

CONCERNING MINISTERIAL RESTLESSNESS.

Those gentlemen who are charged with the duty of finding supply for eligible vacancies tell us that the number of applications for a "hearing" is really astounding. They tell us, too, that some of these applications not infrequently come from ministers that no one would suppose had any desire to move. Years ago we ascertained the number of "hearings" that were arranged for in three vacancies. They were not specially desirable as fields of labor. The record of two of the congregations might be classed as "fair to middling." The third could scarcely be classed so high. The towns in which they were situated could not be described as enterprising or progressive. One was perhaps growing a little, but very little; the second had not grown for years, and the third was going back. And yet there were between forty and fifty "hearings" arranged for in each of these vacancies! In one of them—the poorest of the three—the number was, if we remember rightly, two or three over fifty. It should be remembered, however, that all the ministers who preach, or even ask for a hearing, in a vacancy are not candidates. A man may wish to take a short holiday, or visit friends in the locality, or do any one of half a dozen things, and take a day in a vacancy, with a view of meeting expenses. Friends in the vacancy may wish to hear him. He may preach without the remotest idea of candidating, or of accepting if called. Out of fifty preachers probably not more than thirty are candidates in the strict sense of the word. It is a gross injustice to assume that every minister who, for one reason or another, preaches in a vacant congregation is burning for a call, or would accept one if he got it. Congregations have found out before now that such is the fact.

Making all due allowance, however, for such cases, it must be admitted that there is a good deal of ministerial restlessness. A considerable number of brethren actually do want to move. Let this be assumed.

It is about time we had made a point. The point we wish to make is that the reasons for the restlessness are in many cases *entirely creditable to the minister*. It has become cruelly common to assume that if a minister wishes to change his field of labor the wish is presumptive evidence of indolence, incapacity, unfaithfulness, or some other bad thing. The assumption is, in many cases, ungenerous, unjust and as thoroughly false as anything old Satan ever suggested. Were all the facts known it would be found that in many cases the man should be honored rather than condemned for desiring a change. There is quite as much nonsense talked about long pastorates as about any other ecclesiastical topic. Why should any minister claim credit for a long pastorate if he has tried a dozen times to get a call and failed? He tried hard enough to make it short, but couldn't. In some cases a long pastorate proves the very highest ministerial attainments; in others it proves that the minister has marvellous staying power, and the people marvellous patience. Before any minister is condemned for seeking a change, or any one canonized for never making a change, all the facts should be known. The reasons that lead the one to seek a change may be quite as praiseworthy as the reasons that keep the other from making a change.

Now, let us mention some of the reasons that lead

good men to desire a change, and see if they are not in the highest degree creditable.

Here is a brother who lives twenty miles out in the country—perhaps fifty. He has a family growing up around him for whose education he is responsible. All the good man can give them as a start in life is a fair education. They have learned all they can learn in the country school. Their father has no money to pay their board in the neighboring town or city. Now what is the man to do? Is there anything more natural or more proper than that he should seek a position where he can educate his children? Ought he not to be honored for so doing? His chief reason for seeking a change is entirely creditable to him as a Christian, as a parent, as a citizen, as a *man*. The Church and the country will be all the richer and better for having those manse children well-educated, and their father should be commended for trying to give them all he can give them—a fair education, as a start in this world.

It is very easy for town and city ministers, some of whom perhaps don't preach as well as the rural brother, to talk about ministerial restlessness, when their own children are within easy reach of schools, colleges and good situations. A man who would not feel restless if his children are not getting a fair start in life is unfit for a minister of the Gospel.

Here is an unfortunate minister settled over a small congregation that is practically under the control of one man. Let us call the man Smith. Smith is a coarse, purse-proud, ignorant little tyrant. He has all the bad qualities of a little pope, without any of the good ones. The minister is not long in his charge until he finds that he must obey Smith. He thought he was the servant of Christ and the Church, but for all practical purposes he is the servant of Smith. He was educated, licensed and ordained to preach the Gospel, but he now finds that his principal business is to do what Smith orders. Can anybody blame that minister for desiring a change? It is quite easy to say that he should stand his ground, and that the people will stand by him. The people whose names are in Smith's ledger, or on whose property Smith has mortgages, may not stand by him to any great extent; if they do, some of them will stand very quietly. They will probably do the principal part of their standing after the minister has gone. Some of the people—a majority of them perhaps—may want peace, peace at any price, and as peace can only be obtained by allowing Smith to have his own way, Smith must triumph. If that minister were your son, or son-in-law, could you blame him for wishing to move?

And here is another unfortunate brother, who has to contend against a "ring" in his congregation. They oppose him in every way, belittle his efforts to do good, try to turn the people against him, persuade the people to withhold their subscriptions, and use all the devilish arts known to such cliques to hinder their pastor in his work. He could fight the world, the flesh and the devil bravely enough in the ordinary way; but when the devil takes the form of men who have sat down at the communion table with him, or, possibly indeed, served the communion table with him, the conditions of warfare are changed. The pastor becomes discouraged and disheartened. The men who should help—some of whom perhaps took ordination vows to