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I. LITERARY.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE "NEW INSPIRATION."

PROF. HENRY ALEXANDER WHITE.

There are some among us who first turned the pages of the Bible to see the color and pictured form of men and things whose story was already familiar from parental lips. From picture to print we passed and found the narrative there recorded in exact agreement with the stories told us in childhood. Again and again we sought the printed pages only to find all these stories linked together in one great history. The "Father in Heaven" of our daily prayer was found to be the speaker, in his own Divine Person, on many pages of the sacred book. Character by character the nature of His Personality was unfolded to us. The Creator of the opening chapter was declared to be the Moral Governor in the chapters immediately following; then, by degrees, he was set forth as the Father, the Redeemer and the Comforter of those people whom He had before selected. Yet in all these varying manifestations of His character, He was declared to be 'the same, yesterday, today and forever.'

Closely interwoven with the web of these statements concerning the character of God, we found also a history of human character. Nations and individuals were described with reference to the relationship existing between them and the Invisible God. The character of men was always measured by our infallible standard—the character of God. Hence,

THE OBSOLESCENT MEMBER IN THE PRESBYTERIAN ORGANISM.

PROFESSOR T. C. JOHNSON.

When an organism for any cause ceases for a time to make use of a member, the member deteriorates in power of service.

Naturalists tell us that the fish in the Mammoth Cave are sightless because of the long disuse of their eyes. They tell us that the hoof of the horse is an expanded middle toe and that the other four toes have disappeared because they were so little used. They tell us many other things, some of them being knowing beyond measure; and they have made their awkward, bungling phrase, "*rudimentary organ*," a household word. But we are not dependent, for support of the assertion that a member becomes powerless by long disuse, on facts inaccessible to laymen in physical science.

Every man's experience is wide enough to prove the truth of this by observed instances. He has noted how his own biceps becomes flabby and weak, and his whole store of physical strength depleted from want of exercise. He has observed the same law at work in the world of his spirit, making decay of the spirit's power inevitable on a cessation of active endeavor. And what he has remarked as going on in himself he has beheld in operation in all his neighbors. In them, too, he has discovered that disuse of a member is followed always by a lack of power therein.

Now what is true of these petty organisms is true also of the great body of Christ. Disuse of a member of that body has always been followed by corresponding inability. When the church owing to magical and exaggerated views of the sacrament, fell into neglecting preaching, it lost the power of being a really efficient instructor. When it for a time neglected to observe a simple worship it lost the power to enjoy or to win by such a worship. When it had long disused discipline it became unable to administer discipline. Failing for a time to keep separate from the world, it lost its power of striving, or wishing, to keep separate from the world. The Romish Church is a blind Sampson on whose head the spiritual hair will never grow out, hopelessly bound through the long disuse

of many of the essentials of true church life. And we might point out "rudimentary" organs in many of the Protestant churches, the organs being of essential importance too. But the purpose of the present squib is to call attention to an obsolescent organ in the Presbyterian church.

Before naming this organ, however, let us say that the phrase—"Obsolescent member" in our caption—is somewhat exaggerating, or may be easily taken so. The reader might think his attention was about to be called to an organ almost as little used and as little capable of use as the eyes of the fishes referred to above, and soon going to be as hard to find as the "four missing toes" of his good roadster; whereas this organ seen only in repose, as it nearly always is, is large and vigorous-looking. Of all the members that constitute the body of Christ on earth, these men have, perhaps, as good physical vigor for employment in their functions as joints of said body, as any others whatsoever. One would not err, moreover, should he say that the men who make up this organ of our church, are unsurpassed in their mental ability, and weight of social influence. They have, also, as Christians go, a good degree of piety. They, even, exhibit a low measure of distinctive functional activity, albeit one wonders that such a tiny stream of activity is not altogether dried up. And, just at this time, the organ seems to be making a spontaneous effort to live. There are in the organ potencies of a large, full, and vigorous activity. Yet the potencies are not only not so big as they would have been with proper exercise, but they have had a manifold Rip Van Winkle sleep and are still, in spite of the effort to awake remarked above, held by slumber. Looked at from the standpoint of inquiry as to whether it is *supplying what it should* toward the advancement of the whole body of Christ, the organ appears obsolescent to a great degree. Of course there are exceptions among the individuals which constitute the organ; but the general fact is as we have indicated.

But it is time we had dropped the figure. We are speaking of the "ruling eldership." According to New Testament teaching, this is a highly important office. It is next to the most important office in the church. The office of the teaching elder is of the *first* importance. Paul, in I Tim. 5:17, distinguishes between teaching elders and ruling elders and accords by an indubitable implication the pre-eminence in usefulness to the teaching elder. But the degree of difference

between the two has been grievously magnified.

The "teaching elder" in the New Testament appears simply as a ruling elder developed along a certain line. We mean that the class of "teaching elders" appears to have developed under divine direction out of the class of "ruling elders." Teaching was one of the most important of the functions of the "ruling eldership." Ruling elders who had exceptional gifts as teachers developed into "teaching elders." The distinction once made, of course, men would on occasion be elevated to the teaching eldership immediately. Now, this brief exhibition of the relation which these offices in the Apostolic Church sustained to one another is sufficient to show that the present relative estimates of the two officers are untrue. For the functions of the two classes of elders thus appear identical in character save that the "teaching elder" is more specially devoted to "the word and doctrine."

But the relatively high place of the "ruling elder," according to the New Testament, appears in an unanswerable way in the passages which set forth the qualifications of the elders. See I Tim. 3:1-7, and Tit. 1:6-9. In these places no discrimination is made between the one kind of elder and the other. There is such a similarity, or rather, identity of function that to have named the qualifications of the one is to have named those of the other.

If the preacher should have a character for soundmindedness, sanctity, and "ardent love of souls," to give weight to his actions and words no less does the elder need it, if without it, to give weight to his. The scriptures just referred to leave no doubt as to this. If the office of teaching elder is important as this demand for high character in such an officer shows, then the office of ruling elder is hardly less important as the qualifications of character are just exactly as high in respect to him as to the teaching elder.

This is a most important office, and the duties attaching to it are great. Most of readers of this page will agree that our "Form of Government" has not overstated the Biblical teachings as to the duties of the elder. We therefore condense from Section 45 of that standard as follows: "It appertains to the office of elders, both severally and jointly, to watch diligently over the flock committed to their charge, that no corruption of doctrine or of morals enter therein. They should visit the people at their

homes, especially the sick; they should instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourner, nourish and guard the children of the Church. They should pray with and for the people, be careful and diligent in seeking the fruit of the preached word among the flock, and assist the pastor to accomplish his own pastoral work with the best effect."

But turning now to the average elder of to-day, is he keeping himself fitted for seeing that no corruption of doctrine creeps in? Occasionally an elder does. But how of the average elder? Is he performing his teaching functions,—“teaching the ignorant,” “nourishing and guarding the children of the church”—either in the people’s homes or in convenient assemblies? He was chosen, supposedly, as one “apt to teach.” If he had been destitute of this qualification he could never have been elected with Biblical warrant. He was not expected formally to labor in word and doctrine; but in an informal way that sort of labor was to be according to the need and his ability. Again, we ask is the *average* elder performing his teaching functions? And is he performing his pastoral duties of other sorts? Is he on the earnest *qui vive* that no corruption of morals enter his flock? Is he visiting his people at their homes? Is he comforting the mourner and seeking for the fruit of the preached word among the flock? There are good elders. But they are scarce. Looking at the body as a whole, we may admire them as intelligent gentlemen of great worth. But regarded as elders they are not doing for the church what they should. Ask a dozen preachers whether their elders do much teaching and pastoral work, and ten out of the dozen will regard you as inept, and after a moment’s consideration as to whether you are worth talking to at all, will with a smile tell you, “No.”

No. The Wesleyan class-leader and local preacher, the nearest substitute for the New Testament ruling elder, which Wesley’s polity allowed, are doing their work better in proportion to their light than our elders.

It is an interesting, it should be a profitable question: What is it that has brought about the disuse of the eldership and tends to keep it out of use?

Toward the solution of the question we offer these three suggestions: 1st. The teaching elder not unfrequently has a disposition to lord it over God’s heritage. He, therefore, keeps the work in his own hands that he may have things his

own way. Now if a preacher *will* be his own session, he will soon have an inefficient session or none. If he will do all the *teaching* he will soon have a session incapable of teaching. It is the business of the teaching elder to work through and by the free hands of all his co-elders, and to avoid all needless repression of their several personalities. An absolute despotism is not the best environment in which to develop free citizens and officers for a republic.

2nd. The teaching elder not infrequently has a contempt for the functions of the ruling elder. We have ourselves heard men whose names are in all the church say of the two offices that of elder and that of deacon, that the diaconate was the more important of the two ; that about all the elder does, as a rule, is to hand around the elements on Communion day, and say "yes" and "no" at session meetings. Of course this contempt comes of looking at what the average elder is, instead of at what he should be, of looking at the caricature, instead of at the ideal set forth in the Scripture and which should be regarded in all comparisons. But having come, the contempt affects the elder. Let distinguished men have contempt for any present set of functions, and let that contempt pervade society, and the functionaries concerned are influenced by it, and have a low opinion of what they should do in the relations despised. The preacher who does not keep the Bible view of the eldership before him clearly and does not magnify the office above the important one of deacon, and up hard by that of teaching elder, sins. He is keeping the eldership down. He is dragging it lower. He is locking the chariot wheels of God in which He rides forth to conquer the world.

3rd. Want of consecration on the part of the elders themselves and of the whole church is the most sufficient explanation of the sad case of the elder. Eminently good men are inclined to excuse the elder for inattention to his duties on the ground that he gets no salary while the pastor is paid for his work. But the view is a most deplorable one. The elder is the Lord's. It may indeed be his duty to spend many hours daily in the support of his family or in larger business operations ; but if *all* his time *must* be so expended? then plainly he can't be elder. He has not been called to be elder. But if the Lord calls him to be elder he may discover that he already has time for the duties if he uses economy, or that he can get

time by taking it from something less important than his duties as elder.

When preachers universally feel that they are not for hire to the churches which pay the biggest salaries, but are the Lord's for service where their service will count for most; when the people and, particularly, the ruling elders themselves feel that they are the Lord's, and all theirs, then the obsolescent member will become the second most glorious member in the Christian organism.

