

Our Contributors.

THE SIX MONTHS' LIMIT.

BY KNOXIAN

The proposal to fix the time during which a congregation should call a minister at six months is said by some to be an interference with congregational rights. The *Globe* says the proposal comes "dangerously near" an encroachment upon the rights of the people. This objection seems somewhat serious at first blush, but when closely examined has not much in it that might not be urged with equal force against any arrangement that might be made regulating the call of a minister.

An Irish member of the British House of Commons once made a speech on that time-worn topic, the rights of the British subject. His peroration was something like this, "I say, Mr. Speaker, that every British subject has an inalienable right to do as he pleases, and if he does not do as he pleases he should be compelled to do so."

Every Presbyterian congregation has a right to call whoever it pleases, but it is proposed to ask congregations to exercise that right within a reasonable time. The grounds on which the proposal is made is that it would be better for the congregation itself, better for the ministry, better for the Church at large and, more than all, better for the cause of Christ that vacancies should not be long. Surely it is not a serious interference with a congregation to ask it to do, or earnestly try to do, that which is better for itself, for the whole Church and for the cause of Christ. If the Church cannot do that much, Presbyterian Church government is a myth.

If a congregation has an absolute right to do just as it pleases in calling a minister, then any Presbyterian regulations whatever are an interference with the rights of the people. The Presbytery should not send a minister to declare the congregation vacant if the congregation has absolute control of everything. The Presbytery should not make any arrangements for supply if they should not interfere at all. Nor should they send a member to moderate in a call, nor should they pass upon the call, nor send the call to the person called, nor have anything to do with the vacancy if there is to be no interference whatever in congregational affairs. The bottom question is, have we the Presbyterian form of government found in the books? Are we Presbyterians or Congregationalists? It comes to that in the end.

One answer to the objection that the six months' limit interferes with congregations is that all regulations interfere with congregations to a greater or less extent.

What are congregational rights? Has a congregation the right to injure itself? Has it a right to lessen its own members, decrease its own revenue, destroy, to a great extent, the devotional element in its worship, turn the worship of God into a mere preaching match, and divide itself into rings and cliques formed around preachers who have supplied the pulpit. To say that a congregation has a right to do all this is simply to say that it has a right to do wrong. If that right be admitted, we have nothing more to say.

It might be urged with considerable force that the ills sought to be remedied by the six months limit are inseparable from the system. Then the question arises—may not the entire system be wrong. The comparative failure of the system in the United States, the demoralization of many congregations by prolonged vacancies, the injury done to the ministry by what are called "preaching matches," and the lack of work from which many suffer, the means too often used to force certain ministers upon congregations and to keep others out, all point to an early examination of the whole system. The enormous strides made by Methodism within the past few years and the marvellous ease with which Methodists adapt their machinery to the ever changing wants of the times, show at least that a system may do splendid work and be very unlike the Presbyterian. There is nothing to be gained by sticking your head in the sand and ignoring danger because you refuse to see it.

The argument about the individual rights of congregations vanishes into something like thin air when you remember that all law is a curtailment of individual rights. Each man surrenders a portion of his individual rights for the good of society. The

law, which in this country means the will of the majority, says to individual men, you must not do certain things because it is better for the people as a whole that you should not.

There are many men who would at this season of the year like very well to exercise the right of overloading steamers with cracked boilers. The law says, "No, gentlemen, you cannot do that; your boilers must be inspected and you must not carry more than a certain number on your boats." That is a direct but very wholesome interference with individual rights.

There are a good many people in this country who would like to turn an honest penny by drawing teeth. The law respects the molars of citizens, and says to these people that none but a trained dentist must operate on molars.

There are several thousand people who would like to make a living by pouring drugs into their neighbours. The law protects the human frame by restraining these people and enacting that none but trained doctors shall dispense physic to Canadian citizens.

There are many people in this country—alas too many—who want to sell whiskey. The law prohibits in some countries and restricts in all.

The law says that none but licensed druggists shall sell drugs; that none but lawyers shall practise law; that none but licensed engineers shall run steamboats; in fact, laws of one kind or another meet us at every point and most of them are very good laws.

Now, if people submit without a murmur to hundreds of laws every day, is it not carrying the theory of individual rights a little too far to say that the Church should not say to a vacant congregation, You ought to do your best to call a pastor in six months.

SCRIPTURE TEMPERANCE.

MR. EDITOR,—In reading THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN of last week (June 6), I observed an article by one who styles himself "Scripture Temperance," in which he takes the ground that prohibition is unscriptural. He seems to go on the assumption that our numerous intoxicating drinks were in existence when the Word of God was written, whereas the art of distilling was not discovered till 600 years after the ascension of Christ and over 500 years after the close of the New Testament canon. Hence the question is narrowed down to the two articles of wine and strong drink. Even the strong drink mentioned in the Scripture seems to be nothing but drugged wine.

He tells us wine is mentioned 242 times and drink 413 times in the Work of God. Does he not know that in the Hebrew there are at least eight terms translated by our English word wine? He does not tell us how often it means fermented wine, how often unfermented, and how often drugged wine?

We are told that though wine is so frequently mentioned, it is only prohibited on three occasions. If it were a good thing would it be prohibited even on these occasions? Our friend seems to go on the assumption that what is wrong in the Tabernacle and at the altar is perfectly right on other occasions, as for example the adultery of the sons of Eli! Does not the fact of their being prohibited during the ministrations at the altar indicate that they were highly dangerous; that there was danger of the minds of the priests being clouded during the period of their ministrations if allowed to use wine or strong drink, so that the fearful judgment executed on Nadab and Abihu might not be repeated. It seems to comfort our friend very much that neither Noah nor Lot was commanded not to drink again. Does he mean to say that for the rest of their lives they had the full permission of God to drink as much wine as they chose provided they did not get drunk. I rather think that having once fallen they would be very careful not to even take the first step toward falling again. I fancy they would be like the Irishman when asked how near to a certain precipice he could drive, answered: "Troth, I would drive as far away from it as possible." But, it is said wine is a good creature of God, and to be used with thanksgiving. I answer, Satan is a creature of God in the same sense that wine is a perverted creature of God. A man may eat grapes all his life time and never get drunk, so we might associate all our lives with an angel of light, and no harm but good result. The Jews were a great barley eating people and they never suspected what to them was good and palatable food would in after

ages by the invention of the still be perverted into a soul-and-body-destroying drink.

The principle of prohibition I believe to be embodied in the Word of God. We may not be able perhaps to deduce it from any one passage or to find a "thus saith the Lord," for it, but such a passage as "abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good." (Rom. xii. 9). "Abstain from all appearance of evil." (1 Thess. v. 22) Other passages could be quoted but those will suffice. Who will not say that intoxicating drinks are evil? A man never can get drunk on milk or water, no matter how much he drinks of them. That is not the case with intoxicating wine or any other intoxicant. They must be handled as carefully as dynamite.

But it might be asked why do you not give us a text from the Old Testament in favour of prohibition. Turn to Exodus xx. 13, "Thou shalt not kill." You may not strike your neighbour, but if you do anything that leads to his death you are guilty of a breach of this commandment. Does not the licensing of houses for the sale of intoxicating liquor lead to the death of anyone? I read a statement which was widely circulated in Ontario, and so far as I know, never contradicted, that 7,000 individuals died yearly in the Dominion of Canada through the direct or indirect influence of intoxicating liquors. Has it not robbed our Churches of their members and not the most close-fisted either? Has it not deprived our Sessions of useful elders? Has it not reached into our pulpits and dragged our ministers into the mire? I remember seeing one of the most disgusting sights I ever saw, about twenty-seven years ago; it was one of our ministers who had been keeping company with what our friend would call "a good creature of God," and taking it as he himself would say in moderation, staggering up Yonge Street clad in his clerical habiliments, having just been deposed from the office of the ministry by the Presbytery of Toronto. So long as we support and legalize the sale of intoxicating drinks, can we like Pilate wash our hands and say, I am not responsible for the death of my neighbour. It is very easy for "Scripture Temperance" to call those opposed to himself Pharisees, but I would just say in reply that such arguments prove nothing but the spleen of the individual who uses them. C.

PROHIBITION AT PRINCETON.

MR. EDITOR,—Not only the Church in the States but in Canada as well feels an interest in what concerns the welfare of Princeton College, and will be glad to read the following extracts from a circular letter received by me recently from ex-President McCosh, and learn that no student can any longer find a place in Princeton to buy spirituous liquors.

Toronto, June 6, 1888.

S. H. KELLOR.

On March 30 the students of the college in mass meeting assembled passed a resolution against granting license any saloon for the sale of intoxicating drinks in Princeton. This they did of their own motion but with my knowledge and thorough approval. They knew well the evils that have arisen from some of their number being allurements of temptation. On April 2 there was an election for mayor and four members of council in the town, and the no license ticket was carried by a majority of nearly 100. On and after May 1 there will be no place licensed for the sale of spirituous liquors in this college town. Many are rejoicing that so healthy a spirit has been shown by the students. Parents are proud because their sons have acted so noble a part.

But we are sure to meet with determined opposition from the liquor sellers and those who feel it inkome to live without intoxicating stimulants. It is now necessary to secure the enforcement of the law. It were better that such a law had never been passed than that it should issue in a number of places being started for the illicit sale of intoxicating drink. An Anti-Liquor League has been formed in Princeton to take effective steps for the execution of the law. An excellent mayor and council have been elected. We mean to appoint a competent agent to observe and report the transgressions of the law, and when necessary, to call to a detective from New York. Our aim is to remove the temptations presented in this place where between 700 and 800 young men are being educated for high spheres of usefulness, and to have Princeton known as a safe place to which fathers and mothers may send their sons.

To secure these good ends a considerable expenditure of money will be required annually. A number of persons at Princeton are subscribing liberally; but the bulk of the measures to be adopted will extend to every part of the country from which our students come, and to which they go, and we feel justified in inviting the parents and guardians and the friends of the college generally to aid us. It is also proposed to erect a building, which in furnishing an attractive place of resort without injurious stimulants, may take the place of saloons, and will remove the only plausible argument for their existence.—JAMES MCCOSH, *President of the College.*