

## Our Contributors.

### SHOULD STUDENTS OF DIVINITY PREACH?

BY KNOXIAN.

Some of our Presbyterian contemporaries across the lines are discussing this question. They always do discuss it more or less at this season of the year. The Theological Colleges will soon close. The students are needed in mission fields, and the question naturally arises, should the young men exercise their gifts as preachers? Some good and wise men say no, but the young men are sent to preach all the same. Whatever theory our Church may hold on the question, if it holds any, the practice has always been to employ all the available young men during the summer months in the mission fields, besides giving them a good deal of preaching in and around the College seats during the session. As a rule, the only limit to their employment has been the limit of money to pay them.

We have heard more than one good brother say. "I was brought up and educated in a church that never allows a young man to enter the pulpit until he is licensed." Indeed! Perhaps the church in which you were brought up did not need student labour. Perhaps it had ten licentiates for every vacancy. Perhaps it had no mission field. Does anyone suppose that if the Free Church of Scotland had mission fields like Muskoka and the North-West, practical men like Chalmers, Candlish, and other founders of that Church would not have been in favour of sending students to labour in them rather than let the people go without preaching. If they would not have availed themselves of student labour to meet such an emergency, they were not the wise men the Church always took them to be.

One of the objections to the employment of students as preachers is that mission work interferes with their college work. It is said that a student cannot read up for the next Session and prepare sermons every week during vacation. This objection undoubtedly has some force, but not nearly so much as at first blush it appears to have. Presbyteries do not, or, as a rule, need not, keep the same student in one field for six months. His field, as a general thing, may be changed at the end of three months, and in this way three months' preparation of sermons may do him for six. The objection, moreover, assumes that the main part of a student's preparation for the ministry is to read books. This certainly is an essential part, but is not by any means the only thing to be done. Dr. Shedd, one of the best living authorities, says. "Education is not a dead mass of accumulations, but power to work with the brain." Now this power to work with the brain in the pulpit may be obtained in the mission field quite as well as in the college. There are many things to be learned about preaching that can be learned only by preaching. The possession of "a dead mass of accumulations" can never make a preacher. There is no more pitiable sight in the ecclesiastical world than a young man with a string of medals and a pile of prize books who cannot in the actual work retain the attention of a congregation for twenty minutes. The more successful his college course, the worse for him if he cannot preach. The people read in THE PRESBYTERIAN that the young man who is to preach for them next Sabbath was an honor man in the University, and carried off any number of bursaries and prizes in his theological course. They go to the church expecting a rare treat. They get, well we shall not say what they get, but they go home saying the young man might make an excellent theological professor but is scarcely adapted for the pulpit. The young man is no doubt a fine scholar. He has been faithful and thorough in his studies, but he has no power in presenting truth to others. Perhaps he has an excellent sermon on paper, but he cannot rub it in. The power to rub it in is acquired by *rubbing it in*, and it can be acquired in no other way. Hence, we conclude that a vitally important part of a minister's education can be better obtained in the mission field than anywhere else.

It is objected that students sometimes acquire awkward and slovenly habits of delivery in their early efforts—habits that may cling to them for life. True, but any man beginning to preach or speak in public may acquire such habits, and is it not better that

they should be acquired, if acquired at all, at a time of life when there is some hope of their being rubbed off than at a more advanced period, when there may be no such hope. The student goes back to college, and the Professor of Homiletics and the elocution master may cure him of his bad delivery. The licentiate who contracts similar habits has no future training of that kind, and the awkward habits, like Tennyson's brook, may go on forever. Awkward habits in the pulpit and bad elocution are not by any means confined to preachers that did mission work in their student days.

Many years ago we heard an aged and worthy father of the Church express himself something in this way. "It is down-right cruelty to put a young man up in the pulpit and ask him to discuss subjects of tremendous importance, where he is so nervous that he trembles." It does seem a little hard, but if he is to be a preacher he must go up some time. Licensing him will not take the nervousness out of him. Practice alone can overcome the nervousness. Two more sessions at college and a license to preach certainly will not do it. He may, perhaps, be more nervous when he gets through his course than he is when half-way through it. Practice alone can give self-control, self-possession, and ability to look upon a sea of faces sometimes the sea is not very large—without taking the "shakers." Is it not better that the practice should be had before the young man goes in search of a call? The Premier of the Dominion defines a good speaker to be "a man that can think on his legs." Sir John has seen a generation of public men make their *debut* as parliamentary orators, and he is a good authority on such a question. Now, a man can never learn to think on his legs until he gets on them. And hence we conclude that it is better for a preacher to get on them in the mission field than at a later period of life; that is to say, it is usually better for himself. Apart from the ability to speak with a fair measure of self-control, there is another most important advantage gained in actual work. An intelligent student does not preach long until he finds out that there is an essential difference between the essay style of the college and the style of direct address to the people. When he finds out this difference, and can "write to speak," he has learned something that has millions in it for a young preacher.

So far we have discussed that question from the student standpoint. Richard Grant White says standpoint is not a good word, but we will use it all the same. There are other considerations, the principal of which is, that the Church needs student labour and cannot do without it. Probably two-thirds of the Presbyterian congregations west of Toronto owe their existence to student labour. The Presbytery formed a station, students were sent to preach in it, and in a few years it grew into a congregation and called a minister. This is the history of a very large number of our best congregations. The man who undervalues or belittles student labour knows or cares very little about the history of Presbyterianism in Ontario. Student labour is as much needed now as ever. The fields are not as promising now as they once were, except, perhaps, in the North-West. When London, Huron, Bruce and other western Presbyteries were being settled, students had a grand time. Two or three summers of vigorous work, and a visit or two from Dr. Burns and a few members of Presbytery, turned many a small station into a vigorous, self-sustaining congregation. That was the time when a young man could see the work he was doing. It was a good time. In many of our present fields faith is more exercised than sight. Still these fields must be worked, and the Church should be grateful that we have such an enthusiastic, capable band of young men going this week to work them.

### REFORMED CHURCH OF FRANCE IN THE "DESERT."

#### RESTORATION OF PROTESTANTISM IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

A former letter gave a brief account of what preceded the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which had been granted to the Protestants of France by Henry IV., in 1598, at the request of the fourteenth Synod of the Reformed Church, held at Sedan, and which gave permission to the Protestants to hold religious services, according to the doctrine and discipline of their Church, as well as a guarantee for the peaceable pos-

session of their property which made them eligible for all employments and offices. In this, I shall give a brief outline of some events in the history of the Reformed Church from 1685 until the Edict of Toleration in 1787, and the Concordat in 1802.

Louis XIV., shortly before his death in 1715, issued a proclamation stating that

#### PROTESTANTISM HAD DISAPPEARED

from France. He had good grounds to say so; for 500,000 Protestants, with 1,500 pastors, had been exiled, and 200,000 had been put to death in various ways because of their faith; while the galleys on the coast and the prisons in the interior were full of victims. Those, unable to emigrate, being without temples and pastors, betook themselves to the "Desert," that is, to mountainous regions, where—in the depths of forests, in ravines and grottoes—they held secret meetings, and comforted each other with the consolations of religion. In the absence of pastors, there appeared on all sides preachers—uneducated men, who, by reading the prophetic portions of the Bible, and by the frightful atrocities they witnessed, became excited almost to madness. By their harangues multitudes were inflamed, and hundreds of men, women and children began to prophesy that the day of vengeance had arrived. The influence of these persons did much to sustain the courage of the Camisards, who rose in rebellion in the Cevennes (Lozere and Gard), and, for two years (1702-1704), kept in check the royal armies commanded by the Duc de Broglie.

On the death of Louis XIV., the Regent having formed alliances with Protestant powers, a breathing time was given to the scattered remnants of the Calvinistic Creed. Some even began to think of reorganizing their Church. They must have been sanguine persons who, in the circumstances, could entertain such a hope. Some poor wanderers in mountain fastnesses, were now the only representatives of that fully equipped Church which at one time had given promise of becoming the favourite Church of France. Who was to be the guiding spirit in effecting organization? By what means was he to accomplish it? The chief agent in this work was

#### ANTOINE COURT (1696-1760),

a remarkable man, regarding whose life and labours, a few particulars will, doubtless, prove interesting to the readers of THE PRESBYTERIAN. Antoine Court was born 17th May, 1696, at Villeneuve de Berg, in the mountains of Vivarais. His father dying while he was still an infant, his mother was left a widow in charge of three young children. At the age of seven, Antoine was taken to school where he soon let it be known that he was a Protestant, a crime for which he was first jeered at, and then pelted with stones by his school fellows. After a time he asked his mother to allow him to share in the services of the "Desert," and by-and-bye he became the centre of groups of Reformers who looked up to him as their leader. At this time French Protestants had adopted two modes of procedure. One party deemed it prudent to attend the Roman Church, though secretly holding the doctrines of the Reformation; the other frequented the meetings of the "inspired" in the "Desert." Court set himself to draw the one party from their illusions, and the other from their indifference, and to organize both into one body which should be faithful and reasonable. When only nineteen years of age, he called together in 1715, as Louis was dying at Versailles, the first

#### SYNOD OF THE DESERT,

which met in the quarries of Leques near Nismes, made by the Romans. Five pastors were present, all devoted and active men, though, perhaps, wanting in great culture, and of these five, a few years later, four died upon the scaffold. At this meeting Court advised his friends, seated around him on stones, to restore the office of "elder," and counselled prudence in holding meetings and above all, to avoid fanaticism which could only injure the cause they had at heart. How to restore public worship, and increase the number of qualified pastors, was the subject which occupied the deliberations of this and subsequent Synods. They agreed that it was necessary to stop ignorant persons from addressing meetings and to prevent women from preaching. Only regularly ordained pastors could dispense the Lord's Supper. Under the direction of pastors, preachers were allowed to traverse the country to collect the scattered members, and arrange for meetings.