

Our Contributors.

A DISCUSSION THAT MIGHT TAKE PLACE

BY KNOXIAN.

Congregations are often blamed for not calling a pastor in less time than a year or two. It is very unfortunate that any congregation should have a lengthened vacancy. Long vacancies are the weak points in the Presbyterian system. Without a pastor the people scatter. They go everywhere and nowhere. Those who do not go are not very likely to grow in anything but their critical qualities, for it must, we fear, be admitted that hearing candidates is not a very spiritual kind of exercise. Then the steps taken to secure the services of a pastor are very likely to produce friction, sometimes chronic irritation and sometimes something worse. A congregation needs a great deal of grace and sanctified common-sense to go through a long vacancy without being injured numerically, financially and spiritually.

But the people are not always to blame. The difficulties are coherent in the system. A congregation composed exclusively of ministers would most likely have a perpetual vacancy. If they did call a man he would probably not come—and if he did come he would certainly not remain very long. One or two wise ministers may, and often do, give a pastor great help by their pathy, counsel and prayers, as well as by actual work in the congregation, but fancy a congregation composed entirely of young and middle-aged ministers! Nobody need be afraid of having a congregation of that kind. If such a congregation existed it never could agree or call—never. It would be vacant when the millennium came in. The Church is calling a professor to a vacant chair in Knox College just now, and there is quite as much diversity of opinion in regard to the kind of man that should be called as ever existed in any vacant congregation in regard to a pastor. Next June may find the fathers and brethren not ready to proceed. If they do proceed it is as certain as any future event can be that the call will not be unanimous. Perhaps the minority may not yield as gracefully as the minority in congregations generally yield. Some of them may even go so far as to say that they will withdraw their subscriptions. We hope none of these unpleasant things will take place, but a discussion of the question at present would run something like this:

Dr. Safeman said that, other things being nearly equal, he would favour a man of advanced years and large experience. Men of experience were preferred in law, in medicine, in politics, and, in fact, in every department of human activity. The ministry was the only vocation in life in which experience told against a man. He would not say, like the late Dr. Begg, that young men had been a failure in prominent positions ever since the days of Rehoboam, but he would say that none but a tried man should be entrusted with the training of our future ministers. The position was one of great, he might almost say overwhelming, responsibility. Whoever occupied that chair would give character to the preaching of the students for years to come. The man who preaches the Gospel does most responsible work, but the man who makes preachers occupies a much more responsible position. He hoped none but a man of mature years and large experience would be appointed. The Doctor, having made some further remarks, took his seat amidst applause.

The Rev. Mr. Young-Blood said he differed entirely from Dr. Safeman. What the Church needed and should have was a young man. He denied that young men had been a failure since the days of Rehoboam, even if Dr. Begg did say so. There was no special merit in being old. A man's birth was a matter over which he had no control. We shall all be old sometime if we live long enough. Some of the worst things in the world are old as well as some of the best. Principal MacVicar was a young man when he took charge of our college in Montreal, and he challenged the Presbyterianism of the world to show a better record than that of Montreal College (loud applause). Professor Campbell (cheers) was a young man when appointed—is still a young man—and if we had as efficient a man in the new chair as John Campbell we might be thankful. Professor Scrimger was also a young man. Other things being nearly equal he was strongly in favour of a young man.

The Rev. Mr. Sensible-to-the-Last said he was entirely opposed to this discussion about age. It was undignified, impertinent and altogether unworthy of the occasion. They didn't want a man because he was old or because he was young (applause). Their duty was to appoint the best available man and trust the Lord to give him health and strength to do his work (applause). It might be found that a man somewhat advanced in years could work longer and better than a young man who had not tried his strength at continuous hard work. He feared some people were trying to make capital out of this cry about young men. Some of those who were posing as young men were gray, and some were bald (loud laughter). Some of them were gray enough and some bald enough to be members of a Young Liberals' Convention (loud cheers from the Tories). Has it come to this, that when the Church wishes to appoint a man to some important work a committee must examine his teeth to see how old he is, as horse-dealers examine the teeth of a horse? He admitted that age was one consideration, but it was only one, and not by any means the most important one. Mr. Young-Blood had said that a man was not entitled to any credit because he was born a long time ago. No, nor was he entitled to any credit because he was born a short time ago. His position was that they should appoint the best available man and allow Providence to determine the length of his life. This presumptuous way of meddling with matters over which we had no control never ended in anything good. It was for the Almighty to determine the length of a man's working days. They blamed congregations and mission stations for objecting to the services of old men and they were doing the same thing themselves. He thought they might at least be consistent and show the people a good example. Let them appoint the best available man, and not determine everything by the mere clement of age (applause). The discussion was continued at considerable length; but we are compelled to hold over the remainder of our report until next week.

AMERICAN CONGRESS OF CHURCHES.—II.

DISCUSSION ON THE FUNCTION OF WORSHIP, CONDENSED FOR THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

The discussion in the Congress in regard to the Function of Worship in promoting the life of the Christian Church seems to have been not its least interesting feature. The most important papers on this subject were those of the Rev. Dr. Barton and Professor Samuel Hopkins (Presbyterian), both of whom put in a strong plea for a form of worship at least partially liturgical. We quote first from that of Dr. Barton:

"While preaching is much admired by many, as nourishing the life of the Lord in His members, by the truth which it communicates to them, and it certainly is not to be disesteemed in that respect, it is probable that worship, rightly and diligently used, is still more efficient in that very respect. Let us consider that for a moment: Divine truth as nourishing that resurrection life in the bosom of the Church, which is her most central and essential feature, and worship as conveying and carrying home that truth in a manner truly pre-eminent—that is the thought.

"And here I am constrained to say and confess that worship cannot do its whole good work as the vehicle of truth to the mind, except as it is formulated and prescribed by general authority, and is not left to the genius and piety of the officiating minister, according as he may happen to have the use of his genius and his piety at the moment. As a minister in a non-liturgical communion, I can say this more easily in this presence, perhaps, than some other ministers, and I do say it. There are extemporizing ministers whose study of worship has been so complete, whose good sense is so good, and whose natural gifts are so great, that they accomplish a pretty complete liturgical sweep in their services, and where ministers do not accomplish much of a sweep as leaders of worship, but bear down habitually and only on a few facts and doctrines lying nearest the heart of Christianity, God forbid I should deny their access to God and their use as preachers of truth through the worship they conduct. But, taking all things into account, it seems to me clear that in the one respect of divine truth truly conveyed, conveyed in its entirety, and conveyed

proportionately, a worship prescribed, or substantially prescribed, is not only valuable but indispensable."

So much for general principles. Professor Hopkins, being a Presbyterian, comes down to particulars, in regard to the worship of his own Church, which, he says, needs exhortation on this subject more than any other:

"In the Presbyterian Church, the invocation at the beginning, the two hymns, the reading of a chapter of the Bible, the long prayer, and, last but not least, the notices, are merely the preface, the portico, the prelude, to the great act for which the people come together, namely, the sermon. These are things that have to be submitted to before the real substance of the service can be reached.

"According to this method, God is obviously made a mere convenience of as an introduction, or endured as a necessity. The worship is not for its own sake, but for the sake of the oration that is to follow.

"How wide a departure this exhibits from the ideas of the devout framers of the Westminster Directory for Worship is well known to every student of the history. They had discarded the imposed liturgy of the prelate Church of England; but in the 'Church of England' perpetuated under its new Presbyterian constitution, the grave, decorous, ornate spirit of liturgical worship was still to rule. The whole business of the assembled congregation is called 'divine service'—the service or worship of God. Separate chapters provide for the behaviour of the people during this divine service, for the reading and exposition of the Scriptures, for the singing of psalms. Still more carefully does the Directory provide for public prayer.

"In the chapter treating of this subject, a large outline is given of the full and comprehensive prayer that should precede the sermon. The substance of the thoughts to be expressed under each of these heads is so fully given as to suggest the idea, which the history of the Directory confirms, that the very language was designed to be used, with a little filling up, by such as should prefer to employ it as a form. Professor Briggs, the latest historian of the Westminster Assembly, says that the Directory was constructed with the definite understanding that it was not to be imposed in every particular; and that it did not determine between the use of free and written prayer. This matter was left to the several churches, as the sphere in which to exercise Christian liberty.

"Chapter iv., Of the Preaching of the Word, concludes thus: As one primary design of public ordinances is to pay social acts of homage to the Most High God, ministers ought to be careful not to make their sermons so long as to interfere with or exclude the more important duties of prayers and praise!

"I beg leave to repeat and emphasize this dictum because it requires an immense amount of iteration to bring the average Presbyterian mind to an appreciation of it. The Westminster Directory, I say, calls the worship of the sanctuary 'the more important part of the service,' and forbids making the sermon so long as to interfere with it. If I should translate this sentence, however, into the language of modern practice, it would read thus: Whereas the great design of public ordinances is to interest the people with a carefully-prepared and neatly-delivered homiletical oration, therefore ministers should see to it that the Scriptures, the hymns and the prayers are got through with in such moderate compass of time as not to detain the audience too long from the more important business of listening to the sermon! The Westminster divines were very far from intending to hand over public devotion to the impulses of contemporaneous invention, to the iterations of narrow habit, or to the varying moods of the officiating minister. Taking the history of the English Church during the previous half-century into consideration, it is surprising, not that the Westminster divines should have expressed themselves mildly in favour of free prayer, but that they should not have condemned, in unsparing terms, the use of any forms of prayer whatever. Under other circumstances, it is quite certain that these grave, scholarly and dignified men would have been as ready to recommend the use of the venerable and Scriptural forms to which they had all their lives been accustomed, as Luther, Calvin, Melancthon, Bucer, John Knox and the other great reformers were.

"Public prayer is common prayer, and ought to express in grave, dignified phrase, the common wants of an entire congregation. Trivial phrases and broken utterances are here out of place. The result is that