

if they do go to church, it is to hear the Methodist preacher, or the Episcopal missionary. I invite our excellent Superintendent of the North-West to look into some of our mission stations along the C. P. R., which he can conveniently do, and examine into the attendance, the Sabbath collections, etc., and I will guarantee he will corroborate what I have alleged. Why should we not make our Church respected here? Bishop Anson has introduced young men—graduates of Oxford and Cambridge—into these Territories. They come well qualified educationally, socially, and pecuniarily, to spend a few years in building up their Church, which they are doing most effectually, and it has often grieved my bigotry for my own Church to witness the manner in which our Presbyterian people old and young, throng into an Episcopal place of worship to the utter neglect of their own, and all on account of the miserable, unministerial, and slovenly manner in which our services are conducted by some unfit person. Now, do the successors of Burns and Willis and Bayne, or of Cook, or Matheson, or Urquhart, contemplate violating all the heretofore laws and proceedings of the Church by opening the door of the holy ministry to unqualified men? We in the North-West forbid it and deprecate it as a suicidal innovation. We can and will wait till we can get *bona fide* ministers. We want no "make-shifts" in our religion. We want the genuine article. Excuse the prolixity of this communication. You may perchance hear from me again.

PETER GREY.

Moose Mountain, May, 1885.

LAYMEN IN CHURCH COURTS.

MR. EDITOR,—The near approach of the annual meeting of the General Assembly suggests the consideration of a grave defect in the constitution of our church courts, from which the Presbyterian body in Canada has been suffering for years, and which must sooner or later be remedied if it is not to become a serious bar to its prosperity. I refer to the almost complete suppression of the laity, alike in the legislation of the Church and in the administration of her affairs. This is no new grievance; I have heard it complained of for years by active laymen, and I have repeatedly had occasion to notice it while attending Assembly meetings in a journalistic capacity. At one of these meetings several years ago, a conference of elders was held on the subject, apparently without any solution of the difficulty having been found, for matters have since drifted on in the old, unsatisfactory way.

The causes of the virtual suppression of the laity to which I refer, are not far to seek or hard to discern. I do not now raise the question which may well emerge however, in any discussion that hereafter takes place: Whether the ruling elder is under our Presbyterian polity, properly speaking, a layman or not? I prefer confining my remarks to the obvious fact that even if he is allowed to be a layman he is a very lay figure in the background of our Presbyteries, Synods and Assemblies.

The Presbytery is usually made up of two representatives from each congregation, the pastor and one elder. The Synod is similarly composed, and the General Assembly is made up of delegations of ministers and elders in equal numbers chosen by and from by the Presbyteries. Under such a constitution, no layman but an elder, if he is one, can become a member of any court. Now the elders are not usually chosen by the congregations with a view to the work of legislation or administration for the Church at large. They are chosen, and properly so, with a view to the administration of the affairs of the congregation itself, to assist the minister in the discharge of his pastoral duties and in the general oversight of his flock. It generally happens that men so chosen are not well adapted for taking an active part in the general work of the Church, though, in the vast majority of cases, they are admirably adapted for the performance of the duties they have been elected to discharge.

To make matters worse, while the pastor of the congregation is *ex officio* a constant member of the Presbytery, the position of associate from his congregation is taken by the elders in turn. Where there are a dozen elders—not an unusually large number—in one kirk session, it is obvious that no one, however able or conscientious in the discharge of his duties, can exercise an influence on church work at all comparable with that exercised by his pastor, however

deficient the latter may be in legislative or administrative capacity. The minister, like the elder, must take his chance of election to the General Assembly, but his chance of election is at least ten times as good.

It will not be disputed by any one that it is desirable to have representative and competent laymen in our Church Courts, nor will it be contended by any one that the present method secures their presence there. What is the remedy? An obvious one is to adopt the Anglican method of giving each congregation the right to elect from amongst its own members a lay delegate to the Presbytery and Synod, instead of giving the position to the elders in rotation. In this way the Presbyterian delegation to the Assembly would be made to include a real and active lay element and the General Assembly would never be without a considerable number of prominent and experienced men whose participation in its proceedings would be of incalculable benefit to the Church. WM. HOUSTON.

Toronto, June 2, 1885.

THE REMIT ON ELDERS' COPIES OF ASSEMBLY MINUTES.

MR. EDITOR,—The proposal now being pronounced upon by Presbyteries, to withhold in future from elders the annual copies of Minutes of Assembly heretofore supplied them, is, in my judgment, open to grave objection.

It is unreasonable as well as unfair that elders should be expected and required to manifest an intelligent interest in the various Schemes of the Church when the only means whereby they can become acquainted with the true state of the life and work of the Church is withheld. Complaints, loud and frequent, of an inefficient eldership are voiced from time to time by the higher courts of the Church; but the proposal submitted is certainly a novel method of correcting that inefficiency; running counter, as it does, to the judgment and experience of shrewd business men in every other circle. No secular business concern would ever dream of hazarding its interests or insulting its officers in the manner proposed, and the Church of Christ ought to be the last institution on earth to require the full tale of bricks while it withholds the straw.

The contention that elders should order and pay for copies of the Minutes on their own account is significant, when looked at in connection with the efforts put forth to equip to the fullest possible extent every salaried official in the Church's service. If out of our one and one-half millions of revenue for all purposes, the small amount necessary to supply the elders of the Church with copies of the Minutes is begrudged, it affords painful proof, either that their services are of very little account, or are very little appreciated.

AN ELDER.

IN Germany, says the *Independent*, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of university students during the last decade. From a population of 45,250,000 there were 25,000 students attending the universities, while in England, with a total population of 26,000,000, there are but 5,500 students at Oxford and Cambridge. The Governments of Germany display great zeal in the cause of education, especially of university education. They watch over the Universities with sleepless vigilance, pay seventy-two per cent. of their expenses, and literally drive students within their walls by making them the only doors of admission to the learned professions and to the higher departments of the Civil Service. During the last few years there has been "a sudden crowding to theology," the number of divinity students, especially of Protestant students, having been increased in a remarkable degree.

MRS. ELIZABETH THOMPSON, widely known for her charities, living at Stamford, Conn., is contemplating an original scheme for doing good. On the theory that the old and stirring religious hymns which were familiar in childhood, and from which many people in later years drift so far away that barely an echo of them remains in the memory, would, if heard again, stir old recollections and reawaken religious sentiments long dormant, she proposes to send musical organizations through the country which will render the religious music not only in concert halls but in public places where masses of people congregate. Mrs. Thompson intends not only to organize bands of sacred minstrels to travel from place to place, but desires to get together local companies of young people, under good musical direction, who will give sacred concerts. She is very much in earnest, and is fully determined to try the experiment.

THE MARRIAGE QUESTION.

FACTS, OPINIONS AND DECISIONS OF CHURCH COURTS.

BY PROFESSOR GREGG, OF KNOX COLLEGE.

(Concluded.)

35. The Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada, at its meeting in 1856, "took up a memorial from the Presbytery of Cobourg, with reference to the subject of marriages between brothers and sisters-in-law. The following deliverance was adopted by the Synod, viz.: The Synod *having no doubtful opinion*, as to the conformity with sacred Scripture of the principles laid down in our Church Standards, on the law of marriage, and especially touching the degrees of affinity within which marriage is forbidden by the divine law, enjoin on Presbyteries to carry out these recognized principles, as a rule of guidance in dealing with practical questions of church fellowship in this particular."

36. In the Synod of the Canada Presbyterian Church, in 1867, Mr. John Cunningham appealed from a decision of the Presbytery of London in the matter of his suspension from the membership of the Church for marrying his deceased wife's sister. "It was moved by Mr. McLaughlin, elder, seconded by Mr. J. Ross—That the Synod dismiss the appeal and affirm the decision of the Presbytery." A motion to postpone a decision till a future sederunt was lost, and after long reasoning the motion of Mr. McLaughlin was carried by a majority of 138 to 5. At the same meeting of Synod an overture was presented from the Session of Knox Church, Woodstock, on the subject of marriage with a deceased wife's sister, and a motion was made by Mr. W. T. McMullen, seconded by Mr. J. Lang—"That it be remitted to Presbyteries and Sessions to consider the subject of this overture, and to report to next Synod as to whether the clause in the Confession of Faith which forbids, by implication, marriage with the sister of a deceased wife, shall be amended or removed from the Confession of Faith." It was moved in amendment by Mr. Andrew Wilson, seconded by Dr. Burns—"That the overture concerning marriage with a deceased wife's sister be not sent down to Presbyteries, and that it is unnecessary and inexpedient at the present time to agitate further this important subject." The further consideration of the overture was postponed until next meeting of Synod by a vote of seventy-nine to four.

37. At the meeting of 1868 it was decided, on the ruling of the Moderator, that the overture from the Session of Knox Church, Woodstock, could not be further entertained on the ground that it was incompetent for an inferior court authoritatively to impugn the doctrines of the Church, as was done by the terms of the overture. But a similar overture from several members of Synod was considered. A motion was made by Mr. McMullen, seconded by Dr. Edmondson, to send down the subject to Presbyteries and to instruct them to report whether in their judgment the law of the Church on the subject of marriage with a deceased wife's sister should not be so altered as that the Church Courts might be relieved from the responsibility of casting out of church fellowship, on grounds much disputed, those who are so married. It was moved in amendment by Dr. Willis, and seconded by Mr. W. Gregg, to appoint a committee to give its consideration to the subject with a view of elucidating the Scriptural basis of said law and showing that our rules of discipline do not rest on slight or arbitrary grounds. Another amendment, moved by Mr. David Inglis, seconded by Mr. Andrew Wilson, was carried by a vote of 52 to 37—"That the prayer of the petition be not granted, and that this Synod affirm their continued adherence to the declaration of the Westminster Confession on the subject to which the overture refers."

38. In 1869, the consideration of an overture on marriage with a deceased wife's sister, transmitted by the Presbytery of Cobourg, and a petition from Mr. J. Cunningham on the same subject was deferred till next Synod.

39. In 1870 the Assembly of the Canada Presbyterian Church took up the consideration of the overture of the Presbytery of Cobourg, left over from last Synod. Mr. Laing proposed the following motion, seconded by Mr. Bartlett, elder—"That the overture be received, and that a committee be appointed to consider this subject in all its bearings. First—On the dealings of this Church, in cutting off from its communion parties married in the specified relation. Secondly—On the restoration of such parties to the privileges of the Church, if this can be done consistently with Scripture. Thirdly—On the civil law of the several provinces and countries in which this Church is placed; and further—to prepare such a vindication of the doctrine and practice of the Church as may aid in removing doubts and afford directions to Sessions in their dealing with parties, so that the action of the inferior courts may be uniform and consistent, and to report to next Assembly."

"It was moved in amendment by Dr. Topp, seconded by Mr. Donald Walters, Elder—That the overture be dismissed, inasmuch as the Assembly does not see any reason for such inquiry as is proposed on the subject. It was moved in further amendment by Professor Caven, seconded by Mr. Gregg, that having regard to the importance of the subject brought before the General Assembly, one on which the Confession of Faith gives no uncertain sound, declaring on Scripture grounds there referred to, that marriages within certain degrees of affinity, including the relationship of a man to the sister of his deceased wife, are forbidden by the divine law, and can never be made lawful by any law of man, or consent of parties, the Assembly sees no sufficient ground for modifying the ecclesiastical rule of its communion in this particular, which is also in harmony with the civil law of Great Britain, but willing to treat with respect the difficulties of some, among whom questions have arisen as to the relevancy or sufficiency of the Scripture degree of affinity, brought under notice, is held to rest, agree to appoint a committee to give its consideration to the subject, with the view of elucidating the Scriptural basis of said law, and showing, as far as may be to parties aggrieved by the rules of discipline, that these do not rest on slight or arbitrary grounds, and to report to next Assembly."

It was moved in further amendment by Mr. J. K. Smith,