

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

OUR HOME MISSION DEFICIT—THE GRAVITY OF THE CRISIS.

MR. EDITOR,—In my humble opinion this has not yet been presented as it really exists. I cannot believe it to be a mere present and temporary embarrassment caused solely by a season of general and severe commercial depression, now happily passing away. The causes of it, it is to be feared, lie much deeper, are more widespread, and more difficult to be removed than even hard times, and until these causes are fairly looked at and a general and determined effort made by the Church to remove them, like difficulties will recur or continue to exist not only with our Home Mission work, but with our other schemes as well. If the views expressed should prove to be too gloomy, or be falsified by the state of the fund when the Assembly meets, no one will rejoice more than the writer.

What is meant can best be illustrated by taking a case. Near me is a supplemented congregation, composed of a group of stations, which is now enjoying the services of its third minister within a period of five years. Its first minister left with a debt due him, which was paid up, but only by the disinterested efforts of his successor. The second minister left about a year ago with a debt due him of over one hundred dollars, and he will be an exceedingly fortunate man should he get fifty cents on the dollar. I don't expect him to get twenty-five by all the pressure the Presbytery may be able to bring to bear upon it. The third minister has now been with them about seven months and he has received the magnificent sum of thirty six dollars. The last place he laboured in is still in debt to him, and he cannot get the simple civility from the clerk of the Presbytery within whose bounds he was labouring, of an answer to his inquiries about the payment of the debt. The place before that again is also in his debt, and appears quite willing to remain so. During all this time he has had promise of support from Home Mission Committee, *i.e.*, from the Church, through it. At one time the Church repudiates (it is an ugly word, but it is the right one) twenty-five per cent. of its promised assistance, at another it declines to say anything whether it will pay more than fifty per cent. of its promised assistance. All the while the salary of this brother has been small enough, if paid up in full, and promptly. As it is it has been a mere pittance. I trust that there are few similar cases in our Church, but it is to be feared that exactly similar ones may be found in every Presbytery. Things of a character equally dishonourable in principle might be told by the score, perpetrated by professing Christians towards their ministers. And the worst feature of it all is that these churches, and many similarly situated, do not appear to have the faintest glimmer of an idea of the moral baseness of their conduct; and Presbyteries, and the Church at large, seem not at all to be sensible of the cruelty and immorality of such treatment. It is a charge which I think no truly honest member of our Church can deny or answer, that its good name has been compromised, and will remain under a cloud until *every cent* of its promises to pay is honestly met. I trust that the Church will not rest until this is done, and then if we cannot pay as we have been doing, let us promise only according to our ability.

In your editorial upon this subject the indebtedness was placed where it belongs, upon the membership of the Church. I have no sympathy with denunciations against the Home Mission Committee, and only contempt for the taunts that have in so ungrateful and unmanly a way been flung at it. The Assembly itself has prescribed the means by which funds for this work have to be raised, and the Committee's business is simply and only to administer, to the best of its ability, the funds supplied to it. I venture to say that many who reproach the Committee for not doing more, would be among the first to blame it for exceeding its powers, had it done any of the things so plentifully and gratuitously suggested. It required some such action to awaken our Church to a sense of the duty of being honest with its agents. And this is not all the evil if our present course is persisted in. Ministers are expected to teach in the pulpit the duty of all men to pay one hundred cents in the dollar, and to shew an example in doing this. What weight can there be in such teachings when the Church itself does not do it, and

puts it out of the power of its ministers to do it? We are constantly calling out for more men, but how can a minister have the face to encourage a scrupulously honest and conscientious young man to study for our ministry, or what influence can his representations carry when he must begin by telling him that "probably your first experiences may be in some of our weaker churches, your salary will be small, and very likely you will not even get what the people promise, and if the Church at large pledges its word to a certain sum you may lose twenty-five or fifty per cent. of that." What is to become of the ministry of a Church whose promises to pay are so worthless? "If this continues," was the remark made in the hearing of the writer by one who had been so treated, "I shall be compelled to abandon the ministry." He had just received a payment at the very end of November which should have been paid in October, and then it was only an instalment. Had his salary been ample, had he had other means, it would not have fallen so heavily, but he had neither, and the look of disappointment and anxiety on his face made the heart ache. The good name of the Presbyterian Church in Canada tarnished, our preaching of common honesty shorn of its power, the prospect of our ministry being turned from, most of all by those whose lives and characters would do most honour to it, and consequently the progress of a Church stopped, whose principles, if we are true to them, can do so much for the public good, for the cause of Christ at home and abroad, appears to me in all honesty to be the gravity of the present crisis. Besides, if this way of paying Home Mission debts is found to be so easy of adoption, and to answer so well, what is to prevent the same method being applied to other schemes of our Church?

The ability of our Church to pay every cent of its debt cannot be questioned. If it is able to pay, and does not, what conclusion can be drawn but that it is *not willing*, or at least not willing from any purely Christian motive. How many are there in all our churches who say they cannot pay anything, and don't pay, who will turn out themselves and families to a concert, a festival, a social, or even a wild beast show and prove thus that the reason they are not able to pay anything for the support of religion, is that they are not *willing*. To conclude. By such unworthy and unscriptural expedients for the support of religion, the liberality, and even the honesty, of our Church is being sapped. By the rage also for grand and costly churches our means are being crippled, and crippled most of all at the time they are most needed, in a period of general business depression. This state of things will at least recur, if not continue, until Presbyteries make a point of teaching every congregation and mission station that promises made must be fulfilled, and that when they have robbed one minister they cannot have the opportunity of robbing another. I believe there is power in our Presbyteries to deal with this matter and to redeem the character of our Church. But let not any too sanguine expectations mislead us. It will, I am convinced, require all to work, and to do our very best, until the Assembly meets, if we are not to be humiliated in the eyes of the whole country, in the eyes of sister churches in other parts of the world, and worst of all, in our own.

We have just been offering our thanksgiving to God for His goodness, in all earnestness and sobriety, would it not be well and most becoming for our Church in its present unworthy position to appoint a day for earnest heart-searching, for humiliation, prayer and repentance before God.

HONESTY.

THEOLOGICAL DEGREES.

MR. EDITOR,—Will you allow me to say a word or two with regard to some of the points discussed by your correspondent "B," in his second communication on the subject of "Theological Degrees?" Of the four modes of conferring degrees which "B" mentions, the coming discussion will be directed chiefly, if not exclusively, to the last two, viz., (1) availing ourselves of the existing University of Queen's College, and (2) creating by Act of Parliament, a new University in connection with the General Assembly. The former of these two plans commends itself to my mind as being most decidedly, and in every respect, the "more excellent way." Before adducing any arguments in favour of this plan, I desire to submit some objections to the proposal which is made to establish a University in connection with the Church.

1. This proposal may very fairly be objected to as

being a violation of one of the "resolutions" which accompanied the basis of Union. The resolution of the Collegiate Institutions reads as follows: "The aforesaid Churches shall enter into union, with the theological and literary institutions which they now have; and application shall be made to Parliament for such legislation as shall bring Queen's University and College, Knox College, the Presbyterian College, at Montreal, Morrin College, and the Theological Hall at Halifax into relations to the United Church, similar to those which they now hold to their respective Churches." It is hardly necessary to add that, inasmuch as Queen's was the only University in the Presbyterian Church of Canada in connection with the Church of Scotland, the creation of the proposed new University would cause Queen's to sustain a relation to the United Church very different from that which it sustained to the Church to which it belonged before the union.

2. This proposal may be objected to on the ground that the distinction intended to be indicated by a theological degree has not *exclusive* reference to a man's connection with any particular Church. Academic and Honorary Degrees in Divinity are *usually* bestowed on the students and ministers of the Church to which the institution conferring these degrees belongs; but this is neither *necessarily* nor *invariably* the case. There are many of our ministers who have received degrees from colleges with which our Church has no connection whatever.

3. This proposal may be objected to on the ground of the non-desirability of multiplying degree-conferring institutions.

Competition amongst colleges is beneficial in many ways, but in the present case we do not need to establish a new University in order to secure it. The affiliation of the different Theological Halls to the University of Queen's College would afford all the rivalry that could be desired, by placing all the theological students of the Church in really the same relation to the Church's one University, and requiring them all to pursue the same course of studies.

4. This proposal *must* be objected to on the ground of the formidable and unnecessary expense which it would entail. Passing over what it might cost to have the University established and put in good working order, there would be the serious expense of at least an *annual* meeting of the Senate. And the Senate is to consist of a Chancellor, the Moderator of Assembly, the Professors of the different colleges affiliated to the University, and *twenty-four others*! Your correspondent says, "If the Assembly so determined, the expense might not be more than that of any other committee or board of the Church."

This will hardly be regarded as a satisfactory reply by those who bear in mind that nearly all the Boards of the Church are struggling under crushing burdens of debt, and that the people are seriously asking if it would not be possible to get along with fewer and smaller committees.

Indeed, "B" himself seems to be somewhat dissatisfied with the answer, for he immediately adds, "The University would doubtless have power to exact fees, so that the expense, for that matter, might not be any burden upon the Church at all." Very true. But if the expenses of the Senate are to be met by the fees obtained from those who receive degrees, what a prospect for the happy graduates!

Many a brilliant student, well worthy of the distinction of a Degree in Divinity, will either have to do without it, or obtain it from some less costly source. The recipients of Honorary Degrees will require, not only, as heretofore, broad shoulders to bear the heavy honour, but also long purses to meet the great expense.

The other plan which has been suggested is to secure such a modification of the Charter of Queen's University as would allow the students of the other colleges of the Church to compete for the theological degree, and give these colleges a proper representation in the Senate which confers the degree.

In objection to this plan it is urged by your correspondent that "No matter how the Senate or the Examining Board of Queen's might be composed, the honours conferred would be bestowed under the authority of her Charter, they would bear the impress of her authority, and she alone would be the Alma Mater, dispensing her favours to the whole Church." In the section of "B"'s letter from which this quotation is made, there appears to be a confounding of two things which are entirely distinct, viz., Queen's College