

Our Contributors.

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION.

BY KNOXONIAN.

Some years ago, the late Dr. Burns, in a speech delivered at the opening or closing exercises of Knox College, or in the old Free Synod or some such place, asked an important question, which has never been answered. The question was, Whose duty is it to prevent incapable young men from entering the ministry? "Surely," said the Doctor, "it is the duty of somebody," but the brave old presbyter did not seem to be very clear as to where the responsibility of doing this disagreeable work lay.

Coming down from ancient to modern times, and from a great and venerable man to men who may be both great and venerable some day, we find the *Knox College Monthly* making the following pertinent and timely remarks on the same question:

A great deal might be said about the wrong done to all concerned, when Presbyteries recommend men whom they are convinced are doomed to failure. Of course examiners do not wish to seem unkind, and they cherish the hope that the boy may not be father of the man. The cruelty of their kindness is made manifest to the man himself when, at the end of a long college course, he finds himself face to face with work for which he has no aptitude, and placed in a position for which Nature never intended him. He is not "apt to teach," and never was made for a preacher. What shall he do? "He cannot dig, to beg he is ashamed." He may turn life assurance or lightning-rod agent; but a theological course is not usually the best preparation. He remains a victim of his own short-sightedness, and of the kindness of his Presbytery.

The *Monthly* is clearly of the opinion that at the Presbytery is the place where the unfortunate young man, "doomed to failure," should be stopped. Doubtless, the Presbytery is one place—perhaps the best place—where the brakes might be put on; but it is not the only place. There are brakes academical as well as brakes Presbyterial. Supposing the young man, "doomed to failure," gets through the Presbytery, as he nearly always does, is there nobody further on in the course whose duty it may be to save him from his impending doom?

The question, "Whose duty is it to stop incapable young men from entering the ministry?" is most important: but lest it seem lonely we put a few kindred questions beside it to keep it in company.

Whose duty is it to keep young men out of the legal profession, who are about as well fitted for discharging the duties of a lawyer as they are for commanding an army?

Whose duty is it to keep young men from entering the medical profession, who are as capable of discharging the duties and carrying the responsibilities of a doctor as they are of managing an expedition in search of the North Pole?

Whose duty is it to keep young men from going into business, who are doomed to mortgage their old father's farm the second year, and turn him out of house and home the third or fourth? Such things happen every day.

Whose duty is it to keep young men from getting married, who haven't brains enough, or ambition enough, or industry enough to keep a decent man's daughter in hair-pins, not to speak of a home?

Whose duty is it to keep idle giglets from assuming the responsibilities of matrimony and maternity, when they are as unfit for such responsibilities as they are for sailing the British fleet?

Whose duty is it to keep Presbyteries from squandering precious time over small questions of procedure while great questions vitally affecting God's cause are untouched?

Whose duty is it to sit on ecclesiastical bores who drivel on every question in church courts, and never say anything?

Whose duty is it to stop Ontario towns from building railways to carry their own trade into Toronto or elsewhere? This has been done more than once by men who speak in the most pitying, patronizing way of the sad lack of business ability among the clergy.

The proper reply to many if not all these questions is, that nobody can wholly stop the evils referred to. And this is the proper reply to the question, "Whose duty is it to stop incapable young men from entering the ministry?" Nobody can stop all of them. Incapable men work themselves into every profession, into every kind of business, and it is not possible to keep them out of the ministry.

A lawyer is said to have drawn up seven reasons why a witness did not attend court. The seventh reason was that the witness was dead. Unsophisticated people who never had the benefit of a professional training might suppose that the seventh reason was sufficient without the others. There is one reason why nobody can stop all incapable young men from entering the ministry, and it is quite sufficient without mentioning a score of others that might be given. In many cases the data on which a correct judgment can be formed are not in existence during college days. The capacity for mental growth is one element of ministerial success. How can any one tell by examining a student twenty years of age whether he will be a "growing man" at forty-five? Tact in dealing with men is another most important element. How can you tell whether a student will be a wise leader or stupid blunderer twenty years hence? The power of expression is indispensable to success. How can a Presbytery, or an examining board, or a professor, say whether a young man has that power or not, if he has never uttered a dozen sentences in public? Physical health—a good flow of animal spirits—is a most important factor. How can a Presbytery be sure that a young man may not dry up into a dismal dyspeptic before he is fifty? Many other elements, more or less important, might be mentioned, but space forbids. The plain fact is that many of the data on which a correct judgment can be formed are not visible during college life, and so long as this is the case nobody can keep all incapable young men out of the ministry. In cases in which sufficient data are manifest to make failure reasonably certain it is downright cruelty in these days to allow a young man to go on. The cruelty is seen later on in life, when the wife and children of the young man who mistook his calling are without home and bread.

The old theory that if a minister has piety and learning, and a mind to work, he must succeed, is exploded. We have seen ministers go to the wall who had a fair share of all three—more of all three than some who succeed. Ministers have been driven from their manses and pulpits, and the very men who drove them gave them credit for piety and industry, while in the act of driving. We wouldn't waste ink on a man who at this time of day will stand up and say that piety, learning and industry are a certain guarantee of success. Something more than these three most important things are needed, and it is often impossible to say whether a student has that something more until he begins the actual work.

OUR HOME MISSIONS.

Having spent three months this summer at various points in our great Home Mission field, between Winnipeg and the Pacific Ocean, I wish to give my impression of the work, and to state reasons for its maintenance with undiminished vigour. Since the meeting of the General Assembly in Winnipeg, and the virtual deficit of \$10,000 or \$12,000, our North-West missionaries have felt anxious for the present year. I have no quarrel with the Foreign Mission young men for their zealous advocacy of their plans, nor with the colleges for their energy, both east and west, in raising money, but what about Home Mission interests? Why are not Presbyteries being visited, and the claims of our foundation work of building up a strong home Church strenuously urged? Home Missions are the life of the Church. They crucify selfishness and preserve the evangelical tone. Enough for generalities. Beginning at the Pacific, I had an opportunity of seeing the

PRESBYTERY OF COLUMBIA.

Its meeting was fittingly held in the young city of Vancouver. This place is a marvel. Eighteen months ago blotted out of existence by fire, it has now 5,000 people. It is the terminus of the C. P. R., and has a great future before it. Our Church here is self-sustaining, having called Rev. T. G. Thomson, and given him a salary of \$1,500. This is two years of good mission work! Mr. Thomson is Clerk of Presbytery. In the chair was the venerable father of Presbyterianism in British Columbia, the Rev. R. Jamieson. Our Columbian pioneer goes back to the time of Nisbet's first journey to the Red River, and it was pleasing to see sitting in the chair the man who for a quarter of a century has borne aloft in the midst of prevailing iniquity the escutcheon of a definite faith and pure morals. May his declining years

be peaceful! Mr. Jamieson's successor as Moderator, whom we saw elected, is the friend so well known to us all as an advanced temperance worker and large-hearted man, Donald Fraser, of Victoria. His church had, before his going into it, barely survived, after having long floated on a sea of troubles. Mr. Fraser since undertaking it has done his task well. I preached to the congregation of Pandora Street, and can bear testimony to the good work done in so short a time in Victoria. Donald Fraser is a pillar of the truth on the Pacific coast. While in Victoria I had the opportunity of seeing the

VIRTUAL UNION.

for which we have been anxious in British Columbia. St. Andrew's Church, Victoria, has been the chief representative of the "Kirk" on the Pacific. Application was made on the 5th September to the Church of Scotland to be allowed to join our Church. I had an opportunity of discussing the matter with several St. Andrew's people, and found all recognizing the benefit that must accrue to our cause. It is reported that a well known Ontario minister is the choice of St. Andrew's Church, and all of us who know him say he is just the man for the place. The city pastor yet unnamed—for the Columbians already maintain three cities—Victoria, New Westminster and Vancouver—is the Rev. T. Scouler, of New Westminster, six months ago from Hamilton. New Westminster is said to be the first organized, and on the whole our strongest Church in Columbia. Mr. Scouler's excellent record in Hamilton will undoubtedly be repeated on the Pacific coast.

ENDURING HARDSHIPS.

I was rejoiced to meet on the coast an old Manitoba friend, Rev. Donald McRae. For years in Manitoba Mr. McRae willingly grappled with the hardest field, and he is at his old work even in our most western Province. His five stations lie about Victoria on the island. I went round three of them on one Sabbath, and gave an old friend a lift. Another member of Presbytery from the island was the Rev. A. Dunn, of Alberni. Mr. Dunn's field is a new one, and very hard. The missionary walked fifty miles to reach the railway at Nanaimo on his way to Presbytery. Besides the above there were four mainland ministers at the Presbytery. The great line of cleavage in British Columbia is between Mainlanders and Islanders, but except a jocular allusion or two I saw nothing of this in the Presbytery. To be a missionary in the interior requires a frame of vigour and the zeal of an apostle.

THE INTERIOR.

Rev. J. A. Jaffray has done capital work at Spillamacheen, far up in the mountains at Okanagan. This is claimed as an agricultural district, and it is said will yet supply the Pacific Province with flour. Another member present was the energetic missionary from Kamloops. Kamloops is a dry upland region, known for its ranching capabilities. Rev. J. A. Chisholm, the missionary, is an ardent Nova Scotian. He is said to have much influence with the rough ranchers, and has already gathered \$3,500 for a church. The difficulties of preserving the amenities of life in such a district must be very great. One of the finest and most devoted missionaries present was Rev. A. Tait, of Langley. His district is reported to be a very good farming and fruit-growing locality on the Lower Fraser. Mr. Tait is spoken of as a decided success in his work.

NEW MEN.

The latest additions to the Presbytery are Rev. G. C. Patterson, of Chilliwack, and Rev. J. Cormack, of North Arm. These are both superior men, and much is expected of them. I have thus gone over our eleven missionaries in British Columbia. Three years ago we had but one pioneer—Jamieson—on the coast, if I mistake not, and now what an advance!

I would say, moreover, I was impressed with the business tact and earnestness of the new Presbytery. Our previous neglect of British Columbia is simply astounding as we look back at it, but we have men of the right stamp there now to regain lost ground. The Home Mission Committee, however, ought to allow them a couple of hundreds of dollars a year for visiting distant fields. The work in Columbia differs greatly from that of most parts of the North-West. In Columbia vice and social evils have been entrenched ever since the gold-digging times. There