

THE PRESBYTERIAN.

AUGUST, 1871.

ONE of the most important subjects that came up before the last Synod of our Church, and that incidentally rather than specially, was the question of the supply of ministers for vacant charges, as well as to meet the demand caused by the increase in the population of the country. It is a question of much graver importance than many which took up the time of the Synod. The want of ministers and students of theology is not confined to our own Church, unfortunately, but extends to all, as the reports of the proceedings of all the Church Courts that have lately met show. To meet the present want some have relaxed the rules by which the fitness for admission to the office has been tested, yet the effect of this has been, as it seems to us, rather to aggravate the evil, while presenting a temporary palliative, than to remedy it. It is idle to deny that a great change has come over the minds of young men in respect to this matter; that the time has passed away when it was an object of ambition to enter the ministry, as one of the surest means of effecting good and obtaining an influence over the minds of men to lead them to the true knowledge of what concerns their eternal interests. The parents of promising young men no longer seem to set them apart for the service of the sanctuary. Once they grudged no pains, and spared themselves no sacrifice, to see their sons in a pulpit, and the young men, on the other hand, deemed no privation too great and no labour too severe during the time they were pursuing their studies. Living on a bare pittance whilst at College; returning to the bleak hillside farm to toil during the summer months; or engaged, probably, no less laboriously, in teaching to others what they themselves had but recently acquired, they came out of the ordeal strong, self-reliant and fitted to grapple with the life's labour to which

they had devoted themselves. But having once entered on the duties of a charge, they felt themselves in a position in which they were respected; in which they could speak with the authority of their Divine Master; a position whose dignity and the respect due to which were recognised by their flocks. The respect did not depend on the amount of stipend or on those external influences which are exerted by worldly wealth. Many were poorer than even the poorest of those who in Canada complain of the inadequacy of the pecuniary support they receive from their flocks. The respect was given to the office, the dignity of the office being sustained by men who, as a rule, had qualified themselves by hard and assiduous study and by much self-denial. That there is a want of the former respect for the sacred office is apparent to all. There is a questioning spirit abroad which sneers at everything long established, which attacks creeds, doubts the utility of preaching, denies authority, and subjects everything, however clearly proved, to fresh investigation, not from a sincere desire to discover truth, but with an intense longing to find out that everything respectable and respected is a falsehood. It is not, therefore, surprising that young men of talent, influenced by the spirit of the age, should hold aloof from engaging in the office of the ministry. It is not merely that they can make more money elsewhere. That may, no doubt, be one of the causes which leads them to other professions or occupations. But sordid as is the age, and much as mere wealth is made a test of a man's abilities, we believe the desire for gain is not the temptation which seduces our young men from the Divinity Halls, so much as the feeling that the office of a minister no longer offers the same opportunities as formerly of acquiring an influence on the minds and hearts of men.