

Our Contributors.

TWELVE TO SELECT FROM.

BY KNOXONIAN.

The General Assembly is asked to say that a vacant congregation should, under ordinary circumstances, call a minister within six months of the time it becomes vacant. Six months may seem a rather short time in which to select a pastor, but why does it seem short? Simply because many congregations take a year or a year and a half or two years to discharge that most important duty and enjoy that precious privilege. Calling a minister is both a duty and a privilege. The proposed time seems short because the time usually taken is far too long. That is the principal reason.

Now let us examine this proposed six months arrangement and see if it is not long enough to satisfy any reasonable Christian. We say reasonable because some Christians are just as unreasonable as any average unsaved sinner. Indeed some men who profess to be Christians are often far more difficult to deal with than many who make no profession.

Six months would mean about twenty-four Sabbaths. On these twenty-four Sabbaths a congregation might hear twenty-four eligible preachers. We don't use the odious word "candidate." Candidate has become a political term and should never be used in the Church of God. It would be just as proper to call the pulpit a hustings, and the Session, or selecting committee, a caucus, and the presbyter who moderates in the call a returning officer as call the preachers candidates. How would it look to say that Principal Caven acted as returning officer at the election of a minister in the Central Church the other evening! If we are to have political terms in the Church let us have them all round. The history of the term is bad. It was derived from *candidatus*, a word used to describe white-gowned creatures who sought office in Rome. There is an odour of Popery about the word more rank than that which rose from the Ross Selections even when they were burning. Imagine a man declaring that the General gown savours of Popery and then calling a Presbyterian minister a candidate.

But to come back to the subject under discussion. It might be urged that a congregation could scarcely hear twenty-four eligible men in six months. Perhaps not. Some that were expected might fail to come. Some might come on a wet or stormy Sabbath when the attendance was small. Members of Presbytery might need to fill in a day for local reasons. Some of those eligible for a call might have two Sabbaths. Twenty-four eligible men could not be heard in six months. Suppose we say twelve, and under ordinary circumstances twelve could be heard. Twelve! only twelve! only twelve to select from! Well, are not twelve enough?

Out of a list of twelve eligible lawyers any rational body of people could select a good one in an hour.

Out of a list of twelve eligible doctors any sensible body of men could select a good enough one in ten minutes.

Why in the name of common sense should it take two years to select a minister when there is ample good material to select from? One reason is because the list is nearly always too long. It is assumed that no congregation will call a minister soon after it becomes vacant. It is taken for granted that no matter how well a minister preaches he has no chance for a call if he comes early in the vacancy. Why? Mainly because nobody expects the thing to be done. The congregation does not expect it; the Presbytery does not expect it. Everybody admits that a long vacancy is a bad thing, and yet everybody expects a long vacancy. The ministers who preach the first few Sabbaths may be good men. Nine-tenths of the people go home saying, "I would be perfectly satisfied with that man." Then why don't you call him? "Because there is more coming; we want to hear some more." Exactly. And when ten are heard somebody wants to hear some more; twenty, and somebody wants to hear some more, thirty, and a few want to hear some more; fifty, and one or two want to hear some more; a thousand, and the congregational crank wants to hear a few more. Meantime the people are being formed into rings around favourite men, the wire-pullers are at work, canvass-

ing is going on, influences that should never be thought of are being brought to bear, the ledger and the mortgage may possibly be used as factors in the problem, and the entire proceeds soon come to savour more of party politics than of vital godliness.

While this unseemly struggle is going on, thoughtful people in the congregation wonder if after all ours is the right way to fill a vacancy. Peaceable people who dislike strife drop quietly out and unite with other churches. Careless people who need a pastor to look after them stop coming to church. The missionary societies get out of gear, and the funds decrease. Unless vigorously watched the Sabbath school suffers. Ministers of other denominations visit the sick, bury the dead and marry the young people. The worst feature of the case is that many go to church not to worship God but to hear and criticize the preacher. A critical, faultfinding spirit is thus created that often follows the hearer throughout life. Numerically, financially and spiritually the long vacancy injures a congregation.

In another paper we may deal with the right of the Church to fix this six months limit. It should, perhaps, be stated that at the end of the six months it is proposed that the Presbytery send a preacher for two years and at the end of two years give the people another six months in which to exercise their gifts in trying to call a pastor.

LETTER FROM FORMOSA.

MR. EDITOR.—According to promise I will try to give you a glimpse of a North Formosa preacher's course of study.

In Dr. Mackay's study room there is a coloured geological chart representing the successive ages or periods in the history of the earth's formation. Dr. Mackay himself made the chart. I have heard the students naming over the kinds of rock belonging to each of these periods, beginning with the lowest or earliest formation yet found and coming up to the latest, which in the chart is represented by green hills, on one of which stands a man looking down at all beneath him. The students tell also how fossils found in the rocks thus far correspond with the account of creation given in the Bible.

After the whole class, naming the different periods, I have seen a student step to the table and take up one by one different specimens of rock, describing each specimen, telling the age in which and how it was formed and how it comes to have its present appearance, its colour, hardness, combination of substance or traces of living creatures or plants. All this and much more preachers and students are taught purposely that they may better understand the first chapter of Genesis and other references to creation throughout the Bible.

In the Doctor's study also hangs a scroll on which are three or four beautiful drawings representing different coral formations. The outline of these Dr. Mackay himself sketched, then handed the work over to a student who is very fond of drawing, and whose success at this art is the wonder of all around him. Dr. Mackay taught him drawing and supplies him with materials. He copies writing with great neatness and precision and finishes many a map and sketch that Dr. Mackay requires in teaching. This student is one who has been with Dr. Mackay for many years and who never worshipped idols.

On a second scroll are beautiful coloured drawings, also finished by the same student, representing the different steps in the formation of coral islands, from the first appearance of the ring of coral at the surface of the sea to the island as it is to-day cultivated by man. These two scrolls were used in teaching students about the New Hebrides and other islands.

The different specimens of coral are to be found in Dr. Mackay's museum, and are used in teaching. On the latter scroll are pasted two newspaper prints representing natives of Eromanga. Dr. Mackay taught the students all about the islands from the coral insects the Creator appointed to build them, beginning at the bottom of the sea, up to the very latest mission and political news from these islands. The students know the size and population of the islands and their productions; also the character and employment of native inhabiting the New Hebrides and the plan of mission work carried on among them. They know all the history of the Canadian mission there and the number of converts, churches, schools, native teachers, etc., by latest report.

When students were being questioned on what they had learned about Africa, more than once I happened to be present. Much of what the students said—proper names used, etc. I could not understand. I know they told a great deal about Egypt. They told about the peculiarities of the Nile, about animals and plants to be found in Egypt, about climate and travelling there. They described the people and their habits and told something of their history. They told of the soil and how it is cultivated, of the Pyramids, about burial in early days and about the obelisks—one now in London, the other in New York.

They told of the Land of Goshen and of the Pharaohs, and made frequent references to the Bible history of Israelites and Egyptians. In telling of the Sphinx one student lifted from the table a piece of stone and showed it to the rest, explaining that this was the identical material of which the Sphinx is composed. He described the stone and told how it came to have its present appearance.

Being questioned on the subject of the African continent, students told of British and other soldiers in Egypt, of late wars and what British troops had distinguished themselves. They told of the Sudan and gave a brief account of General Gordon's life and death. They told of Madagascar, of the history of missions there, and gave an account of native converts, schools, and other departments of mission work, also of the late attack by the French, and how it interfered with mission work in Madagascar.

One evening when we were all assembled for worship each preacher and student brought a sketch of some one animal mentioned in the Bible. Each stepped forward in turn, held up his picture for all to see, told the name of the animal he had sketched, described it and its habits, told where it is to be found, and where it is mentioned in the Bible, also what is said about it. In giving his account each one was required to stand erect (but not like a statue) to speak distinctly and naturally and with freedom. Of course the older preachers have been so long under drill that they are quite at their ease and speak with perfect freedom, also with vigour and earnestness. Students who have very lately come to the college require time and much training in order that bashfulness and very peculiarity of manner unsuitable to a public speaker may be overcome. Younger students are often told to "waken up" and look at their audience, not to be afraid to speak out and tell all they have to say. All, from the oldest to the youngest, seem thoroughly to enjoy this combination of different lessons in one. One after another spoke with great zest, especially if some very practical Scripture truth or illustration of truth came out in his remarks. One evening was devoted in the same way entirely to birds mentioned in the Bible. Very interesting accounts were given of the ostrich, peacock, dove, and many others. Dr. Mackay requires that whatever preachers learn they learn thoroughly; they themselves have learned to detest mere outside show or pretense of knowledge.

I have frequently heard native preachers, men of different dispositions, following different trains of thought, thus giving quite a variety of discourse to compass all of which must have required them to explore a wide field in course of their studies. Some of the older preachers have told me about their early training when they used to walk often from day light till dark, Dr. Mackay drilling and asking the questions while all were on the march, and keeping them awake at night at the same work long after they were all in bed.

I see the students going in and out and I hear the singing, but I have been present only a few times when they were in class. Thus I know that I have had but a glimpse of work they are going on. What I saw and heard was simply their ordinary every-day work. The class never goes in the least out of its way, never takes up a different subject or does anything differently for the sake of one looking on. That would be contrary to Dr. Mackay's principle throughout: "Never allow anything but mere appearance sake." ANNIE JAMIESON.

Tamsui, Formosa, May, 1888.

THE committee appointed by Bishop Potter to inquire into the charges circulated in the Catholic press against Mgr. Bouland, who recently withdrew from the Church of Rome and applied for admission to the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, have reported, regarding Mgr. Bouland.