

must be a cause for this. There is a hindrance somewhere, and unless that hindrance can be discovered and removed or counteracted it is of little avail to multiply emphatic statements about the value of the service which might be rendered to the cause of Christ if a certain element of strength were placed at the disposal of the Church. To a very great extent that element is not placed at the disposal of the Church in this respect. What is the cause? Can anything be done to remove that cause? The difficulty does not seem to be so much felt in other Churches. Why is it so strong with us? The answer will suggest itself at once to everyone who will thoughtfully ask the question. It is this: *Our ideal of the preparation which a man must undergo before he can be accepted in the performance of any of the ministerial functions.* This is really at the root of the difficulty. I do not just now commend or condemn this ideal; I simply speak of it as a fact; and I say that, as a fact, in Scottish and north of Ireland character, moulded in the Presbyterian faith, it is sufficiently inflexible to offer material resistance to any movement with which its presence may interfere. Our people are so accustomed to the idea of an educated ministry that it seems to them a kind of sacred trifling for anyone not properly prepared for the work and the office to take upon himself any of the duties usually performed by a minister. This feeling is of course participated in and sympathized with by the men who are asked to take upon themselves this share of duty to relieve overburdened ministers, or to increase the efficiency of the ministry and enrich the service by the variety and freshness which would thus be given to it. This is true of prayer-meetings to an extent which we are perhaps not always aware of, and has a great deal to do with the cold, formal, mechanical prayer-meetings we so often hear about. Men shrink from placing themselves in a position in which they think they have too good reason to believe they would be the objects of unsympathetic criticism. Perhaps our Church has something to regret and something to change here. She would be all the more warm and tender in her inner life, all the more like Jesus if she encouraged her children to a more free and confiding utterance in her congregated presence, and she would be all the richer in good works if she could increase the number of those who would take some share in labouring in word and doctrine. There is no doubt that this is a weight pressing upon us which in many cases prevents the springing of the "tender blade" of active Christian life, and in so doing deprives the Church of the privilege of gathering the full corn in the ear of a ripe workman's experience. Appeals against the effects of this are like the spasmodic efforts of a man bound with India rubber-bands, he can stretch them on occasions by determined effort, but they are still there and by their continual pressure they soon reduce him to the normal condition of bondage and inefficiency. The gravitation of self-will in the line of familiar custom, sanctioned by the command, "Let all things be done decently and in order," acts continuously in the direction of the centre and tends in many a prayer-meeting towards a state of equilibrium of *statical rest*.

But there is one direction in which I believe help may be looked for in this matter. The ideal mentioned is mainly good. It is conservative of what is safe, and approved by the experience of centuries, and even if it were desirable to change it there would be no hope in this of the immediate relief which we require; but is it not possible to concede what is good in this principle and usage by a course of instruction which would be within the reach of many who cannot give seven or eight years to it. I would be the last to propose any lowering of the standard of education of ministers or even an abridgement of the curriculum, but surely in the face of such urgent need something can be done to give an opportunity to men who would render such excellent service, to get, say *two years* practical training which would give them confidence and commend them to the people. I am convinced that such a course exclusively in English and on ground where the instruction would be practical and bearing directly on the work, would leave those who attended it well prepared to be thorough and efficient workmen. As the matter stands now we are asking men to come forward and undertake a work as untried and unknown to them as if we asked them to appear at the bar to plead at the *assizes*, or to take up the practice of a physician. I speak of course of the human side alone. And there is a side of the work of a minister which is very full of human

nature, and in this it is of the greatest importance to have the advice and instruction of men of skill and experience. Would not a man with a clear, vigorous, earnest mind and a good English education be immensely benefited, for example by a course of exegetical study? Is it absolutely essential that the text be Hebrew or Greek? Can he not be trained in the principles of systematic analysis and in the mode of investigation and comparison, in his mother tongue? It would be worth much to any of us if we could thoroughly comprehend and use the English Bible. But by our present requirements there is no way open to this. An impassable wilderness of Latin and Greek declensions and conjugations; an oriental jungle of Hebrew roots not to mention the mystery of two unknown alphabets; all this lies between the earnest labourer and any help in his preparation in exegesis, theology, homiletics or pastoral theology. He may have an excellent education. He may have a cultivated and well informed mind. He may be rich in that most excellent and valuable preparation for dealing with men and women, a practical knowledge of the world, its business, its trials, its temptations, its sins, its conflicts, all this he may have but one word of practical help in the preparation for the work to which he is urged to devote his life now he cannot get unless, at the full noon of life perhaps, with fixed and grounded character, and faculties less nimble than once they were to collect and store away details, he can settle down to years of mechanical drudgery.

I do not believe that a special course for special labourers in view of the emergency of the work would have the slightest tendency to lower the ordinary standard of education. It would rather uphold it by relieving it from the strain to which it is subjected, when the attempt is made to force through it men who have not had the necessary preliminary training, a result which is almost inevitable when there is urgent need, and when it is seen that the services of those men would be of such value to the Church. Besides the practical training which business men would have acquired might well be held as an equivalent to a portion of the course which is valued very much on account of the mental discipline which it gives. Our chief glory as a Church is that we subordinate all mere human authority to the Word of God, and all human practice however venerable to the example of our Lord. We hold that in our care for the education of ministers we follow Him in having the disciples with Him for three years under His own instructions; but let us not overlook the fact that, in what we might call an emergency, He appointed other seventy also.

Are we satisfied that we are doing right to pray the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth labourers into His harvest if, while we pray, we put them under an inflexible course of preparation so protracted, so long in years, that the harvest about which we prayed will, in the meantime, be beaten down and destroyed and the field grown up with thorns and weeds?

We are told of 3,000 persons leaving a single port in one day for our shores. And while this tide of immigration is setting towards our country the men who are to be the ministers of this people are being pressed to come and enter upon their education in High schools and Colleges. This is good but we want something besides this; something more immediately applicable to the emergency of the hour.

G. BRUCE.

*St. John, N.B., May 1st, 1883.*

#### THE "MAIL" LETTER AND THE REV. MR. ROBERTSON.

MR. EDITOR,—Information has reached me here, through a reliable source, that my name has been mentioned as the supposed author of the letter published in the Toronto "Mail" some time ago, abusive of Rev. Mr. Robertson. I suppose this is due to the circumstance that I have on one or two occasions expressed myself in an adverse way regarding certain Home Mission arrangements here that I considered not only defective but also arbitrary and unjust. With regard to the letter in the "Mail" above referred to I have simply to say that I have no knowledge whatever of either its origin or its authorship, and no connection with it in any way, either directly or indirectly. Whatever I have written bearing on Mr. Robertson's work here has been invariably over my own signature and in such a form that Mr. Robertson would be sure to know of it, and I have yet to learn

that the accuracy of any statement I have made has been so much as called in question, or that I can be accused of a word disrespectful to Mr. Robertson, or exceeding the limits of fair criticism. I have, in common, I believe, with the members of the Presbytery in general, every sympathy with Mr. Robertson when he earnestly tries to deal with the difficulties connected with his position, and every desire to help him to overcome them. But that is no reason why one should approve of everything he does, especially if it be contrary to the rules according to which he is understood to act, and when it makes the position of those who labour in the mission field more difficult than it needs to be, as in my opinion is sometimes the case. It would be unfortunate if Mr. Robertson should regard anyone who finds fault with his system—or perhaps I should rather say his want of system—of working as a personal enemy, as it seems to me there is a tendency on his part to do. That would imply something like a claim to personal rule, which is not at all likely to be recognized in this country—especially in the Presbyterian Church. With the statements in the "Mail" letter I have of course nothing to do. Most of these statements are far beyond the truth, as has been already pointed out, and the personal abuse one can only condemn.

But at the same time let not the fact be forgotten—patent to everyone who has any acquaintance with the mission work in this country—that the present arrangements do not work in a way at all satisfactory. Abundant illustration of this occurs at every meeting of Presbytery. It would be unfair, however, to say that Mr. Robertson is responsible for the whole of this. A great deal of it is in the nature of the circumstances, and will require to be borne and battled with, and overcome gradually. Much of it I think also could be removed and many difficulties at least ameliorated by a better system of working. The proposed division of the present Presbytery of Manitoba into three Presbyteries, if sanctioned by the General Assembly, will, it is expected, open the way for much improvement. Till then let us hope and wait.

JOHN ANDERSON.

*Regina, N.-W.T., May 1st, 1883.*

#### SUPPLY OF VACANCIES.

MR. EDITOR,—I have closely observed the working of the probationers scheme for eleven years, and tested it by actual experience; and within the last six months I have preached in eighteen vacancies. While so employed, I have embraced every opportunity of ascertaining how far the scheme has proved acceptable to the congregations. As the result of my experience and observation I am fully persuaded that, though the changes proposed by the Home Mission Committee would make it more tolerable, it would still be far from satisfactory. The evils are far more numerous, and lie deeper than is generally supposed.

The feeling against it among the congregations is so general and intense that no slight changes like those proposed will make it anything like acceptable to them. The wiser course would be to discard it entirely. We are then met with the question, What is to take its place? You ask the New York "Observer" to suggest an agency which will do for the Canada Presbyterian what the bishops do for the Episcopal Church, and the Conferences do for the Methodist Church; and say, "there's the rub." I will now make a few suggestions in that direction, or rather endorse some that have been made by others. And I must confess that I fail to see any serious difficulty in the way of devising a scheme which will be as efficient as either.

The very excellent overture, submitted by the Synod of Hamilton and London ament ordained missionaries slightly modified, and combined with the bureau scheme, suggested by your correspondent "A" in his letter on the probationers scheme, would in all probability meet the wants of the case as well as anything which could be devised at present. The scheme contained in the overtures should be extended to all vacant congregations that desire it. Aid-receiving congregations should be required to adopt, and others should be permitted to do so.

This would simply be applying the Methodist system to those congregations. I have been making special enquiry and have learned that throughout the vacant congregations there is a strong leaning towards adopting the Methodist system "holus bolus." This would not be wise at the present time, but it would be well to try it thus far: The congregations that pre-