

Our Contributors.

GIVE THANKS FOR OUR CHURCH PROBLEMS.

BY KNOXONIAN.

Nearly all the problems that the Presbyterian Church has to grapple with at the present moment arise from a superabundance of work. We have no college in the incipient stage of rebellion. We have no Briggs. There may be a few youthful admirers of the New York professor who would like to have a little of the advertising he has, but, though courageous as the bull that butted against the locomotive, they have more discretion than the taurine animal. We have no organ question as the Irish Church has; no question of voting as the Reformed Church of the United States has. Our ministers may vote as early as they please. In fact there is not a single problem before the Church at the present time that is not forced on us by overwork. Possibly ours is the only Presbyterian Church in the world to-day that can say the same thing. It is a glorious condition to be in. A Church without work is made in vain.

Take, for example, our question of summer sessions. This question was forced upon us by the fact that the Church has over one thousand mission stations. Many of these are supplied by students in summer, and of course the source of supply dries up in winter when the students return to college. Would it be better not to have these stations? What would our Church amount to without them? How long would it last without them? Our Home Mission field extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific is one of the best things we have. We ought to give thanks every day because our Church is honoured by having such important work to do. Foundation work is always important. We are laying the foundation of hundreds of congregations that will be centres of influence for good long after everybody now connected with the work is forgotten. Too much work is vastly better than too little.

The summer sessions problem has been forced upon the Church largely by the very efficiency of our Home Mission machinery. If the Home Mission Committee and our men on the field had not done their work well there would not be so many stations to supply in winter or any other time. The wrestle of the Assembly with the summer sessions question was the best tribute ever paid to our Home Mission managers. They said in effect—of course they were too modest to say it in words—"Brethren and fathers, here are the stations we have opened up; here they are strung along from Quebec to the Pacific. Send us men to supply them in winter." The Church must find men in some way. Of that fact there need be no doubt. The thing must be done. The Church must do it or die. A Church can live without a good many things, but it cannot live without preaching the Gospel to its own people.

Why do we need more professors in some of our colleges? Because these colleges are full of students. Would it be better if we had fewer students? How long can a Church last if no young men study for the ministry within her pale? There is no surer sign of spiritual dry rot than a dearth of theological students.

One of the hardest problems before the Church is the supplying of vacancies. This problem is not specially a Canadian problem. It is common to Presbyterians the world over. The General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland is wrestling with it and trying to put an end to some of the evils arising from what is called in Scotland "competitive preaching." The American Assembly made a heroic effort at its last meeting to devise a plan by which ministers wanting congregations and congregations wanting ministers can be brought together in a proper way. The worst feature of the case in our own Church is that many of our own best people are losing faith in the system. Of course ministers who get calls are satisfied, and some who fail are dissatisfied. All that comes in a natural kind of way and is not serious, but the situation does become serious when you see, as you too often do, the working and paying and praying people in a vacancy, disheartened and disgusted with the whole business. No doubt the theory is correct that a theory may easily be so good that it works badly. It is the most reasonable thing in the world, and we believe scriptural as well as reasonable, that a congregation should select its own minister, but no one can come in contact with a congregation that has been vacant for a year or two without feeling that there is a screw loose somewhere. It would be a fine thing if some minister or elder of our Church should be the first to give the Presbyterian family a good working plan for supplying vacancies.

This vacancy question is discouraging, but the situation would be much worse if we had no vacancies or had no men to supply them. A Church without vacant places is never a growing Church; a Church with a lot of idle ministers has either covered its field or has no field to cover. The darkest cloud has a silver lining, and even this perplexing vacancy problem has its bright side. There may be an embryo Chalmers growing up somewhere within our pale who will straighten out this problem before long. The hour and the work are here, but the man has not yet fyled an appearance. Perhaps he may make his bow to the next Assembly.

This is a good place to say that the difficulties of the situation are greatly increased and intensified by congregations and Presbyteries that break through any plan the Church can make. It would be amusing [were it not so provoking to

hear good people in vacancies complain about their supply and the uncertainty of getting a suitable minister when they have deliberately broken through the plan the Church devised to help them.

Examine all the problems worth the name before the Church to-day and we will find that they all spring from the same cause—plenty of work. Is this a state of things to be groaned over? Not by any means. We should be glad, we should be grateful, we should give thanks every day because God has honoured the Church with so much work. A man who complains because the Church has too much work ought to be invited to join some Church that has nothing to do.

There is another view of the case. If we had nothing to do how could we keep ourselves out of mischief? Heresy is nearly always hatched by men who have big salaries, long holidays and little work. Of course our ministers are all orthodox. No ecclesiastical guarantee company could safely take a risk on some of them if they had ten thousand a year and nothing to do.

Let us be thankful that the Church has abundance of room and plenty of work. The duty of the hour is to attend to the work and pray for wisdom and energy to do it well.

LETTER FROM REV. D. MACGILLIVRAY.

The following letter from Rev. D. MacGillivray, dated Chu Wang, Honan, April 18, 1891, has been kindly forwarded by Rev. Dr. Kellogg for publication:—

DEAR DR. KELLOGG,—Although our enemies here received a crushing defeat (the particulars of which have already been given to the press), they are still anxious to worry us if they dare not do more. As might be expected, chagrin at the issue has added to the lively hate with which many regarded us from the first. The wish was father to the thought in their latest enterprise. Red placards in town and villages for miles around announced in my name a tri-monthly distribution of the 1,400 taels compensation at the rate of 50 cents to each applicant. According to this plan the first 4,200 claimants would each secure a prize. The prompt measures of the county magistrate nipped the affair in the bud. Several thousand hungry beggars might have been somewhat difficult for one foreigner to manage, for I was quite alone. How to deal with real distress here is an unsolved problem. Charity at any rate, especially in a new field, would be blowing a trumpet heard for hundreds of miles around, and the issue would be clamour and riot.

After waiting quietly indoors for a few days after the settlement, I sallied forth to explore the surrounding region. The frequent markets afford the evangelist golden opportunities. Only certain villages have these, and then on fixed days, e.g., on the even-numbered days, 2, 4, 6, etc., or on the odd, 1, 3, 5, etc. Some have four market days every ten days. This is the case with Chu Wang. Projected expeditions in five directions were carried out, the general direction intended being towards the Chang Te fu side, for our hearts are still fixed on that city. I have secured a Honanese lad to act as my servant. He came on the recommendation of Mr. Mao, who acted as middleman in the great case. He proves to be so far reliable. He has actually enabled me to convict the gate-keeper of "squeezing" half a cent on each half-pound of oil bought by him for the gate-house lamp. Petty, to be sure, but the principle is vital. This boy goes with me as my man Friday. The humble plan is to ride a donkey. This animal always stops as he hears a village to signify that the foreigner should show respect for the inhabitants by dismounting, as all natives do. Of course we observe the custom. The first place is a walled town four miles south-west of Chu Wang. The majority of the villages are without walls. The larger villages, however, threw up walls when the Taiping rebels came this way. At this place some questions were asked about the settlement of the case. One man asked: "If you have come to do good why did you go to law?" I retorted: "If a man attempts to kill you, is it not your duty to inform the magistrate?" As usual there is no desire to continue discussion. The Confucianist is very different from his Hindu brother. I find that the proverb: "The right-doer can travel the world over; the wrong-doer can only with difficulty stir an inch," has always drawn murmurs of assent from the crowd as it did even on the day of the looting. Here, as everywhere, the uppermost thought is: What business are you going to open? Are they after money? is a frequent query addressed to our assistants. No! After reputation? No! What then can they be after? is the exclamation which reveals deep suspicion and profound ignorance of bottom principles of right conduct. To do good? Impossible! Following their great sage in polite lying, they may say to your face that you are come to do good. But what Chinese in his heart of hearts believes it?

I returned *via* Tai Li, where a funeral was assembling. A ready-made stone table in front of a temple gave a suitable preaching stand, and soon a large crowd gathered, conspicuous among whom were the mourners, with white cloth on their caps. Can this god, said I in the course of my remarks, send you rain? Yes, said the bystanders. It happened to be the temple of the god to whom they all pray for rain. "Why, then, during the famine had you no rain for so long? Besides, before the Emperor made him a god, who sent rain, which has fallen since the beginning of the world?" Yes, yes, that is so, are the frequent exclamations, but the heart is far away, and to-morrow all will worship Kuan Ye as of yore. Thence on to Ying Li. As I was entering the village

cries of "foreign devil" were heard rather louder than usual; but soon a man came running to meet me with his hand on his jaw. Dr. McClure had removed some of his teeth, and he wanted some more extracted. I told him to wait till the doctor returned. Toothache is not common here. At any rate the forceps cannot play such an important part here as in malaria-stricken North Formosa. I presented the village dominie with some books. Poor fellow, his dress was much worse than a hedge schoolmaster's.

My next trip was to Kan Chuang, one mile north. Held at the temple of Buddha a fine one created last year. Hiring a bench and a few boards we erected a stand, but soon the legs were broken by the pressing of the crowd, and the bench alone did duty. An old man who said he had been with foreigners in Tientsen thirty years ago making powder seemed much affected as he recounted their kindness to him. Another old man said if he did not worship Buddha the god would punish him with a headache. I said: "I don't worship him, and I haven't one." The history of Buddha is to them an unheard-of tale. Worship a foreigner, how absurd. But they do not believe that he was anything else but a good Chinaman. Another trip was made to Sung annual fair, four miles north. My table and chair being planted on newly-harrowed ground, the dust rose considerably in the rush to see the topic of every fireside for months. Preaching and selling books alternately. As usual, some of the respectable spectacled folk went off to read the books, and became so absorbed that they forgot to return or send the price. A Buddhist priest appeared. I gave him a book, as is my custom. Some of the priests here seem a trifle above the dead level of good-for-nothingism seen elsewhere. On leaving we passed through a zone of opium-scented air and looking round saw the sign of the opium den, a piece of brown paper. And the den (?) was in a temple taken possession of for the purpose by an itinerant opium-seller. Oh! if we could sweep out of China the twin curses fraternizing together under that roof, idolatry and opium.

On two other days visits were made to Tien Shih market, six miles west, and Hsiao Wang annual fair, five miles north-west. I am glad our new Chinese helper has arrived at last, for one cannot well manage a crowd at a fair, for there are thieves and rowdies always at hand. The country all around is like the rest of this great plain, level, dotted with villages, at present surrounded with green fields of wheat. Glorious privilege to sow the good seed of the kingdom in fields unsown before. Again and again people would take up our books, and after reading a few minutes, would exclaim: "Still it is Jesus." Yes, that glorious name shall sound forth through all this region until these idols shall all be reduced to their elemental dust, until these temples shall be turned over to the worship of the true God, and these priests be replaced by ministers of the true religion.

Two recent events will be of special interest. Mr. Mao, the teacher, who was so useful to the officials in managing the case with us, has been handsomely and properly rewarded by appointment to teach a free school supported by gentry and officials, at a salary twice as large as he formerly received as teacher of a private school. The foreigners rejoice in the appointment, for Mr. Mao was useful to us as well as to them. "Without a middleman no business can be transacted" is a Chinese rule. The other fact is the recent death of Mr. Yüan, at the age of sixty-three. He acted as spokesman for the gentry on the memorable visit of the deputation, was believed to be the moving spirit of the plot, and his name headed the list of our accused. I was profoundly sorry when I heard of it, for his grey head has gone down to the grave with the awful sin of fighting against God upon it, without his having had many days to repent of his sins and become reconciled to God. His death will likely have some effect on the misguided men who were his associates. The day of the looting I was reading Psalm xxxvii. 12, 13: "The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him, for He seeth that his day is coming." I rose from the table repeating these last words with a gusto, I fear, more becoming to Davidic than Christian times. But how true those words have proved. We expect Dr. McClure in a few days. Mr. MacDougall is with me. I was much interested in your remarks on the Jewish mission and the Lahore mission. The Lord will direct. Kind regards to all your family. The prayers of my dear friends in St. James Square Church have been heard.

DISTRIBUTION OF PROBATIONERS.

At the meeting of the Committee having charge of this part of the Church's work, held on the 29th June, it appeared from the report of one Presbytery which had vacancies in its bounds, that no supply was asked for any part of the quarter. The Committee instructed their secretary to call attention to the clause of the Interim Act, now in force, which reads: "Presbyteries shall report all vacancies within their bounds prepared to call, and shall obtain, through the Committee, either full or partial supply."

From the report of another Presbytery it appeared that it has vacancies which were being supplied by students, which is contrary to another clause of the Act that states: "Students shall not be employed to fill the pulpits of congregations prepared to call, except in cases of special emergency; nor shall ministers in settled charges be employed to the exclusion of those on the Committee's Roll, except by special permission of the Presbytery."