

IS IT FAIR?

MR. EDITOR, - Permit me a word in answer to "Graduate," whose letter appears in your issue of the 11th.

"Graduate" has quite missed the aim and purport of my remarks. The complaint is not that ministers from other Churches are received into our Church, but that there is no provision made for members of our Church to enter the ministry, unless they are prepared to take a course in some college.

The question whether few or many come from the Methodist Church is a mere side issue. At the same time, although not in possession of figures, I feel safe in saying that we have a larger number in our ministry from the Methodist Church, than from other non-Presbyterian Churches. And further, we have more non-graduate ministers in our Church who were originally Methodists than non-graduates who were originally Presbyterians.

"Graduate" thinks the admission that non-college trained Methodist ministers in our Church do effective work "cuts the ground from under my feet," and leaves me without an argument.

On the contrary, it places my argument on more solid ground. If non-graduates from other Churches do effective work, by parity of reasoning, non-graduates from our own Church could do just as effective work. And here is the difficulty our General Assembly makes no provision for the admission of such men into the ministry. We have in our Church many men full of zeal, good effective speakers, and anxious to extend the Master's kingdom, who are practically prohibited from entering our ministry, because they are not able to meet the requirements of a college course.

Now what I suggest is that means be provided for such persons to receive a ministerial standing, without all the labour of classical and general college work; and the contention is that, until this is done, it is not fair to admit gentlemen from other Churches who have escaped these labours.

It looks at least an anomaly to insist upon a graduate standard from members of our Church, and admit gentlemen from other Churches under a non-graduate standard.

Your correspondent speaks of John Bright and Alexander Mackenzie as examples of able men who have not received a college training. Exactly so. But these gentlemen are neither Presbyterians nor Presbyterian ministers. Had they been Presbyterians, and wished to become ministers, the law of our Church would require them to "hold the piece of parchment," which is of so little value. Had they been Methodist preachers, and become Presbyterians, possibly some other arrangement would have been made.

I am as pleased as "Graduate" when Methodists come into our Church, and "expose themselves to all the uncertainties of our candidating system." I wish them all success, and trust their numbers will increase; but I hold that the system that excludes one man, while it receives another is not just.

In conclusion, I hope, Mr. Editor, that a correspondent may express his opinion freely in your columns without being accused of "carping," which is certainly not the spirit in which I write.

FIAT JUSTITIA.

THE *Earthen Vessel*, in a recent number, contains the following: The Speldhurst Road Chapel is now disposed of to Mr. Widdows, an ex-monk of the Romish Church, and the present Church have to give up possession after the fourth Sabbath in August. Mr. Widdows has been for some time before the people in South Hackney. His life and works have been published, and have been read with much interest by many thousands. The awful persecution with which he has had to contend from the priests and the papacy, the curse pronounced upon him by Archbishop Lynch, of Toronto, because he objected to transubstantiation, is something more than awful. That he may be the means of stemming the torrent of Romanism, which is being greatly strengthened by the Anglican Church in Hackney and other parts, is our earnest desire. We have seen "men" walking about Hackney, Kingsland, etc., dressed most disgustingly, doing the devil's work, receiving their pay from the Protestant Church Funds. Mr. Widdows is a powerful speaker, and we should rejoice to know that at Speldhurst Road he has been the means of effecting a crushing defeat to the Anglican and Romish dupes which surround the place, and whose practice is most awfully questionable. We know of one instance in South Hackney where a man was compelled to take his daughter away from the English Church on account of the disgusting questions put to her by the so-called celibate priest at the confessional.

Pastor and People.

TWO CHARITIES OF FLORENCE.

A month or two ago, as I was strolling through the Signoria of Florence in the dusk of the evening, threading my way rather aimlessly amongst the moving throngs of citizens and sightseers, a sudden stir attracted my attention toward a corner of the square. As I turned, one of the strangest sights met my gaze; a company of twenty or thirty men, draped in black from head to foot, so that all but their eyes was concealed from view, were marching with quick step toward the curious building known as the Bigallo. In their midst was a covered litter borne by four of their number, whilst other two, one in front, the other at the rear, held aloft flaming torches. The people quietly and respectfully made way, as if the phenomenon were something quite customary and well understood by all. I alone was at a loss. What could it be? Thoughts of the fierce old Inquisition instinctively arose. A moment more and the real meaning of the scene flashed upon my mind, sending a sudden thrill through me. It could be nothing else than the "Brothers of Mercy," of whom I had read years before with comparatively little interest. The reality, amidst all the circumstances of the hour, was much more impressive than the description in the book.

This, and another society to be named presently, are, perhaps, the most interesting institutions of that interesting and fascinating city. Beautiful as are her Duomo with its wondrous lily-like campanile, her statues, paintings, hanging gardens, and flashing river, these are the brightest jewels in her crown. Nor are they to be classed amongst the mere survival of the better things; it is probable that there never was a period when they were so free from abuse, or in such healthy working order, as they are at present.

The Bigallo, which is connected with the Hospital of the Misericordia, on the other side of the Via Calzaiole, is on the south side of the Duomo, opposite the campanile. The institution seems to have originated in the middle of the thirteenth century. It was established somewhere about A.D. 1240-4, at the suggestion of Pietro Borsi, amongst the porters of the extensive cloth factories, of whom he was "dean." Its funds were to be derived from fines mutually imposed upon themselves for profane swearing, and speedily acquired importance. The scheme approved itself to the common sense of the public, and persons of all ranks enrolled themselves in its membership. There have been times when even a grand duke could be reckoned amongst those who actively discharged the duties of the brotherhood, which included assistance in cases of accident, the conveyance of the sick to their hospital, and if necessary to relieve their families during their illness, and night nursing, both in the hospital and in the homes of patients. Their strange dress has this amongst other uses, it prevents their being recognized when discharging the functions of their office. From time to time, as in the cholera visitation of 1855, they have been called upon to render the most arduous and trying service. It was usual until a short time ago for citizens to lift their hats to them, and soldiers to carry arms as they approached, and although these salutations are not so marked nowadays, it is abundantly evident that the public hold the fraternity in profound respect.

The city is divided into districts and the membership into *giornate*, or days, about forty being on duty at a time. When the signal is heard from the great bell of the campanile they hasten to their post, whatever the nature of the occupation in which they may be immediately engaged. A half-hour glass is used to mark the interval between the summons and each arrival. Then ere proceeding upon their duty they assume their official dress, and the captain repeats the words, "*Fratelli, prepariamoci a fare quest'opera di misericordia.*" and kneeling down he adds, "*Mitte nobis, Domine, charitates, humilitates, et fortitudines;*" to which the rest reply, "*Ut in hac opera te sequamur.*" After a prayer the captain exhorts the brethren to repeat a *Paternoster* and *Ave Maria* for the benefit of the sick and afflicted; then four of the number take the litter upon their shoulders, and, preceded by their captain, the rest follow, bearing the burden in turns, and repeating every time when another set takes it up, "*Iddio le ne renda il merito,*" to which those who are relieved answer, "*Vadano in pace.*" They may not receive anything save a cup of cold water whilst in discharge of their duties. For these details I am indebted to Horner.

Much that is most valuable in the constitution of this society is doubtless due to the influence of the good Bishop Antonino. It is interesting to learn that the Bigallo was originally occupied by an older society originally established for the care of orphan children and foundlings, but which had been perverted into an organization for the suppression of heresy.

Entirely owing to St. Antonino's initiative was the charity called *Providitori dei poveri vergognosi*, or

society for the relief of the shame-faced poor, but better known by the more popular title of the "Good men of San Martino." In the vicissitudes through which the republic passed during the middle ages many noble or gentle families were at various times reduced to poverty—poverty that was all the harder to endure that the sufferers were too proud to ask for bread. Many a noble heart endured the last extremities of famine rather than appear *in forma pauperis*. The good bishop, honouring and yet compassionating this exaggerated sensitiveness, called twelve of the best men of all ranks in Florence to his side, and communicated to them the scheme he desired to see carried out. They met his proposals with a ready, enthusiastic sympathy, and almost at once the guild sprang into being which with little alteration has existed ever since. The alms-box they set up to receive the gifts of the public may still be seen on the outside wall of the little church of S. Martino—the church where Dante was married, and near which he was born—which is still the headquarters of the society. When I visited this quaint little sanctuary I noticed several respectable people quietly entering and leaving the place, but it did not occur to me at the time that they were recipients of this ancient bounty. Amongst the rules of the charity are the following: "The money given for charitable purposes to be spent at once—no accumulation or investment," "no interference of public authority to change its laws or regulate the use of its funds;" and "the *Providitori* to give no account of their private ministrations to any one."

In an age like the present when one is hearing everywhere of charity abuses, and of proposals for the restoration of charities to their original objects, or to others that may more effectually carry out the benevolent intentions of their founders, the existence of two such societies in the midst of a Catholic community cannot but be most suggestive. But, next to the delicacy of their mission, we cannot but hold in highest respect the unobtrusiveness of their service, and the unfailing honour with which their great responsibilities have been sustained throughout more than six centuries.—A. F. M., in the *Homiletic Magazine*.

THE MINIMUM CHRISTIAN.

The minimum Christian! And who is he? The Christian who is going to heaven at the cheapest and easiest rate possible. The Christian who purposes to get all out of the world that he can, and not meet the worldling's doom. The Christian who aims to have as little religion as he can, without being destitute of it altogether. The minimum Christian generally goes to church in the morning, unless he is too tired with his week-day labours, and has lain in bed too late on Sabbath morning, to get ready for the morning service; in that case he will attend in the afternoon or evening, unless it is likely to rain, or is too warm or too cold, he feels too sleepy or has the headache. He listens respectfully to the minister, and joins in prayer and praise. He applies the truth often to his neighbours, rarely to himself. If there is a lecture in the week, he goes if quite convenient, but rarely attends the prayer meeting, as the latter is apt to be uninteresting. He feels it his duty to be present on communion Sabbath, and his family prayer at least once a day unless business presses upon him too urgently.

The minimum Christian is friendly to all good works; he wishes them well, but it is not in his power to do much for them. The Sabbath school he looks upon as an admirable institution, especially for the young, the neglected and the ignorant. It is not convenient, however, for him to take a class or attend very regularly. His business engagements are always so pressing during the week that he needs Sabbath as a day of rest; nor does he think himself qualified to be a teacher. There are so many persons better qualified for this important duty that he must beg to be excused. He is in favour of the visitation of the poor; but he has no time to take part in these labours of love. He thinks it a good thing for laymen to take part in the prayer meetings of the Church, but he has no gift for public prayers, or for making addresses (unless the subject be business or politics), and he must leave it to others. He is friendly to home and foreign missions, and gives his "mite," but he thinks there are too many appeals; still, he gives, or he will lose his reputation.

The minimum Christian is not clear on some points relating to Christian conduct. The circus and dancing, the theatre and card-playing, give him considerable trouble. He cannot see the harm in this, or that, or the other popular amusement. He says there is nothing in the Bible directly against it. He does not see but that a man may be a Christian and go to the theatre or to the ball-room. He knows several people who do go, and members of the Church, too. Why should not he? In short, the minimum Christian knows that he cannot serve God and Mammon; he would if he could, and he will come just as near to doing so as he can, for he thinks it not best to be "righteous over much." He will give to himself and the world all that he may, and to God and his cause as little as he can, and yet not lose his soul. He