

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

From the Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record

Not in Canada only, but generally throughout Christendom, the complaint is heard, that so few are offering themselves as candidates for the ministry. The diminution of students is one of the dark signs of our times. On this side of the Atlantic, we have not to deplore so much the actual falling off, as that the numbers bear so small a proportion to the progress of the population. In half a dozen of the American Theological Seminaries, the numbers were, in 1852, 267. In 1853, they were 259. At the German Universities, Halle for example, there has been a great decline.

These remarks are intended to apply to Protestant Churches exclusively. Popish priests are so superabundant that we wonder what they have to do, and how they are sustained.

Taking it for granted, that generally, in the evangelical churches, the candidates for the ministry are diminishing, let us endeavour to suggest a remedy.

We believe that the Church has not yet begun to do her duty, in looking out for suitable young men for the office of the ministry. The first aspirations to the sacred office have originated in the minds of many ministers at a very early age. In the family circle where "the minister" is spoken of with respect, and among the families who esteem him very highly for his work's sake, it would be surprising if well trained boys did not indicate a predilection for the office. But we know of nothing more likely to cause a generous youth to turn from it with aversion, than the very reprehensible—because sinful practice of dwelling upon the weaknesses and failings of ministers, and speaking of them disrespectfully. This evil practice—evil in any circumstance—becomes much more hurtful when indulged in before those whose youth and in-experiences prevent them from judging correctly for themselves. A pious gentleman, who has the superintendence of a Sabbath School, conversing on the office of the ministry, and the few candidates offering for it, said, that he intended to bring the matter prominently before his school, and to direct the attention of the young to the important subject. Much, we are persuaded, might be done in this way. It is wrong to suppose that the first thought of the ministry should always originate with the candidate. Perhaps they are the least qualified to judge in the matter.—The modest, humble, but gifted youth, seeks retirement, while the less qualified, but self-confident aspirant, rushes into the office. The intelligent Sabbath school teacher is more likely to form a correct estimate of a boy's gifts, than even his fond parent. But while we would by no means hold out inducements indiscriminately, we would direct the studies of the young far more generally to those subjects which are indispensable to the minister—in short, urge parents to give to their children a good Christian education. Up to the period when a young man enters the Divinity Hall, he has only been acquiring the knowledge necessary to his entering upon the secular professions.

In the domestic circle and the Sabbath school, potent influences may be brought to bear; but the Church generally, in her ministers, office-bearers, and members, should be earnest in seeking out suitable youths as candidates for the ministry. Let them search for the man, and the right sort of men. The quality is of more consequence than the number.—"Look out for the most pious, the most intelligent, and the most ardent of our young men—not forgetting, at the same time, to ascertain their physical qualifications of voice and energy. It is not studious youths only who will do for this work—mere book-worms, who will devour knowledge, and make no return; but such as will unite a thirst for knowledge, with an intense desire to employ every acquisition for saving souls. We must be inquisitive after such; and if they are youths in the more respectable classes of society—young men who have known something of good society, and have acquired the manners and habits of gentlemen, and have had something to do with business, and have acquired such a proper degree of self-confidence as shall give them weight and influence of character, all the better. Low men, with coarse, vulgar manners, may, by the power of great talents, rise above their origin, and be of great value, as diamonds uncut and unpolished, yet how much more would the value of these spiritual diamonds be increased by the lapidary's art."

There are, in most of our congregations, youths who would enter upon the proper studies for the ministry if they had the means, and there are others who, though possessed of gifts, feel themselves at a hopeless distance from it. Were the Church alive to her duty in this important department of her work, provision would be made in the one case, and encouragement and advice afforded in the other. Her missionary character is the life and glory of the Church. Perhaps one of the most effectual ways in which our Church could give an impulse to the missionary cause, would be by each congregation striving to bring forward, at least, one student. It is gratifying to know that the plan is being tried, and that we have students now in Knox's College who have been brought forward and encouraged, and are now assisted by the congregations to which they belonged.

While good men deplore the scarcity of spiritual labourers, it is the reproach of the Church that so many who have engaged in the service, have met with cold neglect. In the wealthy establishments, priests are pampered—in undowered Churches it is quite different.

"The minister is generally found at the head of a family. He is not one of a brotherhood for whom nearly everything is provided. He stands comparatively alone. His responsibilities are personal. The provision he has to make relates not to himself merely, but to a wife,

a family, a household. Nor is there anything adventitious to his position to take away from the abjectness of poverty. His ecclesiastical system is not of a nature to impart any sort of dignity to such a condition.—He cannot appeal to his church as the adopted of thrones and princes as great in its historical associations, and as rich in its relations to authority, art, and splendour. Poverty in him is simply what it is everywhere else—or becomes only the more repulsive, as tending to secularize and vulgarize a sacred function. The sort of care and dependence which it generates seems to reduce the office he sustains to a level with the worldly and the common. In his case you do not see poverty elevated by religion, you rather see religion degraded by poverty."

"What the expenses of a family mean is no secret; and if the several items of necessary expenditure in the case of the large class of ministers adverted to were taken fairly into view, and contrasted with the means placed at their disposal, we suspect that many an inconsiderate religionist would be constrained to admit that, of all his arrears of debt, the debt due from him to his minister is the greatest. A few men of eminent ability, in large cities, may be without reasonable ground for complaint in this respect; but we are now speaking of the average of the class, and of those whose income lies even much below the average line, and of those we do not hesitate to speak as sufferers to an extent highly dishonourable—we will not say to the liberal feeling, but to the sense of honesty in many of our churches. It is in vain to say, the men themselves, in not a few instances, are of a humble grade as to origin and ability, and not entitled to high remuneration. We reply, that to proceed as you are now doing, is the surest possible course to perpetuate the supply of men of this grade, with few that rise above it. If you would possess something better, you must study better to deserve it."

"There is a class of men who, to cover their own selfishness, tell you, in a somewhat angry tone, that they do not want men who serve God for 'filthy lucre'—who become ministers for the sake of 'the loaves and fishes.' Truly we, none of us, want such men; but it is one thing to require that men should not bring a selfish and sordid temper to the ministry, and another to require that, for the honour of being allowed to do us service, they should be content to become martyrs to poverty all their days. Ability has its remarkable value, and if our young men of ability see that the walks of professional life or of an honest traffic hold out to them the promise of a valuable return, while the prospect before them as dissenting ministers is little else than a hard fight with necessity and dependence, it should not surprise us to see the world often turn the scale against the church—indeed, so often as to leave the church only a scanty supply of ability to choose from."

"The demand that the persons sustaining this office should be men of solid acquirement and mental power, has been rising every year, as a natural effect of progress in the general intelligence; but a readiness to couple this demand of higher ability with a provision to connect a more adequate remuneration with ministerial service, this has not followed in anything like the same proportion. What is the result? Precisely such as might be expected—the sons in our wealthy families rarely devote themselves to the duties of our ministry; and many beside, who might otherwise have been most efficient men in that office, have given themselves to the pursuits of science or of literature, to the professions, or to the enterprises of commercial life."

The foregoing extracts are from an article in the *British Quarterly Review*, on "The Christian Ministry—how to amend it." Having exceeded our limits, we take leave of this important subject for the present, with the following additional excerpt from the same source:—

"No ministry will be really effective, whatever may be 'its intelligence, which is not a ministry of a strong faith, true spirituality, and deep earnestness.' We confess, however, that we have been prompted, in great part, to the writing of this paper by a fear lest, while the responsibilities of the pulpit are discussed, that those of the pew should be forgotten; for assuredly, while an earnest ministry may conduce to an earnest church, it is only as we possess both that we shall possess an earnest and powerful Christianity. We wish the evil to be looked at in its whole compass, and that the appliances brought to it may be such as to embrace it in its whole extent and complexity."

Receipts for the Magazine.

VOL. I.

Tecumseth.—J. McG. Indiana.—J. C.

VOL. II.

Derry West.—J. H. Tecumseth.—J. McG. Lloydstown.—H. S. Bradford.—W. R. Huntingdon.—Rev. P. D. M., Toronto.—J. F. Hamilton.—Mr. P. Owen Sourc.—R. P. Sullivan.—W. H., 10a. Claremont.—R. A. Indiana.—J. C. Caledonia.—J. H.

WANTED for the Huntingdon Academy, a SENIOR ASSISTANT. He must be a good Classical and Mathematical Scholar. Applications, (post-paid,) stating amount of Salary expected, to be addressed to the Rev. P. D. MUIR, Huntingdon, C. E.

All orders, payments, and communications to the Editor, to be sent (Post-paid) to the Rev. JOHN JENNINGS, Toronto.

PRINTED BY JAS. CLELAND, AT No. 62 YONGE STREET, TORONTO