

and in the pews a people "pricked in their hearts." We invite the co-operation of all the children of God who read these pages in special prayer to the Father of Mercies that he would grant us a personal awakening in our Churches, among both young and old, rich and poor, office-bearers and people, and that we may all have a more thorough PERSONAL REALIZATION OF CHRIST. ✕

DISPUTED SETTLEMENTS.

From the Free Church Record.

A few cases of serious division in connection with the filling up of vacancies have occurred in the Free Church of late, and the matter has naturally attracted the notice of all who feel an interest in her permanent welfare. Considering how few these cases have been, and the previous inexperience of our congregations in the discharge of this new duty, there is no cause for much alarm, but rather for congratulation on the overwhelming proportion of perfectly harmonious settlements which have occurred. Some little difference of opinion, and even an occasional sample of actual division, may be anticipated as the price to be paid for every kind of liberty, and especially liberty newly acquired. It is remarkable that more cases of dispute have arisen in the Established Church, from a simple lengthening of their chain under the supervision of the civil courts, than in the Free Church, from giving the people an absolutely free choice of ministers according to the Word of God. There can be little doubt, however, that when our system has become consolidated, when all parties understand their relative positions and duties, cases of dispute will be indefinitely reduced in number, and perhaps nearly quite extinguished.

Meantime it is important, without entering minutely into the subject, to indicate in general some of the sources of our present difficulties, as proved by our own experience and that of other bodies of Christians similarly circumstanced.

There are three parties in every settlement, and *only* three, and from one or other the difficulty, when it does exist, must in every case arise, viz., the congregations, the probationers, or the presbyteries. Let us glance at the respective duties of each :—

I. *The Congregations.*—In one sense they may be said to be the parties most deeply interested in filling up a vacancy ; for their own spiritual interests and those of their children, including to some extent also those of an entire neighbourhood, and perhaps for a generation to come, are bound up in the issue. The matter is therefore one of great solemnity to them, and ought to be treated in a peculiarly earnest and prayerful spirit. They are not only called to exercise a high privilege, but to discharge a most momentous duty to the great Head of the Church and to themselves. Anything, therefore, like the mere spirit of a political contest ought to be banished as far as possible from the election of him who is to "watch for their souls as one that must give an account." This matter ought certainly to be fully explained to every congregation at the commencement of every election by some experienced member of Presbytery. During the course of the election all canvassing from door to door, so fruitful in divisions, ought to be prohibited and put down as inconsistent with the free liberty of choice and with the nature of such a transaction. The people should be strongly admonished to study not merely their own personal feelings, but the feelings of their brethren, the interests of the whole congregation and neighbourhood, "the things that make for peace, and by which they may edify one another." There is a passage in Gal. v. 13 which might form a suitable text for such a discourse, "For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty ; only use not liberty for an occasion to the