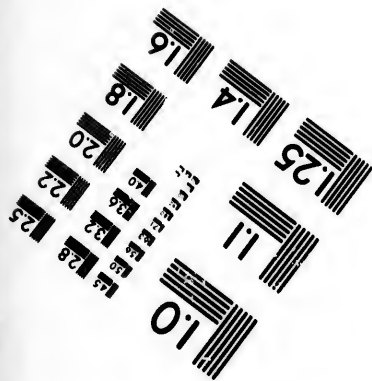
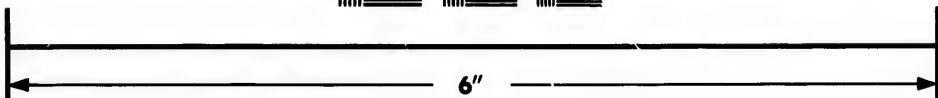
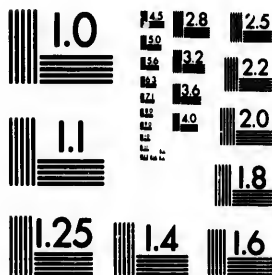


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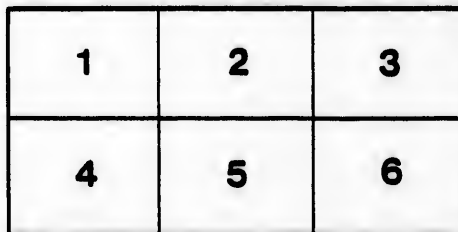
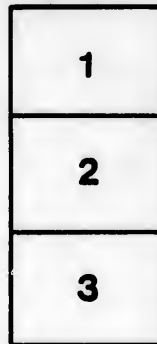
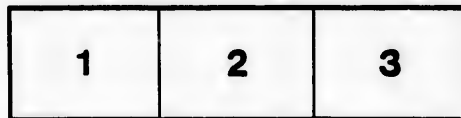
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9
Tracts on Presbyterian Topics.—No. 2.

9
HINDRANCES AND HELPS

TO THE

Spread of Presbyterianism.

BY

REV. PRINCIPAL MACVICAR, LL.D.,

MONTREAL.



TORONTO:

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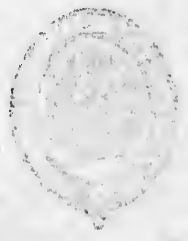
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FACTS ON PRESBYTERIAN TOPICS - No. 1

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

THE HISTORY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

REPRINTED FROM THE "CANADA PRESBYTERIAN."



THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

HINDRANCES AND HELPS
TO THE
SPREAD OF PRESBYTERIANISM.

PRESBYTERIANISM means a form of church government, but it is seldom thought of apart from the doctrinal system, the creed, with which it has been associated for centuries.

In the present inquiry it will not be necessary to dwell upon dogma, although we cannot overlook its value, and the vast importance of sound scholarship and high theological attainments, as well as of vital godliness and practical Christian activity.

In venturing to indicate some of the hindrances and helps to the spread of Presbyterianism I am deeply sensible of the delicacy of the subject and the danger of being misunderstood and even misrepresented, but I have unlimited confidence in truth of any sort, and a strong conviction that the time has come when the truth on this subject should be spoken out. I wish it to be distinctly understood, however, at the outset that in dealing with Presbyterianism, whether in the way of commendation or criticism, it is no part of my plan to depreciate other forms under which the Church of God exists. We cheerfully accord them all a proper measure of respect, but claim the liberty to prefer our own and to cling to it because, after full investigation, we believe it to

embody more truth, and to be instrumental in the dissemination of more truth than any other system. If any one thinks otherwise he is bound in conscience to leave our communion—and the sooner he does so the better for himself and for the Church—and to join the body which he honestly thinks possesses these qualities.

One other preliminary remark. What is advanced in this address is not intended to be of merely local application. The hindrances discussed exist, it is believed, subject of course to various modifications, throughout this Dominion and it may be to some extent in Great Britain and the United States, but I have chiefly in view our own country.

What are these hindrances?

I. Ignorance of the fundamental principles of Presbyterianism. This ignorance exists among ourselves and beyond ourselves.

It is only just to recognize the fact at once that there are very many intelligent and scholarly persons beyond the Presbyterian Church who know its history and candidly appreciate its scriptural foundation as well as its noble and successful efforts in defence of the truth and of human freedom; but there are also vast and increasing multitudes in this and in every other country who have never made our doctrines and polity a special study, who have neither read nor heard discussions of our principles and are satisfied to rely upon vague and inaccurate hearsay virtually amounting to traditional slander as to what we hold and teach.

They have read in some cheap story book, or popular work of fiction, or they have been told—and they have taken no trouble to inquire into the truth of the tale—what Presbyterians believe. Hence, to many the sum and substance of Presbyterianism is really a gross travesty upon a few of the

doctrines of the Church. They have thus been led to think, for example, that we hold a doctrine of Predestination, equivalent to fatalism and which makes God a cruel, heartless despot; that we believe in a doctrine of reprobation which represents God as creating countless millions of men for the very purpose of dooming them to eternal torments; that we sincerely believe in the everlasting perdition of innumerable myriads of infants who die before they are able to discern the right hand from the left; that we delight to limit the gospel call, the offer of mercy, and the operations of grace exclusively to the elect, and actually teach that these favoured few are infallibly destined to unending glory no matter how they behave themselves in this world; that we ignore the necessity of regeneration and conversion, and openly deny man's free agency, and thus annihilate his responsibility and the very basis of all human morality.

Such notions as these, such gross perversions of what constitutes our belief are lamentably prevalent—to be met with in the workshop, in the street, in the thoroughfares of business, almost everywhere, and it is not surprising that persons cherishing such opinions should shun, or even vigorously oppose and denounce what they call Presbyterianism.

Others again know Presbyterianism only through distorted representations of certain features of our discipline and worship.

They have heard of austere and Puritanic views in favour of a sort of Jewish observance of the Sabbath and against innocent social customs and indulgences being rigidly enforced—personal liberty being rudely and unwarrantably invaded and crushed in the sacred name of religion—manly sports and virtues being discouraged and canting hypocrisy being upheld and cultivated, and inquisitorial scrutiny being

made by Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, and Assemblies into what is in no sense their business, into the beliefs, the opinions and practices of men for which they are responsible to God alone. They have read garbled reports of hair-splitting discussions, angry debates, and tyrannical decisions by ecclesiastics, and these they take to be the bone and sinew of Presbyterianism.

Then as to worship, as to matters under the head of the *ius liturgicum*, they take us to be a people strongly addicted to Psalm-singing in a way of our own, to the exclusion of nearly all Christian hymns, and these Psalms rendered in rugged and unfinished verse scarcely distinguishable from ill-written prose and set to barbarous music rendered in a most discordant manner ; a people of inexhaustible patience and boundless capacity for listening to long, dull, doctrinal sermons, and withal stubbornly opposed to culture and the fine arts especially in the house of God, and yet not pre-eminently devout inasmuch as we are said to be not a little given to gazing in all directions while the minister is arguing out some theological question in his disorderly extemporaneous prayer. These, and such like items, constitute to their minds Presbyterianism.

Now it would be folly to claim for our Church infallibility on all the points thus caricatured, or to say that we are in no measure responsible for such perverted conceptions, that we have done nothing to give occasion for them, and that those who entertain them are wholly to blame ; it might be unsafe and unjust to assume this position, but it is perfectly safe to say of such persons that they are, from whatever cause, profoundly ignorant of the first principles of our Church and of the spiritual life and activity of our people, and, of course, such ignorance is a formidable hindrance to the spread of Presbyterianism.

But let us look at home, among our own ranks; here the same evil prevails to a very considerable extent. And we need not be surprised if people should seem heartless in upholding and dilatory in extending a system which they do not understand. Let us not fear to look each other in the face and frankly ask the question, do our people as a whole know and appreciate our principles? Is there not a large number who are Presbyterians by force of habit, by the accident of birth or circumstances, rather than by conviction and intelligent investigation? Their attachment to the Church is traditional and even superstitious to a great extent. The matter is easily tested. Our principles are accurately and admirably formulated in certain books, in The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, but are these works understood and mastered by the rank and file of Presbyterians? How many households possess a copy of them? Very many I grant do, but very many do not. Are they in the hands of all our Elders and Deacons and Sabbath-school teachers and heads of families who mould the character and opinions of the rising generation and are supposed in loyalty to their own convictions, to their historic past, and to the truth of God to teach the doctrines and the polity of the Church? The books, with perhaps the exception of the Shorter Catechism, have a very limited circulation. No Canadian publishing house, so far as known to me, has issued an edition of them. There is a growing feeling which is already strong and dominant in many instances that these books are too dull, and hard, and antiquated for our progressive age and that if they are to be looked at at all they should be relegated to the libraries of ministers and colleges. Some go even the length of piously deploring the very existence and the dissemination of such works. I read not very long ago in a religious paper which

is not Presbyterian but largely patronized by them an expression of profound regret that our Confession of Faith had been rendered accessible to the Chinese, because it had already sufficiently disturbed and distracted the religious world. Are there not many who secretly and very heartily sympathize with such absurd and ignorant notions, and even with open attacks and reproaches so freely directed of late against our standards? They have not read them, they have no time or patience to do so; but they know that they are bad and deserve to perish. Others again are greatly in love with the thought of being Bible students. They have quite outgrown the wisdom of the Westminster divines. They are sure that it is infinitely better to go direct to the fountain-head than to streams polluted by human touch. Our principles, they say, are all in the word of God, and we ignore and despise mere human invention—we are free to determine our own beliefs—we are bent upon progress and refuse to be ruled and fettered by any book made by a set of ecclesiastics two centuries ago.

Precisely so, we answer. Down with mere ecclesiasticism. Perish every dogma and every book which controverts the Book of God. Let the Bible be supreme and let us search it through and through. But do the persons thus carried away with the grand thought of original Biblical investigation attend to it? They strongly assert their independence of all helps and of all antiquity and freely denounce formulated creeds; but after that what do they produce? If they determine their own principles with sufficient accuracy to deserve to be recorded what are they doing but preparing another man-made book perhaps far inferior to those they discard. At any rate, my observation is to the effect that those who on the score of liberty and progress keep them-

selves intentionally ignorant of the small manuals now within their reach are the very persons, however much they may clamour for direct appeals to the Bible, who make very indifferent and unsuccessful students of God's Book. I do not say that we have many within our pale of the class now referred to, and I have no wish to press the charge of ignorance unduly. The people of other denominations often generously volunteer the opinion that we are better read in Divine things than they are themselves, and perhaps it is unwise in us to cast suspicion upon what is thus so graciously asserted. We have certainly a sort of traditional glory in this respect which it would be well to vindicate by convincing all of our possession of solid attainments; and I should be delighted to think that all our people, young and old, could pass a searching examination in the fundamental principles and even the minute details of our scriptural polity; but I cannot venture to believe that they possess any such knowledge. My fear is that proper scrutiny into the matter by ministers and elders would disclose lamentable ignorance on the part of vast numbers as to the doctrines, the constitution, and the discipline of the Church, constituting, as is self-evident, a most formidable hindrance to the spread of Presbyterianism.

II. A second hindrance arises from the failure of our Elders to come up to the scriptural ideal of their office, and hence comparative inactivity among their ranks.

Probably we all fail—both ministers and people—to take in the full significance of the fact that ours is a Presbyterian Church, and apostolic in this respect—a church instructed, edified, and ruled, under Jesus Christ, by Presbyters or Elders. Let us try to understand for a moment the status of our elders according to Scripture and the practice of our

Church, that we may see wherein any of them seem to come short of it. Our elders are not mere laymen but ecclesiastics, as truly so as was the Apostle Peter, who said "the elders that are among you I exhort who am also an elder." They are elected by the voice of the people, according to apostolic practice, and solemnly ordained not to a secular but to a sacred office—an office which we are accustomed to designate the highest in the New Testament Church. It is well known, accordingly, that in seeking to check the pretensions of prelacy we triumphantly establish the identity of Bishops and Elders. We do so, as you are aware, upon several valid grounds. We show that the Greek terms *episcopos* and *presbuteros* are in the New Testament used interchangeably, used to designate the same persons, and therefore Scriptural bishops and elders are the same—a position which is now frankly conceded by candid and scholarly Episcopalians, such as Dean Alford, Dr. Jacob, Bishop Ellicott and others.

We show that the duties and functions of bishops and elders, according to the apostles, are the same, or, in other words, that the elder is officially qualified to do everything which belongs to the bishop, and, therefore, we have not two orders of ecclesiastics but one. Hence the parity, the official equality of all presbyters, and the unscriptural character of the practice of allowing any one of them to lord it over the rest by claiming authoritative jurisdiction, or usurping the sole right to ordain or set apart others to the sacred office.

We go further in this argument. We show that in apostolic churches, whose practice we are bound to follow, there were a plurality of elders or bishops—a single congregation having had not one, but possibly a dozen bishops, all holding the same office and rank and exercising the same author-

ity within that congregation. Hence the New Testament Church, in the days of the apostles, knew nothing of Diocesan Episcopacy. This again is granted by candid Episcopal writers who plead for diocesan jurisdiction merely on the ground of expediency and human convenience, and who do not presume to deny the historic fact that in hundreds of instances, as in the case of the Puritans in England and the founders of Episcopacy in Scotland, their own church most unequivocally acknowledged the validity of Presbyterial ordination.

Thus in argument, at least, we vindicate very fully the Scriptural rights and functions of elders; and practically we go a great length in the same direction. Our elders constitute the local or congregational Presbytery commonly known as the Kirk Session. They sit in equal numbers with ministers, or teaching elders, in all our other courts. They are appointed commissioners to the General Assembly, or Supreme Court of our Church; and there no distinction is made between them and ministers except that by long established custom they are excluded from the Moderator's chair, and are seldom called upon to lead the devotions of the house: They speak—to be sure not so much as clerical members—they move and second resolutions, they vote, they act on committees, they present reports—do everything that ministers can do. Thus it is in meetings of the Assembly, elders being in no sense denuded of the functions of their office, Presbyterial parity being most fully recognized, the Moderator himself being only *primus inter pares*.

It is evident, therefore, that the difference between the teaching elder and the ruling elder is not as great as is often supposed. It amounts just to this much. The ruling elder is usually ordained by the Kirk Session without the imposi-

tion of hands ; but this mode has been called in question and it has been urged that in strict conformity to apostolic practice all elders should be ordained by prayer and the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery. Be this as it may, I enter not upon the discussion of the subject here, but venture to think that the ordination of the ruling and the teaching elder as now conducted is virtually identical. In the one case we have the Congregational Presbytery, or Kirk Session, composed of a company of elders residing in one place, belonging to one church ; in the other case we have the district Presbytery composed of a company of elders drawn from a wider area from several churches conferring the office. The ordaining body in both cases is made up of Presbyters and the office they confer, whatever form they follow, is that of the eldership. It appears to me therefore that the only thing really claimed as exclusively belonging to the teaching elder is the formal act of dispensing the sacraments.

And even in this act he does not exercise arbitrary power and is not strictly alone or left to his own will, for "according to the seemly usage of the whole Presbyterian Church" teaching and ruling elders act together and upon terms of official equality in determining who are worthy to receive the sacraments ; "and in the dispensation of the Lord's supper the teaching elder is assisted by his co-elders and it has always been understood that his presiding in this service implies no usurpation whatever of sacerdotal office and power." It is true that the work of public instruction on the Lord's day falls chiefly upon the teaching elder, and it is right that it should be so, because this is his vocation to which he devotes his life and energy and for which he is supposed to be preeminently qualified by grace and natural ability and education. But he is by no means to have a complete monopoly

in this respect, or in the exercise of this function of his office. He is the recognized teacher, but not the *only* teacher, of the flock—all the elders should be, and were in the days of the apostles—"apt to teach," and it is greatly to the edification of the church when they heartily engage in this work, if not from the pulpit certainly in the class-room, the prayer-meeting, and from house to house. But is this Scriptural distribution of authority and work always carried out practically? Have we not in many instances a sort of autocracy, a one-man-power, in congregations? The minister, according to his own wish it may be, is expected and allowed to do everything and to be the sole ruler of the flock. Is there no clerical assumption—yes, and youthful presumption on the part of Sunday school boys and teachers and others who ignore the very existence of the bench of Presbyters in some churches? It may be said that elders in such cases have themselves to blame. That they are persons fit only to be superannuated, destitute of culture and religious activity and the elasticity of youth, behind the age in all respects, chosen only on the ground of their peculiar quietness and supposed piety. I am not going to discuss this point. I leave it to be decided by every one for himself. It may be that sufficient care is not always taken to draw the youthful talent and sanctified business power of the Church into the eldership; and it is certain, at any rate, that in very many congregations elders are not distinguished for activity—they have no special work in hand—there are no districts allotted them which they are expected to visit and in which they are to conduct prayer-meetings, catechetical services, and classes for the instruction of the young—they do not even believe that it belongs to their office to be thus charged with the care of souls, and hence many of the baptised children of the

Church and even members in full communion with the Church are utterly unknown to them. This is surely not feeding the flock of God over the which the Holy Ghost hath made them bishops ; and the result is that their work is allowed to fall with crushing weight upon the teaching elder, which inevitably impairs his power in the pulpit because he has not the requisite time to make his sermons what they should be, impairs his health and usefulness, for he cannot with impunity perform the duties of several men, breeds discontentment with minister and people, leads to short and unsatisfactory pastorates, stunts the intellectual and spiritual growth of young ministers, and generally inflicts weakness upon our Presbyterianism. Is it Presbyterianism at all when the majority of Presbyters simply hold office and do little or nothing? I utter no censure. I merely state facts.

Then as to the higher courts of our Church, have they not through the supineness and absence of ruling elders, through some cause or other, virtually become clerical? This is a great weakness. It is well known that Presbyteries often sit without a single ruling elder. And the attendance of such in Synods and General Assemblies is comparatively small. Of the ruling elders appointed commissioners to our last General Assembly sixty-five failed to attend, and usually many of those who do put in an appearance remain only a few days. How is this? Who are to blame? Ministers, or elders, or both?

Elders say that they are not familiar with our technical forms of business, and, therefore, feel little interest in it. Let them master these simple forms. They are based on common sense and Scripture, and are printed and accessible to all. Let Sessions and Presbyteries see to it that all their members possess and study the little volume just issued by

our General Assembly known as "Rules and Forms of Procedure," and this difficulty will speedily disappear.

Elders sometimes whisper, if they do not frankly speak it out, that they cannot endure the domineering spirit, and wordy debates of the clerical members of these courts, and hence their absence. Well, it seems a pity that they should be so timid. They are not always so in other walks of life. But without defending or condemning the discussions and the verbiage of ecclesiastics, I may be allowed to say that these good brethren have the remedy in their own hands. Let them rise in sufficient force and put down this domineering spirit at the same time showing themselves patterns of meekness, and let them speak and move with so much clearness and point as to make transparently manifest the folly of wordy disputations.

But elders sometimes say they have no time to attend ecclesiastical Courts. This may be true in the case of poor men and of those who are not their own masters and who live far from the place of meeting; but all our elders are not in this condition, there must be a large number of them neither poor nor servants, but thoroughly free and able were they so disposed to give all the time that is required. But whatever may be the cause, and whoever may be to blame, what I venture to allege is that in so far as there is failure to appreciate the spiritual functions of the eldership and to render a full measure of service by those who hold the office this is a serious departure from our fundamental conception of the constitution of the Church—a decided weakness and great hindrance to the spread of Presbyterianism.

III. A third hindrance is the imperfect exercise of discipline. Imperfect in two ways, by excess and by defect. We have sometimes too much Episcopal supervision by the con-

gregational and the district Presbyteries, and sometimes too little. Discipline is defined in our Book of Procedure as "an exercise of that spiritual authority which the Lord Jesus Christ has appointed in His Church. Its object is three-fold; the glory of God, the purity of the Church, and the spiritual good of the offender." I do not think that discipline should be limited to offenders, and it should certainly aim at the edification of the Church, its guidance and growth as well as its purity. But this in passing.

It is obvious that Sessions and Presbyteries in the exercise of discipline may go beyond their province, may "intermeddle with matters which are purely civil," or show "an undue solicitude to pry into the private conduct or family concerns of individuals," and an unwise readiness "to interfere officially in personal quarrels, or to engage in the investigation of secret wickedness."

It is possible, moreover, that these courts may exhibit a disposition to ignore the well-defined rights of the people. There is grave danger in any such tendency in the present day. Respect and veneration for authority of this sort has passed away, and it is well that it should be so, whatever ecclesiastics may think about it, because it was only a religious superstition which held sway as the Church was ignorant, inactive, and corrupt. The truth is, that in the Apostolic Church the people exercised their power not only in the election of all office-bearers, but also, under certain restrictions, in maintaining discipline, in seeking the edification of the Church, and in determining doctrinal matters. It was to the people, not to ecclesiastics exclusively, but to the whole "Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ" that the Apostle Paul wrote: "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one an-

other, even as also ye do" (1 Thess. v. 11). As if he had said, I have entrusted to you the delicate offices of mutual spiritual consolation, and the arduous task of edifying or building up one another in your most holy faith, and you have successfully performed them both.

It was also to the people, to the church at Rome, including Presbyters, no doubt, that he wrote: "Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine ye have learned, and avoid them" (Rom. xvi. 17). You are competent to understand and to judge touching my doctrine, and you are to cut off those who practically set it at naught by avoiding them, by shunning them, by refusing to have any fellowship with them. And still more directly he says to the people, the church at Corinth: "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor. v. 13). "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment which was inflicted of many" (2 Cor. ii. 6). Passages which make it plain enough that while Presbyters, or Bishops, are the executive in the exercise of discipline, yet the people are not to be ignored, their aid is to be invoked in an orderly way for the practical enforcement of discipline, and it can only be effective when their intelligence and spiritual life are sufficiently high to carry out with vigour the decisions of the Presbyters. Not only so, but you recollect how in grave doctrinal matters the people were associated with the apostles and elders. The decision touching the case from Antioch before the Synod of Jerusalem is formulated in these words: "Then pleased it the apostles and elders with the whole Church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas" (Acts xv. 22); the utmost care being taken to guard against the slightest semblance of

anything looking in the direction of an Hierarchy, and to bring out the idea that the Church of Christ is not so much a *potestas* as a *libertas* in which the rights of all the people and even the feeblest member are most fully secured. This is the true Presbyterian, and, as we believe, apostolic, conception of the Church ; and hence Presbyterianism rightly administered secures all the freedom, and popular rights, and spiritual purity of communion which can be claimed for Congregationalism without its facilities for disintegration, its incapacity to deal with heresy and ministerial aberrations, and its practical denial of the visible and organic unity and true catholicity of the Church.

But has Presbyterianism been always administered in this liberal spirit, or has not mere ecclesiasticism been sometimes unduly magnified ? Have we sufficiently emphasised this conception of the church as a *libertas*—a living spiritual body in which every member has his own functions and inalienable rights ? We may be sure of this, that all unwarrantable ecclesiastical meddlings with the Scriptural rights and powers of the people are grave hindrances to the growth of our system, especially among intelligent, educated and independent people.

I do not forget, however, that failure in discipline may occur through defect, through laxness, as well as through the excessive exercise of power ; and probably there is not so much uncomfortable fidelity in our day as indefensible remissness. The tares are allowed to grow among the wheat pretty freely and rankly in certain portions of the field. Some sins, indeed, are deemed disgraceful but others pass muster as very reputable. While drunkenness and flagrant immorality are openly denounced, meanness, covetousness, secret dishonesties which lead to public disasters, extortion,

extravagance, worldliness, and wily defrauding of the Lord's treasury are not often dealt with as sins of special heinousness. I do not mean to say that these are easily laid hold of as matters of discipline or even as subjects of reprobation from the pulpit. They are so respectable and so closely wedded to religious matters in many communities as to be unpopular themes of discourse. And I do not say that we can suspend a man from church membership on the mere suspicion of his being secretly addicted to any one of them. We cannot cut him off because we know that he has hundreds of thousands in precarious bank stocks and such like, and yet pleads instant and helpless poverty the moment he is appealed to for the Lord's work ; but we may try to teach him common truthfulness and honesty and get him to cease saying that he is poor and helpless when he is only close and mean. I do not say that discipline can make the Church immaculate. It argues supreme conceit and self-righteousness in any church to say that she can get wholly rid of canting hypocrites and subtle religious frauds, or of men who at heart love the world better than Christ and prize a comedy or a tragedy more than a prayer-meeting. We cannot discipline men for faults of heart—invisible sins—and we cannot expel impalpable devils. But we can denounce their works in scripture terms ; and we can by acts of discipline, too, make it understood that the Church of God is not a shelter, a refuge, a hiding place for respectable impenitent sinners. We can give it out with peculiar emphasis that the Church and the world are not one, that spirituality of heart and life, honest cross-bearing and cheerful submission to the law of Christ are the conditions upon which men can retain their status in His kingdom ; and we can make it just as hard for the disorderly, insubordinate, excommunicated

man of broad acres and high social standing to pass from one congregation to another as it is for the rejected penniless man. We can show with all kindness but with all firmness that just as God is no respecter of persons, so sin and ungodlessness when indulged in wholesale and in high places find no more tolerance or approval with the Church than when clad in rags. And we may be sure again, that in so far as discipline breaks down in this direction, through partial, feeble, time-serving laxness the spiritual life of the Church is impaired and her real progress hindered as thoroughly, and it may be more so, than by the excessive exercise of ecclesiastical power.

And is it too much to hint that Presbyterian supervision of ministers and congregations is seldom excessive? To put the matter mildly and cautiously, are there not cases in which the people feel keenly that ministers are continued in charges as well as on the Probationer's roll long "after their usefulness is gone?" And cases in which ministers justly complain that the people are allowed with impunity to repudiate their righteous obligations and to resort to the starving-out process which is by no means unheard of in Canada and the United States? And in the distribution of congregations are there not anomalies thoroughly indefensible on any sound principle of business or common sense resulting in enormous waste of money and of intellectual and spiritual power? Do we not all know villages and towns, for example, with ambitious looking church edifices struggling under intolerable burdens of debt, feebly supporting, or thoroughly starving two or three ministers—perhaps not all Presbyterian—where one could do the work much better than three, and in a sweeter and more Christian temper of mind? How much better in such cases that men should be scattered abroad and

go to the heathen, or to aid honoured brethren in the rough fields of Canada where one man is sometimes left to struggle amid the duties of five or six? Now, all these things are theoretically under Presbyterian jurisdiction, and, without insisting upon them further, it seems to me that imperfect discipline in the forms indicated, and in others that might be mentioned, is no small hindrance to the spread of Presbyterianism.

IV. I notice, fourthly, hindrances which spring out of certain erroneous notions respecting the ministerial office.

There are two opposite errors in this connection which damage our cause, viz., making too much of the office and making too little of it.

Both ministers and people sometimes think that official dignity is the main thing. This comes natural and easy to the pride of man's heart. Who does not like to be dressed up in a little official dignity, be it as a magistrate, an alderman, an editor, or a divine? Besides, mere official elevation readily fits into the natural indolence of man. It is far easier to put on airs than to hold a position by honest service and downright hard work. And we must not forget that this sort of thing is promoted by the prodigious influence of the Latin Church, by State-Churchism, and by Sacerdotalism, all of which exercise an untold moulding power in this direction. They set the fashion in ecclesiastical matters, and determine the general style of our churches and all their appointments. They settle the form and meaning of all the little extras in posture and dress that make public devotional services aristocratic. They see great beauty and religious significance, for example, in the absence of the ordinary collar from the minister's coat, and in his bandaging his throat in a special manner, and making a clean sweep of his beard, and wearing

certain variegated habiliments in the house of God. And people like to have clergymen clothed in seemly robes of office and adorned with goodly sounding titles that they may look up to them with special reverence. We have nearly everywhere a few aspiring persons who have a secret craving after this sort of thing; and it is not surprising that plain Presbyters, compassed with human infirmities like other men, seeing this kind of thing is demanded, and is so easily supplied, requires so little brains and education—I say it is not surprising that they should be tempted to yield to it, and should grow into the idea that they are not simply “your servants for Jesus’ sake,” but “lords over God’s heritage.”

But it is a mistake on our part. It is neither Christ-like nor apostolic. It widens the gulf of separation already existing between ministers and the masses and disgusts vigorous thinking minds from whose ranks Presbyterianism must grow. Besides, we cannot go far enough to meet the wishes of the unthinking ones who take this direction, and hence when they ascend to a sufficient height in fashion and in the social scale, and descend a sufficient depth in ignorance and forgetfulness of God’s truth they take leave of us altogether in order to gratify their longings to the full.

Here is one extreme, certainly alien to our system and injurious to our progress, the attempt to make too much of our office. But the opposite extreme is equally hurtful, the tendency to depreciate and degrade the office. It is plain, for example, that it is a degradation of the pulpit to turn it into a stage. In this case there is neither gospel instruction nor successful sport. The comedy and tragedy furnished in the pulpit in response to the desire manifested for such in certain quarters is of an inferior order. Theatre-goers are not to be attracted or converted by chaff. They know very well

that they can get something far better and more to their mind from professional artists who are supplied with the appropriate music and scenery to set off their plays.

It is also a lowering of the sacred office for ministers to undertake the work of the daily press, to discuss science, and politics, and literature, and secular themes generally instead of proclaiming God's saving grace.

And why cannot congregations see that it is a ruinous waste of a minister's time and a degradation of his office to be obliged to attend all the paltry meetings some eccentric people may wish to have in his parish? Deacons and committees of management should certainly know that he is not solemnly ordained by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery to attend countless tea-meetings, and make funny speeches, and be the patron of petty shows, small imitations, under a religious name, of the big travelling shows of the country.

Is it not a degradation of the office to have a minister hired, paid as much as he is worth, as it was lately expressed in a religious paper, to be virtually the manager of a commercial concern under the name of a congregation of the saints, and to be esteemed very highly for his work's sake so long as he can secure a good dividend to the shareholders in the form of pew-rents, or show himself able to hold the mastery of the mortgages on the church in spite of the hard times; but failing this, to be dismissed—reduced to the rank of "stated supply" in the United States and in Canada to the "Probationers' list?"

Is not the office degraded by the people when, with the utmost comfort, and competency, and, in many instances luxuriance, in their own homes, they compel the minister to live among them in circumstances which would be quite ap-

appropriate were he in the heart of paganism? For no one can deny that we are all, laymen as well as ministers, free to go to the heathen and to live among them as tent-makers or corn-growers, clad in sheep-skins and goat-skins, dwelling in caves and dens of the earth, and counted off-scourings of all the things, while we seek to save their souls. These things may be inevitable and pre-eminently meritorious among savages. But they are not the style of things for highly favoured Christian lands. I cannot think that it is fitted to promote the success of the work at home or to induce you or your sons to enter it, that it is a fair interpretation of the Lord's mind, a correct exegesis of His words, "that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel," "that the labourer is worthy of his hire," to have ministers settled in parishes with great solemnity, and "under very promising circumstances," as it is usually expressed in the papers on such occasions, and then to receive as the united offerings from their flocks something less than the income of clerks and carters. But without pressing the matter further, what is to be done in the premises? How are we to check this tendency to official assumption on the one hand and degradation on the other? Very many things may be necessary for this purpose, but one especially. By our own conduct—those of us in office or seeking the office—we must give the people the true idea of the minister of Christ. We must show them that he is a man, every inch of him, not dependent on dress and surroundings—a man of God to the core—consecrated soul and body to the Lord; ordained to speak the truth before God in Christ; licensed to preach the gospel, not licensed to serve tables, or to put on airs, or to be a dandy and a puppet in the pulpit and the drawing-room; at the same time a Christian gentleman, with the culture, the attainments and the self-

respect of a gentleman ; a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the Church for His sake, and therefore clothed with humility ; a steward of the riches of divine truth, full of faith and of the Holy Ghost ; and therefore, neither empty-headed nor cold-hearted ; a man of intellectual and spiritual resources, not needing to multiply appearances because the substance is not ; a master in Israel, a master of theology—the queen of the sciences—and thus able by natural force of character as well as by depth and breadth of attainments to save himself and his office from reproach and degradation. Given an army of men of this sort and hindrances springing out of erroneous notions of the ministry would soon disappear. Hence the next hindrance I mention.

V. The lack of a sufficient number of true ministers of Christ.

This is at once apparent if we take into account the home and foreign fields. It is sometimes said that all the learned professions are over-crowded, and that there are hundreds of unemployed ministers in Britain and the United States ; and even in Canada, eligible charges ready for pastoral settlements and affording “good livings,” as it is sometimes expressed, are not very numerous, so that the supply of ministers seems to be equal, or more than equal, to the demand. This may be true of a certain sort men—men who are looking for “livings” rather than for souls—willing to enter upon other men’s labours, but destitute of faith and courage and manliness to subdue moral wildernesses and make room for themselves.

The Church—every branch of the Church—has always men to spare of the class who have no spirit of enterprise, and see nothing to do beyond their own parish and the supply of their personal wants, and who desire to be tenderly

cared for, nursed, and ministered unto, but who are not ready to "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ." And one of the dangers, the hindrances, our Church must guard against with firmer purpose than heretofore is the influx of such persons from other bodies. But the Church has never had too many, or anything approaching a sufficient number of such men as Duff, and W. C. Burns, and our own missionary to Formosa, men who catch the spirit of the Master's command, "go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

Why is this? How is it that the supply of the right sort of men is so utterly inadequate? How is it, we are sometimes asked, that the sons of the wealthy are not found pressing into the ministry? Do they think the office beneath their dignity? If so they are mistaken. God's Son led off in this work and he has been followed by an army of men whose talents, and culture, and purity of life and elevation of character would shed lustre upon the highest ranks of nobility. Is it beneath the dignity of any man—God pity the man who thinks that it is—to be commissioned by the King of Glory to be the co-worker with His own Son in saving souls? Are they deterred through fear of being ordained to perpetual poverty and hard work? Are they attracted—drawn away by the fascinations of business and of social elevation? Are they less devout and spiritual than those who enter the ministry from humbler ranks? Would the brain-power and the heart-power of the sacred office be materially changed and improved by the poor being all kept in the pews and the rich taking possession of the pulpit? I am not prepared to say yes or no. And I have no quarrel with either class. I claim near kinship through Adam to both rich and poor, nor do I think it desirable that the ministry should be drawn

largely or exclusively from any one class, but rather from them all, that there may be no semblance of caste countenanced, and that there may be broad and true sympathy with humanity and knowledge of its wants in all its multitudinous diversifications and circumstances.

The vital question is, why this totally inadequate supply of ministers? While we have doctors, and lawyers, and politicians to excess, why has this holy office to go a begging for occupants of the right sort? Is it owing to the general treatment which ministers receive? Not exclusively by any means, for after all that has been written and said about the shady side of ministerial experience, taken all in all it is happier and better than that of any other class of men, and hence their average life is longer.

Is it due to the low spiritual life of the Church, to her awful want of confidence in Christ's great enterprise of saving the world? Yes, this is the chief cause. Through this unbelief men are not willing to spend much or risk much in sending the gospel to others. As their faith loses its definiteness, its clearness, and spirituality, they become marvellously generous in a cheap way—so generous and credulous that they believe that countless millions may be saved without the gospel, and they persuade themselves that they are quite right in leaving the heathen to the sovereign mercy of God.

But when, in answer to prayer, the power of Divine grace rests upon the Church, and real revival is experienced, and the Holy Ghost arrests the worldliness of God's people, then there is no lack of volunteers for the work of the ministry. But while we thus fully recognize the Divine call to the work we are bound to say that there is one form of spiritual deadness, of practical unbelief which has kept back multitudes from the Lord's service, and that is the unguarded and mischievous tone of conversation in Christian homes.

Young persons even with the grace of God in their hearts, get their impressions and convictions and determinations for life settled very much by their surroundings, by what they see and hear. That which is esteemed high and noble and sacred by parents is usually viewed in the same way by their children; and that which is ignored and despised secretly or openly by parents is pretty certain to be treated in the same spirit by their offspring. It is here, in the household, often in the Christian drawing-room, that the mischief is done, and here precisely we must seek the remedy for the hindrance now dealt with.

Let us get Christian homes purified of the poison that infects them and acts with such deadly fatality against the Lord's work—let us get Christian fathers and mothers to do their duty, to follow the example of Hannah, and Zacharias, and the parents of young Timothy; and we shall soon hear the end of empty lamentations over the lack of talent laid upon the Lord's altar and the insufficiency of the intellect of this country for the work of its pulpit, for this is untrue. Dr. Schaff, of New York, says in the last number of the "Princeton Review," "From long experience as a public teacher in Europe and America, I may venture the assertion that the theological students of America, as regards ability, gentlemanly bearing, and Christian character, are equal to any in the world." We claim nothing less for the students of Canada. And what we need, and wish to see, is hundreds and thousands of them throwing themselves with spiritual power into the work at home and in the great heathen world.

VI. Hindrances in the form of defective and unscriptural financial management. These, let me assure you, are most formidable.

Several methods are followed in raising money for the Lord's work which are thoroughly injurious. I have not time to discuss them, but will mention a few of them. Some congregations may be said without exaggeration to have no proper system of finance. Passing over such we may notice the following :

First, The Subscription List. In many country churches when a minister is called his stipend is provided for in the form of a subscription list exhibiting the amount which each person promises to pay. By and by the minister in his zeal for common morality, gives utterance to some plain and unpalatable truth against intemperance, or lying, or swindling, or worldliness, and similar sins. This offends one or two of the large subscribers. They sulk, they absent themselves from the church, they talk of the imprudence and impertinence of the minister, they give it out that they are not going to pay for *such* preaching. Others, not noted for liberality or godliness, and who had to be coaxed and urged in the first instance to subscribe, sympathise with them and quietly deplore their pastor's unnecessary fidelity and want of tact. Presently they form an influential, although numerically small, party in the church. The ecclesiastical year closes with a financial deficiency not in the treasury, but in the minister's pockets, for the treasurer's business is simply to hand over to him in dribblets what he receives, and now he is minus the big subscriptions, the price of his outspokenness and temerity, and he has been forced to live partly on credit, and to countenance that abominable curse in business, the credit system.

But what is to be done with the balance due to him at the end of the year? Members who have honestly implemented their engagements refuse to pay what they deem due from others. The Session cannot deal with the repudiators for that would

be meddling with temporalities and going beyond their spiritual functions. The treasurer is helpless. He cannot collect the subscriptions, or advance the money, and, perhaps, secretly approves of the repudiation. For peace' sake, therefore, the balance is allowed to lie over for another year. But this year is no better but a little worse than its predecessor. And thus it goes on for a few years, during which the subscription list becomes more and more unreliable, until the minister resigns—the thing the repudiating subscribers wished and foretold. A Presbyterial visitation takes place. The large subscribers make speeches, and explain to the Court that it is impossible to go on as they have done for several years. They are constrained to say so as men of business. The pastoral tie is severed with appropriate resolutions touching all concerned; and the minister is commended to the Church and sent out to look for another charge. This is no fancy sketch, but something which has actually occurred more than once through that pernicious instrument of evil—the subscription list. I have not spoken of it strongly enough. It is an instrument of disintegration and tyranny. A thing which in its practical working ignores the unity of life and spirit and obligation which belongs to the Church of God—a thing which fosters the vulgar pride and vanity of not a few whose names it exhibits, which stereotypes their liberality, or rather their meanness, and which enables them to play the part of little despots in many a Christian circle—surely a thing to be abolished in connection with the Lord's business.

A second method of church finance is by pew rents. This is usually less objectionable than the method just disposed of; but the abuses to which it has given rise are well known specially in large cities.

It has proved injurious to the poor. In some places it has virtually excluded them from the house of God. Through honest industry and frugality many of them manage to make themselves respectable everywhere except in the sanctuary ; but there extravagant pew rents force them to take rank virtually with paupers, and in order to escape this they absent themselves altogether. If this evil is not largely experienced in Canada it is certainly keenly felt elsewhere.

Again, the system of pew rents is injurious to the rich. The price of a wealthy man's pew, which is the same as that of a comparatively poor man who sits next to him, often fixes the extent of his giving. I do not say that it is always so, but the tendency is strongly in this direction. And what is far worse, the system brings a secular and purely commercial spirit into the church. A man buys up so much sanctuary room and pays for it as for a site on which to build a warehouse and the transaction is closed and dismissed from his thoughts

How much better the Divine rule, that rich and poor should give on the first day of the week, according as the Lord hath prospered them. This would oblige them to reckon with the Lord in this matter frequently, and to recognize their dependence upon Him, to see God's hand in business, and to remember that the gold and the silver are His—that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, and what a blessing this might prove to their own souls.

There is a *third* method of church finance which I mention only in a sentence or two, viz., that which depends upon soirees, tea-meetings, bazaars, fairs and even raffles. These, I believe, should have no place in the working of God's Church as means of securing support for the gospel. But, having said this, I do not wish to be understood as dispar-

aging the efforts of women and children and virtually excluding them from the Church. No, by all means let them bring the products of their skill and industry and sell them at right prices and in right places for the advancement of Christ's kingdom. Nay more. Let the work of women be properly organized, and let those of them who are qualified for the office regain their ancient and rightful position as Deaconesses that their invaluable services may become available in many directions. And so of children and young men. I hold that the Church of God is bound to make room for them all, and not to oblige, or allow, if possible, any of them to go outside of her organization and discipline in seeking scope for the exercise of their religious energies. When this principle is not acted upon, the grossest and most scandalous abuses sometimes occur, such as having persons who have been justly excommunicated from the Church and never restored to her fellowship put themselves forward as leaders of public devotion to the unspeakable detriment of religion and the disgust of all honest men.

But with respect to the methods of securing income just named, there can be no doubt that they are often simply the means of bringing reproach, and penury, and disgrace upon the cause of God and His servants. I have spoken of the dignity of the ministerial office and have no hesitation in adding that the support of those who hold the sacred office by means of fairs and raffles is a degradation to which merchants, lawyers, and bankers would never submit. Let a raffle or bazaar be started in aid of some respectable merchants and see if they do not resent it as an insult. And why should the ambassadors of Jesus Christ be subjected to such humiliation? Sooner a thousand times let them resort to the apostolic method of working with their own hands to secure their daily bread.

But what is to be done with this great question of religious finance, and with all the other hindrances which have been mentioned? What helps do we propose?

I should say, in one word, abandon every unscriptural method. Come back to the simple teachings of God's Word. Instead of all the shifts resorted to let the Scriptural office of the deacon be brought into full activity and by its ministry let the solemn duty and privilege of giving, in which the Church is yet so lamentably backward, be plainly and constantly laid upon every man's conscience before God. Let no one be omitted, and let the offerings of all, rich and poor, be so managed, so administered, as in the great and successful Sustentation Fund of the Free Church of Scotland, as to bring out the living and practical unity of the Church and the official equality and independence of all Presbyters whatever position they may occupy. This is the remedy for a multitude of cases which now occupy the time of Presbyteries, and an end of the reign of little financial despots up and down the country who manage to make the lives of ministers miserable, to impair their usefulness and the purity and discipline of the Church. But I cannot elaborate this.

Then as to inactivity among the elders, let us try to quicken their spiritual pulse by the addition of youth and piety to their ranks, let us try to take every hindrance out of their way, to enlist their sympathies, to induce them to understand and honour their high vocation and to rouse them to holy enthusiasm as leaders in the Lord's army.

As to discipline, the ministerial office, and the lack of labourers in the field—Home and Foreign—I have already said all that time permits.

And as to the ignorance depicted. Let us remove it by diligent Scriptural and historical instruction delivered *viva*

voce and through the press, an instrument of power which we have not half used for the propagation of the truth. Let us show our people what has been accomplished in the past and fill their souls with the vast possibilities of the future in this great Dominion and throughout the whole world ; let them become acquainted with the vicissitudes, the weakness, the strength, the failures, and the triumphs of our Church. And let us not fail to shut out from her worship, her discipline, and doctrine all that is narrow, superstitious, popish, vulgar, unnatural and unscriptural ; and let us not fear to cut off excrescences that may have been growing upon our system for centuries or that may try to fasten themselves upon it now, and let us show the world that our Church is not simply Scottish, or Canadian, but catholic and progressive. Theology, in order to be progressive, must revise its old arguments, and readjust its old defences that they may fit into exsiting errors and destroy them. We must meet indifferntism, and latitudinarianism, and sacerdotalism, and scepticism, and worldliness, and the cry for fewer sermons and shorter sermons, not with hard names and frantic denunciations, but with living faith, and honest lives, and solid arguments, and sermons that are a consuming fire, a rushing mighty wind laden with Divine truth touching man's sin, Christ's sacrifice, God's justice and mercy and love. Sermons that impart a luminous knowledge of the way of life, and are full of Divine power and passion for saving souls.

In this high sense we must

Make knowledge circle with the winds ;
But let her herald, Reverence, fly
Before her to whatever sky
Bear seed of men and growth of minds.

