

## Our Contributors.

### LESSEN THE LEAK.

BY KNONONIAN.

Whether the Presbyterian plan of settling pastors over congregations is the only scriptural one or not, is a question that need not be discussed. The fact that Presbyterian people would have no other, makes discussion of that question a waste of time. Some of those who would kick most violently if the right to vote for the minister were in any way interfered with, might be sorely puzzled if asked to give the scriptural argument in favour of popular election; but let that pass. Every sensible man knows that the voters of the Adam family cling to their votes even more tenaciously than they do to their money. A citizen who never voted at a political, municipal or school trustee election will threaten to overthrow the common-wealth if his name is taken off the voters' list. A Presbyterian that never attended a congregational meeting in his life, that has to be hunted up with a horse and buggy in order to get him to sign a call, will threaten to overturn the church if you question his right to vote. Voting for ministers is here to stay. Sensible people deal with men and systems as they find them.

Apart altogether from what the New Testament may say on the question, we think the right to call one's spiritual adviser may be successfully defended on common-sense grounds. If a man is to teach me twice every Lord's day, if he is to enter my home and stand in more confidential relations to my family than any other man stands, except perhaps the family doctor; if he is to pray with my dying and bury my dead, surely I should have something to say in the selection of that man. The argument from justice and common sense seems unanswerable. And yet the fact remains that our Episcopalian and Methodist friends get along fairly well, although the people have very little to say in the selection of their spiritual advisers.

But supposing we assume for the purposes of this paper that the right way and the only right way to select a pastor is by popular vote of the people, does it follow that congregations should take a year or two in doing the thing when it might be done much better in half or one-third of the time.

There may be far too much time spent in doing a right thing in a right way. It is a good thing for a man to take his dinner, but it may be a very injurious thing for him to dine all afternoon. It is a good thing to sleep, but the man who sleeps all day will soon ruin his business. It is a good thing to preach, but no wise preacher will go on for three hours on a hot July day. It is a good thing to visit your intended, but no young man should draw too heavily upon his prospective father-in-law for light, or stay until his future mother-in-law walks about in the front yard and says she is looking for the morning paper. It may be a good thing for people to call their own pastor, but why in the name of common sense keep on hearing candidates after every sensible man in the congregation says he has heard at last half a dozen who would have suited quite well.

The evils that grow out of protracted vacancies are many and some of them are of a very serious type. We are not by any means certain that the worst of the evils is the loss of numbers. Division of the people into rings and cliques with self-appointed leaders may do much more lasting injury to a congregation than the loss of a few families. The spirit engendered by sitting in judgment instead of humbly and reverently worshipping God is so injurious as to lead many thoughtful people to doubt seriously whether the God who commands us to worship Him in spirit and in truth ever did sanction any such system as the hearing of candidates. The vanity fed by sitting in judgment on a new preacher every Sabbath is certain to interfere with the work of the pastor after he is settled. The scars made by a year's conflict are almost sure to meet him many times when making his pastoral visits. Only those who have watched from a spiritual point of view the inner working of the system have any idea of the amount of evil done by a protracted vacancy.

The harm done to the ministry by candidating is perhaps still more serious, but that branch of the question is large enough for a separate paper—yes, for half a dozen papers.

Since Mr. Macdonnell made the startling statement in the Assembly that the church loses eighty years of pastoral work every twelve months by vacancies we have heard several people ask, How does the church stand such a drain. Here is the way the church has stood it in one place. A level-headed man connected with a congregation now vacant said the other day, "The last time we were vacant the Methodists enlarged their church. I suppose they will put another addition to it this time." That is how we stand it in too many places. And yet there are people who think that congregations should be kept without pastors until every crank, every specialist, every hobby-horse man, every long-haired man and short-haired woman are satisfied with hearing candidates. Nero fiddles while Rome burns.

### A PLAN FOR SETTLING VACANT CHARGES.

MR. EDITOR,—I am not surprised that Dr. McMullen objects to that part of my plan that provides for cutting off congregations. I suppose this would challenge criticism. But this is really the least part of the plan, and indeed came as an after-thought, and was put in to make the plan something like complete. For if a church, with the facilities provided in my plan, cannot settle in six months, something decisive needs to be done. I provided that such a church may—not must—be cut off. It would be a question for Presbytery, and the fact that Presbytery had to discuss such a question would be one sure method of bringing such a church to time. That was the idea which I had in view.

But Dr. McMullen would cut off probationers instead. Yes, and with his own limitation, I agree with him. He says, "after reasonable probation." That is just the point. Do the methods that prevail now give a reasonable probation? What are the facts? A church falls vacant. If a desirable one, it is besieged with applicants, probably a hundred or more. The first effect, is that the church officials lose their heads; if they are not very modest men they get ideas of the importance of themselves and their church they never had before. Then they are bewildered with the immense number of applications. It would be marvellous indeed if they made a wise choice of candidates under such conditions. Perhaps they do the best they can; so by hap-hazard, or influence, or favour, or good judgment, they start the procession, and the work of candidating begins. Each man selected supplies for a single Sunday. Except a man makes a very marked impression, he simply passes in the procession, evokes more or less flippant criticism, passes out of sight, or is wiped out by the man that follows him next Sunday. So the dreary procession moves on. If in course of time some man makes a very good impression, or if he has some strong personal influence, a congregational meeting is held, with a view to a call. But in our constitutional way this involves delay; so before the meeting is held another candidate perhaps has been on the scene whom some of the people like better. The result is, that the favorite is not elected; or if he is elected, it is with abated enthusiasm and unanimity. This is no mere theory; I know of two cases just now where this occurred. If there is no election the weary work of candidating proceeds, but with probably diminished good feeling and unity in the congregation. How do such methods afford any "reasonable probation" whatever? Is a church likely to make a wise choice under such conditions? Is not the whole scheme humiliating to the candidate, and demoralizing to the people? And a more serious question than any of these is,—Can we expect the divine favour on such foolish methods? I do hope we can, for God's goodness is happily not limited by our folly; but surely we might expect more of the divine favour and blessing if we pursued a wiser course.

What is that wiser course? Well, I suppose nothing can be done officially until next

meeting of Assembly. In the meantime, however, congregations are free to adopt such new methods as may seem to be best. One thing I would respectfully suggest, namely, to hear each candidate at the very least two consecutive Sabbaths. Then if a congregational meeting could be arranged to be held at once, each candidate could be finally disposed of in turn. If each one could be heard four Sabbaths, I think that would be all the better. I feel assured that many a happy and lasting union might be effected if minister and people had only a chance to know each other, which they have not with one Sunday's acquaintance. Along with this, if the Moderator and Session would make a wise selection of a very small number of candidates, say three—and give each of these a full and fair trial, disposing finally of each one in turn, I believe the vacancy would be filled as a rule much sooner and more satisfactorily than by the methods that usually prevail. I spoke lately with the leading men of a church that has had a chronic difficulty in settling, and they all believe that such a scheme as I proposed would have saved them much time and trouble.

Most of your readers know something of Dr. Joseph Parker, of London. He is known as a great egotist; but he is a great man for all that. I asked a member of his church one day if he knew that Parker disgusted every stranger at first by his egotism. He said he knew it well. How, then, did Parker ever become famous, and how does he hold his congregation? Thereby hangs a tale, and an instructive one in this connection. The world as yet had heard nothing of Parker when a certain church in Manchester fell vacant. It had great difficulties and delay in selecting a pastor. A wealthy friend of the congregation made a proposal that a certain man whom he could procure be heard for four Sabbaths. He would not name the man, so the people refused to entertain the proposal. After a while, however, they consented. The friend in due time brought his candidate. It was Parker. The friend knew Parker's ability, but he knew also that if he got him on for one Sunday only, the people would never have him again. And, sure enough, they were disgusted with Parker's first performance, and disgusted with themselves for making so foolish an agreement. But they had to hear Parker again, and he was not so very offensive the second time. On the third Sunday he was endurable, at times a little captivating; and on the fourth Sunday no man in England was equal to Parker. Whence the change? The people simply had a chance to find out something of what was in the man, despite his egotism; and others have been finding out Parker till this day, and don't know him yet. Hence my plea for hearing a few candidates often, instead of a great number only once. If a man has really anything in him you are not certain to find it out the first time you see him. Give him time, and give yourself time. I plead for a little more fairness and good sense all round. Yours truly,

JOSEPH HAMILTON.

Knox College, Toronto, 5th July, 1894.

### THE CHURCH AND MANSE BUILDING FUND.

BY REV. JAMES ROBERTSON, D.D.

#### RESOLUTION OF ASSEMBLY.

The General Assembly unanimously and cordially adopted the annual report of the Church and Manse Building Fund for Manitoba and the North-West; recorded its satisfaction with the work done during the past year, thanked all who contributed of their means for this branch of Home Missions; and commended the Fund anew to the generosity of members and adherents of the church.

#### WORK DONE BY THE BOARD.

The report shows that last year the Board helped to erect 13 new manses and 26 churches, worth over \$57,000, and that during the 12 years of its existence it helped to erect 271 buildings worth over \$400,000. It is estimated that the rent saved by the building of the manses would pay interest at 9 per

cent. on all the capital ever possessed by the Board, and yet only about one-fifth of the help giving during these 12 years was to build manses.

#### REVENUE FOR '93-4.

The contributions to the Fund ranged between \$1.00 and \$5,000, the latter figure being the largest single contribution ever received by the Board. But for the princely generosity of Mr. J. T. Morton, of London, England, in loaning the Board \$12,000, without interest, its operations would have been much curtailed. One-fifth of this loan has to be repaid each year till the money is returned.

It is to be borne in mind that this Fund receives no place among the schemes of the church, and is dependent solely upon special contributions. The work has commended itself to the judgment of the wealthier members of the church, and by them, chiefly, it has been created and maintained. To them the Board must still appeal, for the capital at present possessed by the Board is inadequate for the prosecution of the work.

#### INSUFFICIENT CAPITAL.

The Assembly fixed the capital for Manitoba and the North-West alone at \$100,000; the Board has less than \$70,000 for all the country between Lake Superior and the Pacific.

#### THE FUND DESERVES SUPPORT.

Valid reasons can be shown why the Fund should be liberally supported. (1) The people of the West are without much means; are beginning life in a new country where, at first, it will be all outgo and no income; building material is expensive; and hence without help from without they cannot build churches or manses. (2) A church is as necessary for a missionary as a store for a merchant, or a shop for a mechanic; it adds 25 per cent. at least to his efficiency. The gratifying growth of the church in the West is in no small measure due to this Fund. (3) Missionaries with families must be provided with shelter when the winter is long and the cold sometimes intense. If shrewd business men save money by building warm stables for their horses, the church will gain in the health and efficiency of her missionaries by providing them with adequate shelter. (4) Promising settlements of foreigners are appealing to the church for ordinances. If we assist them when strangers and without means, we shall secure their adhesion and help in after years for all our work. Are not such people included in Christ's "strangers," and for helping them may we not expect His blessing? (5) As patriots we are interested in building up the cause of God in our own land. We shall be united and prosperous as a people in proportion as we fear God and keep His commandments. This Fund will help us as a church to take possession of the West for God. (6) The people the Fund is designed to help are deserving. Notwithstanding the partial failure of crops last year, they gave for all church work \$15.82 per communicant, or nearly 37 per cent. more than the average for the whole church. These people are intelligent, self-reliant, liberal and progressive and deserve help and encouragement. (7) In 1881 the church held service at 116 points and had only 3 manses and 18 churches in the West. There are now 163 missions and 28 augmented congregations with 693 stations. This means that at well-nigh 500 stations in the mission field there is no church. Manse are conspicuous by their absence. (8) Where churches have been built the progress of the mission towards self-support has been much more rapid. In 1882 we had only two self-sustaining congregations in the West and now over 50.

#### HOW THE FUND CAN BE HELPED.

The Fund can be aided by congregational contributions, by contributions by C. E. societies or individual donations. Where \$500 or more is given it can be kept separate and secure the erection of a new church at least every five years. Were a wealthy congregation to give \$2,500 they would have the satisfaction of knowing that they had secured the erection of a new church every year for all time to come. And could