

CHURCH and HOME

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Preaching Competitions.

One of the burning questions demanding special attention at the hands of our Church reformers is that of the calling of ministers to vacant charges. Reform in the methods at present in vogue is absolutely essential. The present system, in its recent developments, has proved anything but a success. No surprise need be excited thereby. Ministers are only human. Vacancies of any worth are few. Aspirants are many. When, therefore, what is called a good vacancy occurs all sorts and conditions of influence, legitimate and illegitimate, are exercised. Proceedings which from their importance and character should be models of order and sobriety, are too often made to afford scope for the operations of the unscrupulous wirepuller and the machinations of the interfering busybody. The true issues are forgotten in the violence of party strife, and, after the conflict is over, the wounds given and received rankle in the breasts of the excited combatants, and poison the springs of congregational power. Indeed some ministers never get over the bad start thus made. Their partizans certainly uphold them, but they meet only with hindrances and difficulties from the disappointed supporters of their rivals. The bad feeling too

often engendered by these unseemly contests may spend itself in time, but its deplorable results remain more or less pronounced.

This may not happen in all cases, but it would be fruitless to deny or ignore the fact that the history of many church settlements is as described above. Not infrequently has Presbytery's power been appealed to in an attempt to restore peace to a riven congregation. The many "splits" and secessions which have taken place despite such intervention amply testify to the need for reform. Apart from the effect on the congregations themselves these preaching competitions tend to unsettle the candidates themselves, more especially if they are already in charge of a church. No congregation cares to see its minister apparently anxious to seek fresh fields and pastures new. It may end favourably if he is successful, for then they have the consolation of knowing that others appreciate their minister's powers and capabilities. But when the effort proves unsuccessful, it has often a prejudicial influence on the future of the congregation. Something has come between the pulpit and the pew. A little rift has been discovered which may destroy the harmony and good feeling that has hitherto subsisted, and which will henceforth em-