

RECEPTION OF MINISTERS FROM OTHER CHURCHES.

When applying for admission to the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Canada a clergyman of another denomination is required to state "When, where and by whom he was ordained." (Rules and Forms of Procedure p. 53). If the General Assembly grants his application he "may be received on satisfactorily answering the questions appointed to be put to ministers and probationers and on signing the formula." No further ceremony is required. Re-ordination has never been suggested when not explicitly ordered by the supreme court. I think that I am correct in saying that if the certificate of ordination handed in with the application is in order, a minister of an evangelical non-presbyterian church is never re-ordained when received by us.

But what is considered a satisfactory answer to the question "When, where and by whom ordained?" What has the church usually accepted as a regular and valid ordination? What is considered as constituting a man a minister of Christ and a presbyter of His Church? Does the practice of the church agree with the doctrine of her standards? We shall first endeavor to ascertain the present usage of the church, and then we shall examine the doctrine of the standards and test it by Scripture and reason.

So far as the course pursued by presbyteries is concerned, I can speak from more than 30 years of experience, all the time noting the action of other courts as well as that of my own, for the subject has always interested me, and as far as my knowledge goes, anyone coming to us from an evangelical Protestant body, Baptist, Methodist or Congregational, has been accepted at once, as far as ordination is concerned, if he could show that he had been set apart in the recognized form and manner of his denomination. No person has ever raised a question as to the right possessed by the ministers of such churches to ordain other ministers. Their "de facto" standing has been recognized and their action homologated as being that of legitimate possessors of the authority they assumed. Leaving out the case of Romish priests, which raises questions of its own, I am not far astray when asserting that the "unwritten law" of Presbyteries has been that no evangelical minister requires to be re-ordained.

Let us consider next the action of the General Assembly. The application, endorsed by the Presbytery, and accompanied with the relative papers, including the certificate of ordination, is placed in the hands of a committee for examination. This committee is newly appointed at each Assembly and has no fixed membership or even permanent minute book. There are no standing rules nor record of precedents for its guidance. Absolute consistency of action is hardly to be expected under such circumstances. As far as I can ascertain, not a scrap of any of the documents left before it has been preserved. The only information to be obtained regarding its procedure is found in the exceedingly meagre reports contained in the Assembly minutes. For the last two years these do not give even the names of the churches from which the newly-received ministers came. It is impossible for one to ascertain authoritatively the principle on which the General As-

sembly and its committee have proceeded. I can only infer that it is not incorrectly expressed in the "unwritten law" already mentioned.

For a few years (1901-1904) a record of proceedings was kept. At first it is very full and circumstantial, but it gradually becomes extremely brief, and at last useless for practical purposes. I understand that it was forgotten and not brought to the Assembly in 1905, and no one has troubled himself about it since. I tried to get some of the subsequent manuscript minutes, but could not locate them. I believe they are destroyed. I have, however, gathered a little information from the brief record available. In no case do these minutes state that the committee had documentary evidence of ordination before it, but the date of ordination is generally recorded and the name of the church from which the applicant for admission came. During this period of five years 66 ministers were received, 44 were from Presbyterian churches, 15 Congregationalists, 5 Baptists, 1 Methodist, and 1 Church of England. Only in one instance do I find a Presbytery instructed to re-ordain, and that is in the case of a person who had received his ministerial status from the Christian and Missionary Alliance and had spent some years in the Soudan. The reason for this unusual course is not given. There does not appear to have been any doubt of the fact that the Alliance had ordained him. That the C. and M.A. is not a recognized "church" or denomination may have had something to do with the committee's action, but those who would take part in the designation of its missionaries would all be in good standing in their respective churches and constitute as permanent a body as any Congregational or Baptist council. The considerations influencing the committee were doubtless stated on the floor of the Assembly, but they are not recorded. All that we learn is that the Assembly once drew the line at the C. and M.A., but why we cannot tell. In the Synod rolls for 1905 the date of this gentleman's Presbyterian ordination is given, Nov. 22nd, 1904, but in 1906, April, 1898, is substituted. It would appear that, in contempt of the Assembly's action, the date of the earlier ordination, which had been refused recognition, was inserted in the records. I cannot find the name on the roll for 1907 and the charge which he served is vacant.

Another instance, of an entirely different character, seems to show that ordination was not considered by anyone as a matter of much importance. Opposite the name of one applicant in 1904 stands the following: "Licensed by a Baptist church in T—, Nov. 30th, 1898." The committee reported him to the Assembly as: "A Baptist minister in good standing, from the United States." But I learn from a Baptist brother that licensure by a congregation carries with it no denominational status whatever, not so much as an appointment as "local preacher" amongst Methodists. Yet we seem to have accepted it as equivalent to ordination. The clerk of the Presbytery which endorsed the application informs me that the entry in his minutes merely states that his credentials were approved and ordered to be forwarded in the usual way. Nothing whatever is said about his orders. Turning to the printed minutes of the Assembly, I find in 1905, opposite the name in question, under "Date of Ordination," this extraordinary entry, "Rec. by order of Gen. Ass. Aug. 1904," as if reception constituted ordination. This date is also given under "Date of induction to present charge." In the minutes for 1906 and 1907 the

space is blank under "ordination," but the same date is continued under "Induction." Am I not warranted in concluding, since these reports are usually filled up by the minister himself, that this brother found it impossible to give a date for an event which had never taken place?

In view of the facts that I have brought out, have I not good reason to ask, "Does the Church know where she stands in regard to ordination?" Surely I am not presuming on your space, or wearying the patience of your readers, if I venture to call the attention of the Church courts to this very serious laxity of principle and practice. During the coming winter we shall be called to discuss a proposed Basis of Union with other churches whose views on the subject of clerical orders differ materially from those of our standards. Is it not possible that in our ancient and Scriptural ministry we have something the value of which we have too lightly esteemed? If in the ordination we have received in unbroken succession from Reformation, nay, from pre-Reformation back to apostolic times, we have a sacred trust laid upon us which we must not betray, ought we not to weigh carefully the effect of organic union with a ministry which has no such historic continuity, rests upon no such scriptural basis and places a different value upon the ministerial office? The man who, without applying to it the common tests of its genuineness, throws a diamond into the sea declaring that "he doesn't believe" it to be more than a piece of glass, is a Solomon compared with those who renounce their Scriptural rank, break their ecclesiastical entail, and obliterate their historic name, without taking stock of the value of these before irrevocably parting with them, and declare that they do all "ad maiorem Dei gloriam!"

That we are in danger of committing this egregious folly and unpardonable sin, I shall, with your permission, Mr. Editor, endeavor to show in my next article which will be on "The Doctrine of the Westminster Standards Regarding Ordination."

PACIFICUS.

THE TRUE MAN AND CHRIST.

True living is true religion: the Christian life is the sound, sane, whole human life; the man who follows truth follows Christ, whether he knows Christ or not. Yet we preach Christ insistently to every man. For we dare to say to every man, If you are true, here is what you are looking for: the way of God in men, the way of life; more life, irrepressible, growing, victorious life—and that is the way of Jesus Christ. Have that mind in you which was in him who humbled himself and was obedient unto death: practice faith in an infinite spirit of love as he practiced it to the utmost limits, to the least details; above all, learn his spirit who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life for many, and you will prove that Christ's way is life in deed and life abounding.

The man who follows truth follows Christ, to be sure, but to follow and not know him is to walk in the dusk that precedes the day. Give to the man who follows truth to see Christ as he is; he will recognize his Master, he will recognize the life that is itself the truth. To him Christian discipleship comes as inevitably as day to "them that wait for the morning"—if Christ be presented as he is. But presented in the guise of outworn creeds, unreal liturgies, superstitious "schemes of salvation," the true Christ is not seen of the true man, the common man, and not on the common man rests the blame.—Laird Wingate Snell.