing very distinctively christian or unchristian, is not on this account necessarily qualified for the proper discharge of the duties of the eldership. The fact that a man is singularly good-natured and tolerant, and prone to reconcile contradictories in theology and practical conduct, does not point him out as fit for the office. Mere negative attributes are not enough. Positive qualities and the vigor of character which they impart are demanded. The elder, above all things, must be a man of God—the significant designation by which Old Testament prophets were known. He should be fully persuaded in his own mind and able, by consistent godly living, to convince those who have spiritual discernment that he is a temple of the Holy Ghost; for “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his,” and therefore not fit to be an elder.

More than this, he should feel himself moved by an inward divine impulse constraining him to undertake this work. This divine call is in reality his primary and highest title to office. He receives and holds his patent direct from the Court of Heaven. God the Holy Spirit first makes elders and ministers, and the Church merely selects, trains, and installs in office those who are thus divinely fitted for it. When she does otherwise she does wrong, and brings upon herself weakness and deadness.

But can the Church, and can a man himself discern that he is fitted for a certain office? Why not? Has not Christ given her the promise of the presence of his Spirit and the providential guidance of his own hand in such matters? And are not good men consciously moved by the truth and the Spirit of God to consecrate themselves to the special service of the Redeemer? There is no need of

wrapping this matter in impenetrable mystery. When God calls a man to office he reveals it to him in his own consciousness, and after intelligent and calm consideration, and by listening to the counsel of those competent to give him wise advice, he is finally persuaded that he possesses in some degree—I do not say in full measure—the qualifications of head and heart necessary for the discharge of the duties he is constrained to undertake.

II.—*Elders are called to office by the voice of the people.* There is first the call of God's Spirit addressed to the heart, and then the outward call of the Saints. How do we know that this is the order? By the word of truth which is the only rule we can accept in settling all things pertaining to the house of God. They are not to be determined by custom, however venerable, by the decrees of the Church, or the enactments of the State, but only by the word of the Lord and the practice of his inspired apostles.

You recollect how the first deacons were chosen. Even the apostles, although inspired and invested with special authority, did not claim the right to select deacons. On the contrary they said to the people, "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." The brethren did so, and it is added, "Whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed they laid their hands on them." That is to say, the people selected the deacons and the apostles ordained them.

The same order was uniformly followed with elders. There was first election by the act of the members of the Church, and then ordination to office. Indeed the Greek

word used in the New Testament to describe the transaction conveys the idea that the election was by an open unbiased vote, probably by the uplifting of the hand, or by casting the *sephos* or pebble, the method followed in the Jewish Sanhedrim. And it is not difficult to perceive the propriety, safety, and wisdom of this divine order in the choice of the office-bearers of the Church. There is manifest propriety in it, for surely it is seemly and right that every member of the Church should prayerfully and wisely judge who are to be rulers and teachers therein. There is also safety in this course; for suppose that weak and conceited enthusiasts should appear in a congregation claiming to be called of God and pre-eminently qualified to teach and to rule, this election by the people is an effectual check upon their folly. The whole Church cannot be supposed to be beside herself, and although these pragmatistical visionaries may be in this state, the Lord will restrain them by the hand of his flock in declining to elect them to office. And the divine wisdom of this order is conspicuously obvious. The Lord knows that it is most useful for a congregation to make the effort to find among themselves suitable persons to become elders. It will compel them to know one another better than is usual, and this is good. It will reveal to the people how poor or how rich they are in spiritual gifts, and this too is most desirable. If they can hardly find any one to serve the Lord in this capacity, then they are poor indeed, and need to seek earnestly more spiritual life and power from on high. If on the other hand they can readily find a dozen men, as is the case in this Church, eminently fitted for the office and willing to undertake its duties, then they are rich, and should give God thanks and take courage.

But this is not all. See God's wisdom in asking you to make choice of elders in the fact that you thereby become responsible to them and responsible for them. You place them over yourselves voluntarily, and hence should find it natural and easy to obey them that have the rule over you in the Lord. You have deliberately given them this place, and you must not contradict your own action by disregarding them.

Nay, more. You are responsible for them. They are your elders, and if without due thought and prayer you have appointed them, and if they are not such as they should be you are to blame in calling them to office. And therefore instead of finding fault, and bewailing the shortcomings of our fellow-Christians and counting this a pious exercise, let us confess our faults one to another, and pray one for another, and be incessant and wise in our efforts to second the christian endeavours of those charged with special service, that their labours may be crowned with abundant success.

III.—*Elders thus called of God and elected by his flock are ordained to office.* What is ordination, and by whom is it performed? Many vague and superstitious notions are entertained about this matter. We may say in a word that ordination is an act of the Church through her proper officers, presbyters, by which, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, she invests a man with sacred office and sets him apart for the discharge of its duties. This act is in no sense sacramental. There are only two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper; and these are signs and seals of the provisions of the eternal covenant of redemption—that covenant between God the Father and God the Son by which we are delivered from sin in its penalty, pollution

and power. The Sacraments are seals of this covenant and means of grace to believers, but in no way connected with ordination.

Still more. Ordination is not a charm or talisman by which grace is conferred, and supernatural gifts are imparted to men; and yet it is more than a mere form which may or may not be observed, which may with impunity be treated with neglect or contempt. It is a solemn appointment of the Saviour. "He ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach" (Mark iii. 14). His apostles also committed the things they had received to faithful men who should be able to teach others; and He gave certain promises to the elders who rule well and labour in word and doctrine, which promises if pleaded in faith at the time of ordination, and are afterwards trusted in, are sure to be fulfilled.

As to the mode of ordination it embraces two acts—prayer, sometimes accompanied by fasting, and the imposition of the hands of presbyters. This was the order followed in the case of the first deacons. The seven men "were set before the Apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them." (Acts vi. 6.) Timothy's authority to "give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" was given him "by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." (1 Tim. iv. 13, 14) And so at the ordination of Barnabas and Saul to a special mission among the Gentiles, by the Presbytery of Antioch, "when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." (Acts xiii. 3).

It is proper to add that the Presbyterian Church has never regarded the form of ordination as a matter of grave

importance. Hence the laying on of hands in ordaining ministers and ruling elders was dispensed with in the First Book of Discipline adopted by the Church of Scotland in 1560, and the ceremony was again enjoined in the case of ministers in the Second Book of Discipline adopted in 1578. The present practice is to ordain ministers in this manner but to omit the imposition of hands in the case of ruling elders. The essential thing is that the Church should carefully guard the right of the people to elect, and should solemnly recognize in an orderly way and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ the call by the Holy Spirit of such persons to their sacred office.

And now comes the practical question, what are the functions of persons thus called, elected and ordained? I answer:—

IV.—*That they are chiefly to rule, to teach, and to administer the Sacraments.*—Their power in these respects is derived from Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, who is the sole fountain of all ecclesiastical authority. The Church in electing and ordaining elders can clothe them only with such power as she receives from her Head. They are thus constituted bishops or elders, overseers of the flock of God; for elders and bishops in the New Testament are the same, as is now admitted by competent and unbiased interpreters.* That this was the opinion of the revisers of the English translation of the Bible in 1831-34 seems evident from a much needed correction which they made in the twentieth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, substituting the word bishops for overseers. At the seventeenth verse it is stated that Paul “sent from Miletus to Ephesus and called the Elders of the Church.” I ask you to notice particularly that in delivering his charge to those elders

* Vide Note B, Appendix, pp. 18 and 19.

the apostle said, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops, to feed the Church of God which he purchased with his own blood." (Acts xx. 28). The Ephesian elders are thus pronounced bishops by apostolic authority, showing that the two names are used interchangeably, and showing, too, that a plurality of bishops, several bishops existed in one church, instead of what grew up in post-apostolic days when one bishop was set over a number of churches in a whole diocese. The primitive practice was to ordain elders or bishops, as many as might be thought desirable, in every church (Acts xiv. 23); and any attentive reader of the New Testament can see plainly that the same qualifications, privileges, responsibilities, and duties belonged to elders and bishops. According to Paul they were "to feed the flock of God." The Greek word is *poimainein*, literally to tend as shepherds do their flocks. And Peter says, "Tend"—using the same Greek word as Paul—"the flock of God which is among you exercising the oversight"—the bishopric—"not of constraint, but willingly, according unto God; nor yet for filthy lucre but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet. v. 2, 3).

In defining the qualifications of elders or bishops we might content ourselves with the analysis of a single passage—that in which Paul directs Titus when left in Crete "to ordain elders in every city." He is told what sort of men to set apart for the office. The negative and positive attributes of their character as well as their official functions are enumerated in detail. "The bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God." "Not self-willed." He must sink his own will in that of Christ, feeling that He is

his Master. "Not soon angry"—capable of governing his temper even under sharp provocation. "No brawler," literally not quarrelsome over wine—one whose moral and spiritual nature is not impaired by being given to much wine. "No striker"—free from violence whether of temper or outward conduct. "Not greedy of filthy lucre"—above being biased and controlled by desires of sordid gain.

These five negations express a great deal, and make the elder a very remarkable man even if nothing more could be said of him. But here are positive qualities by which he is characterized. He must be "given to hospitality," prone to entertain strangers without reward, or with generous liberality. "A lover of good"—wherever he finds it in any section of the Church of God—having his delights not with the ungodly and riotous, but with the saints, the excellent of the earth. "Sober," in feeling, in thought, in action. "Just," in his business, in his opinions, and judgments of all things, and therefore both fit to rule and to teach—a man "whose eye though turned on empty space beams keen with honour." "Holy"—God-like and Christ-like, for the divine nature revealed in Christ is the standard and pattern of human holiness. "Temperate"—free from mental and physical extravagances, well balanced in mind, and therefore showing a calm even and consistent career in life. "Holding to the faithful word which is according to the teaching"—having a firm and strong grasp of God's truth as a whole—not weak and uncertain in his convictions as to the gospel, but clear and decided as the result of diligent personal study of the word, as well as by showing due deference to the prelections of others. An elder is not simply a person who can pass

a creditable examination in some easy theological primer, but rather one who has a goodly mastery of the contents of the whole bible. Hence he is to "be able to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers." His strength as a teacher is to be laid out not upon theory or speculation or brilliant oratory or skilful adaptation of his lessons to the opinions of others, but upon exhortation in the sound doctrine that he may thus convict the gainsayers.

These, brethren, are the qualifications and functions of the bishop or elder. But who is sufficient for these things? Is it not too much to expect all these qualities in full measure in any man? I answer, the standard must be correct and perfect, and we must do our best to come as near to it as we can, and seek help from God that we may daily rise to a higher plane of spiritual life and service.

It may be too much to lay upon the rank and file of the elders all the duties just described, and as matter of fact our church discriminates in this respect, and divides elders into two classes, those called to rule and those called to teach.* Of the ruling elder such teaching power as implied in the passages cited has not been demanded. The divine gift of public teaching in a pre-eminent degree is not very widely distributed. It is certain that many elders justly shrink from delivering public discourses. They are not required to do so, and have not been trained and may not be naturally fitted to render such service. For the sake of doing "all things decently and in order," as the Apostle Paul enjoins, it is well that some should be specially designated to the work of preaching the gospel, while at the same time exercising the right to rule along with the rest. But if we accept a wide-spread consensus of opinion

* Vide Note C, Appendix, p. 10.

to the effect that New Testament bishops and elders are identical, we cannot avoid the conclusion that they are all to be "apt to teach." We must, of course, grant them the utmost freedom as to the circumstances under which they perform the task. It may be in the household or office, in small or great classes. Some may excel among the young, and others among the aged, some among the sick and fainting, others among the strong and froward. By a principle of both natural and spiritual selection they will readily find their proper spheres, so that the teaching force of a congregation may thoroughly cover all its needs. And there can be no doubt that with the comprehensive scriptural knowledge proper to elders, many of them who never preach sermons can deal successfully in private with "unruly men, and vain talkers and deceivers, whose mouths must be stopped" (Tit. i. 7-11). And it may be laid down as a general principle that the larger the number of truly devout and able teachers of the Word in any church the better for its spiritual growth and power. In so far as the thousands of elders belonging to our section of the Holy Catholic Church in Canada are men of the stamp and character that Paul directed Titus to ordain, they constitute an enormous intellectual, moral and spiritual force, for which we cannot be too thankful. It is, let me assure you, a matter of the highest moment for a church to have a wise and strong Congregational Presbytery as a court of primary resort in discipline, composed of a body of men given to prayer and good works, to whom members can look up with reverence and affection; for we are enjoined of God to "count the elders who rule well worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and in teaching." Their services are very precious to the flock, and to be

specially sought in seasons of trouble. Hence it is written—"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he have committed sins they shall be forgiven him."

Observe the divine order to be followed in the matter. The sick one is not to wait until the elders find out that he is sick. Much less is he to assume that teaching or ruling elders are endowed with omniscience to see who are sick and who are not in a large parish. He is to "call for the elders"—for any of them, not necessarily always for the one who stately occupies the pulpit.

Observe, too, the blessed results which follow the ministry of the elders. They are to pray over the sick one, not merely to talk to him, and to advise and instruct him, but to plead in his behalf with Him who holds the issues of life and death in His hand, at the same time using approved means for his recovery, "and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up."

Time fails me to speak fully of the innumerable benefits which these men of God are capable of conferring upon His Church in many ways.

And now it may occur to you that I have so far made no reference to the functions of elders in relation to the two sacraments of the New Covenant. It may be sufficient to say that the practice of our church in this respect is wise and Scriptural. In the case of baptism the preaching elder alone officiates. It belongs to his commission from the Saviour to preach and baptise. In the case of the Lord's Supper the elders act unitedly or jointly, and there is nothing sacerdotal in the part taken by the presiding

elder in this solemn service. It is held by some, and they carefully act upon this belief, that the minister and the minister alone should be permitted to place the elements of the eucharistic feast in the hands or lips of communicants. With us there is no such restriction. The sacred service is conducted by all the elders. They reverently pass through the church distributing the bread and the wine and placing them in the hands of the members. This is a silent but effectual protest against sacerdotalism. For what is the root and core of this growing error? It is the ascribing to one man, known as the priest, or by any other name you please, the exclusive right of transacting with God in spiritual matters in behalf of others.

We seek to guard against this evil chiefly by clinging to Jesus Christ as our only great High Priest before God, and also by denying to every elder, the preaching elder included, as we are fully authorized by Scripture, the right to the name and the functions of a priest, except in the sense in which the whole body of believers are a royal priesthood. And let me remind you, as my final word, that it is only as we all habitually come boldly to the throne of grace, in the name of Christ, in the exercise of our royal priesthood and in concert with those we have chosen to teach and to rule, that we shall bring down the power of God the Spirit into this church to quicken the dead, and to comfort, purify and establish those who believe. Amen.

APPENDIX.

NOTE A.—In the Apostolic church the natural talents and spiritual gifts of all members, male and female, were fully recognized and employed in the service of Christ. Elders and deacons were not the only workers. Others besides the apostles preached the word and put forth Christian activity. This is very evident from Acts viii. 1-4, and 1 Cor. xii. 28-30; Eph. iv. 11-12.

Prophesying, which embraced forecasting and teaching, belonged to women as well as men. In harmony with this historic fact the former are now largely engaged in giving religious instruction in families and Sunday Schools, thus moulding the faith and spiritual life of the church, as well as in conducting the work of public education at home and in foreign mission fields. Regarding diversities of gifts, and the services of women, see 1 Cor. xi. 4-5, xii. 4-11, xvi. 19; Exod. ii. 4-10; Micah vi. 4; 2 Kings xxii. 14; Neh. vi. 14; Jud. iv.-v.; Luke ii. 36-38; Acts ix. 36-42, xvi. 14, 15, 40, xviii. 2, 26, xxi. 8-9; Rom. xvi. 1-4, 6, 12; 2 Tim. iv. 19; Phil. iv. 2-3; Tit. ii. 3-5; 1 Tim. v. 9-11.

NOTE B.—Scholarly Episcopalians hold that the New Testament bishop was the same as the elder or presbyter, and was not a diocesan bishop or prelate. Dean Alford, in commenting on Acts xx. 17, 28, gives the following quotation from Irenæus, showing how he perverted scripture to teach his own views: "*In Mileto convocatis episcopis et presbyteris, qui erant ab Epheso et a reliquis proximis civitatibus.*" Translated.—The bishops and presbyters who were from Ephesus and the other neighbouring states being assembled at Miletus.

Upon this the Dean remarks: "Here we see (1) the two, bishops and presbyters, distinguished as if *both* were sent for, in order that the titles might not seem to belong to the same persons,—and (2) other neighbouring churches brought in, in order that there might not seem to be *episcopi* (bishops) in one church only. That neither of these was the case, is clearly shown by the plain words of this verse: He sent to *Ephesus* and summoned the elders of the church. So early

did interested and disingenuous interpretations begin to cloud the light which scripture might have thrown on ecclesiastical questions. The English version has hardly dealt fairly in this case with the sacred text, in reading *episcopous*, verse 28, *overseers*, whereas it ought there, as in all other places, to have been *bishops*, that the fact of *elders and bishops having been originally and apostolically synonymous* might be apparent to the ordinary English reader, which now is not." In his comment on 1 Tim. iii, 1, he says: "But the *episcopoi* (bishops) of the New Testament have officially nothing in common with our *bishops*."

Bishops Ellicott and Lightfoot teach substantially the same view. G. A. Jacob, D.D., in his Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament, says, on p. 72: "The only bishops mentioned in the New Testament were simple presbyters; the same person being a bishop—*episcopos*, *i.e.*, a superintendent or overseer, from his taking an oversight of his congregation, as is distinctly shown by Acts xx. and other passages; and a presbyter—*presbuteros*, or elder, from the reverence due to age."

This agrees with the statement of Gibbon, the historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, who says: "The public functions of religion were solely entrusted to the established ministers of the church, the bishops and the presbyters, two appellations which, in their first origin, appear to have distinguished the same office, and the same order of persons. The name 'Presbyter' was expressive of their age, or rather of their gravity and wisdom. The title 'Bishop' denoted their inspection over the faith and manners of the Christians who were committed to their pastoral care. In proportion to the respective numbers of the faithful, a larger or smaller number of these *episcopal presbyters* guided each infant congregation with equal authority and united counsel.—*Vol. I., ch. xv., pp. 555, 556; Boston edition, 1853.*

Conybear and Howson, in the Life of St. Paul (Am. Ed. 1858), vol. II. p. 536, says: "The ordaining of *presbuteroi* (elders) in every city was a step always taken by St. Paul immediately on the foundation of each church (Acts xiv. 23). On the other hand, there are some points in the church organization described, which seem clearly to negative the hypothesis of a date later than the apostolic age; especially the use of *presbuteros* (elder) and *episcopos* (bishop) as synonymous."

Many other Episcopal authorities have expressed the same view.

NOTE C.—“Unto the pastors only appertains the administration of the sacraments, in like manner as the administration of the Word.”—*Second Book of Discipline, ch. iv.*

“Baptism and the Supper of the Lord; neither of which may be dispensed by any but by a minister of the Word, lawfully ordained.”—*West. Confession, ch. xxvii. 4.*

“Every minister of the Word is to be ordained by imposition of hands and prayer, with fasting, by *those preaching presbyters* to whom it doth belong.”—*Westminster Form of Church Government.*

“In short, the elder is to speak nothing to the church from the pulpit,”—*Pardovan i. 7, 9.*

This view has been rejected by eminent scholars. The late Professor Witherow, of Londonquerry, contends against it in his *New Testament Elder; His Position, Powers and Duties in the Christian Church.*

Vitringa, in commenting on 1 Tim. v. 17, says: “St. Paul, therefore, does not in this place refuse to any presbyters the right of teaching. He merely supposes that some do not teach. He wishes, however, that all should teach; nay, he stimulates and exhorts all to do so, when he declares those who teach to be worthy of double honour.”—*De Synagoga Vetere ii. 3, p. 493.* Vitringa’s view is gaining currency in the church; and that elders should be teachers of the young from house to house, as well as in class rooms and churches, is greatly to be desired.

Each elder should be appointed to take charge of a specified district in his congregation, the families of which he should statedly visit, giving them spiritual instruction and aid as he may be able. The universal adoption of this as a rule would promote the growth of Biblical knowledge, which is so much needed, as well as the unity and Christian activity of congregations.

