

The Presbyterian Review.

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Toronto, August 17, 1893.

Distribution of Probationers.

AN important question brought before the General Assembly was the distribution of probationers. It should not be lost sight of, when in a few weeks, the holidays being over, full work will have been resumed by the various agencies of the Church. The committee's report is virtually a complaint of neglect of duty. It sets forth a state of things that ought not to exist and raises a problem which must be faced. The character of the supply placed at the disposal of the committee is one cause of complaint and another is the meagre information furnished by Presbyteries in answer to the committee's circulars. As to the first the report states that scarcely any of the younger men, and of the licentiates of the Church apply for work to the committee through their Presbyteries. In most cases, it is stated, the supply consists of men who have been a considerable time in the ministry and who have resigned from their charges, or of men grown old in the ministry. It is with cause complained of that with this class of limited supply the work of the committee is extremely difficult, and that it is well-nigh impossible to give satisfaction to vacant congregations who depend on the committee for efficient and suitable supply. The second point, the scanty information furnished to the committee by Presbyteries, admits of no defence. The relations of the organizations of the Church to each other should be not only harmonious, they should be such as to produce systematic work throughout, and defaulting Presbyteries ought to be reported to and dealt with by the General Assembly. A little method and punctuality from the congregation to the Presbytery, from the Presbytery to the upper courts and committees would prove a great benefit, and it should be insisted upon. The necessity for it is illustrated in the report on the distribution of probationers, but it might be equally well shown in the work of almost any of the other committees. Let the business of the Church be attended to in a business-like way, just as the business of the merchant is, and time will be saved all round as well as greater and better results secured.

The question of supply for vacancies is one that requires wise handling. The condition of the vacant congregation has often to be delicately considered, and in many cases the counsel of the Presbytery determines, to a great extent, the future of the congregation. It is, therefore, more than

desirable that there should be perfect understanding between the Presbytery and the committee, the duty of both bodies being of a peculiarly important character. But from the following extract from the report it is to be feared the committee has been given the cold shoulder oftener than the cordial grasp of the hand:—"Very seldom do any of the replies to the circulars that are sent out quarterly by the committee contain anything more than a bare and brief statement of the names and number of the vacant charges requiring supply and the amount of this asked. Among the information sought by these circulars is whether Presbyteries have committees to co-operate with the elders of vacant charges in procuring supply for the pulpit; but it is only in some instances that the question is answered, and from the answers received it would appear that little attention is paid to the regulation of the Assembly bearing upon the point. Were it more faithfully carried out, Presbyteries might feel themselves bound to ask their representatives on the committees to report regularly what arrangements for supply were made, and in this way an opportunity would present itself for ascertaining if that other regulation of the Assembly was observed for application to be made to your committee for full or partial supply."

Look for a "Via Media."

IN a recent issue we published an article on the effects so far of the Declaratory Act passed by the Free Church of Scotland. An esteemed correspondent, for whose letter, on account of its length, we cannot supply space, takes exception to one or two statements, notably in saying that the leaders of the minority "lead the people too far," and that "in their zeal they lacked knowledge." Our purpose was to show by the experience of the Free Church, where a strong, it might be said, overbearing majority, forced its views on a minority; and where a minority, aroused by the unequal struggle went beyond its depth in an effort to check and discredit the majority,—to show by this experience, the danger of rushing to extremes in Church matters. Our correspondent must admit that we tried to apportion the responsibility for the present deplorable state of the Highlands of Scotland fairly between the parties. If the scales did bend to one side it was to the side of the weak as against the strong. We are fully aware of the steps leading up to the action of the secessionists in severing their connection from the Free Church, and columns could be produced to show that the leaders of the minority advised the people that, if the Church tolerated the Declaratory Act, she would, by that toleration, be fundamentally and vitally a different church from that of 1843. We could also show that legal advice was taken as to which party could hold the property of the Church in the event of a disruption and this was openly discussed among the people. Were the minority leaders warranted in thus acting unless prepared to carry out their evident purpose to the end? Were they warranted on the merits of the case in going so far? Evidently not, or what becomes of the following deliverance by the eminently cautious Presbytery of Skye, drawn up in the open air, at the locked door of the Free church, of Raasay, the rain pouring down on their unsheltered meeting:—"That the Free Presbytery of Skye, while all along disapproving of the Declaratory Act, yet, considering that it is a relieving and not an imposing act, find that it is not binding on the office-bearers or members of this church, and that it does not require any one to hold or to teach what it sets