

Our Contributors.

CONCERNING MINISTERIAL RESTLESSNESS

BY KNOXIAN.

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 unfrequently 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 labour. 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 labour 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 honoured rather than contemned 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 neighbouring 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 honoured for so doing? His chief reason for seeking a change is entirely creditable to him as a Christian, as a parent, as a citizen, and 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 the 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 help—hinder all they can, instead of helping. If that pastor were your brother, or your brother-in-law, your son, or your son-in-law, would you blame him for trying to escape from that ring? Not you.

Here is a case of another kind. A minister has been several years pastor of one congregation. He is anxious to do good, he feels that he has little time or opportunity for liberal study, and is in danger of getting into a rut. The people are becoming used to his modes of presenting truth. He has not much money to buy books, and none to travel, in order to keep his mind fresh and his style well up. He is conscious, perhaps morbidly so. He gradually works himself into the belief—possibly, indeed, without any sufficient reason—that a change would be beneficial to himself and his congregation. Acting on that belief, he puts himself in the way of getting a change by preaching in vacancies. Now, before God and His Church, should that man be blamed for so doing? Is his conduct not infinitely higher than that of the man who is satisfied to remain in his pastorate, whether doing good or not?

It may be granted readily that some few ministers are always on the move, because they are useless or worse. The fact remains, however, that many seek a change from the highest and purest motives, and should be honoured and helped for so doing. Saying hard things about every man who seeks a change is as unjust as it is callous. There is a remote possibility that some who do it would be changed themselves if their congregations were consulted. It often shows a thousand-fold more manliness and self-respect, aye, and more godliness too, to resign or seek a change than to hold on. Let the brethren who want a "hearing" have fair play.

A SERIOUS view of life is always a right one. But seriousness is not melancholy; on the other hand, it is cheerful hopeful, and sometimes even light-hearted.

WOMAN'S WORK.

Woman's work has from the beginning been recognized among Christian institutions. Not only were there in the time of Christ those who, like Elizabeth and Mary, were great in the greatness of their sons, but others who publicly ministered unto Christ, and gave of their substance, who fearlessly came, when the disciples were hiding, to note the place of His burial. It has often been noticed, and should be the greatest encouragement to us to-day, that Christ time after time commended those women who served and followed Him, thus openly approving their labour of love.

In India, where it was found utterly impossible by the means used to reach the 125,000,000 of women there who were living in forced seclusion, the Church realized that something else must be tried, and thus opened up a great work for Christian women. At first the plan seemed little more successful than the old. When Mrs. Murray Mitchell began working there, she tells us that the utmost liberty of access to the ladies of the zenana she could by any means obtain, was to stand for a few minutes upon the veranda, and speak to the occupants of the zenana through the lattice. As she turned away she could see a servant carefully sprinkling the place where she stood, to free it from the defilement contracted by her presence. Contrast with this the present state of things, in which some 2,500 zenanas are opened to the lady missionaries, and over 4,000 of the inmates are learning of Christ, and who will say there was no place in God's plan for woman's work? Many are the joyful hearts in that land to-day who, but for the Christian women, would be still in their hopeless misery. Many will be the redeemed souls singing praises around the throne of God forever, who under God will owe their salvation to our female missionaries. And India is not the only land that blesses their efforts. In Persia and Syria female seminaries are sending out medical students who will doubly bless those poor ones to whom they minister and do inestimable good.

If, then, we realize, as we surely must, that there is a direct call for woman's work, that it is a necessity laid upon us, can we for one moment suppose that the responsibility rests alone upon those noble self-sacrificing ones who give their lives to this work? Dare we say that because they give all we need give nothing? Can we be truly thankful for all our Christian privileges and not want others to be blessed likewise? When we think of those poor degraded creatures, dragging out their weary existence without comfort in the present or hope for the future, let us remember that our lives would be like theirs but for the blessed Gospel, and then shall we want to keep it to ourselves?

If we are content to enjoy our elevation, peace and hope thus selfishly, without caring for others, then let us fear there is not much of the Spirit of our Master in us.

There are some, we believe, who honestly desire to help in this work, and yet they feel their service too small to offer. They say they have so little time, so little means, that their service is not worth giving; but let us remember that it has not been told for 1800 years of the poor widow in the days of Christ, how she would have cast into the treasury if she had had anything worth while, but that she gave what she had.

When Dr. Duff was collecting means to carry on his noble work among the Hindus, over \$5,000 were gathered in pennies by ladies in Scotland for this fund. It is told of a poor blind basket-maker that she brought a pound note, representing the candle money she did not need, to send light to darkened souls. Shall we not give of our abundance?

Our work individually may be small; our work in societies may be small; but when we feel discouraged at this, let us remember that Christ never despises our weakest efforts if our motive be only pure. We never read of the blessed Master refusing to show men the way of life because His listeners were few. He as willingly taught the woman at the well when weary and worn with the day's work as He did the multitudes who came to hear, and if He thought a little worth seeking surely we may.

There is much in the reports of the Woman's Foreign Mission Society to strengthen us in our efforts. Last year \$224,598, or over one-third of the amount contributed to foreign missions by the Presbyterian Church in the United States was raised by