

when I venture to apply it to his calling. But call the young man who is learning his business, an apprentice, an artied pupil, or what you will, he does pass through something of the nature of an apprenticeship; and if he did not, would be very unlikely to apprehend the work, whether of head or of hand, in which his after-life is, for the most part, to be spent. Here and there, and now and then, appears a man of singular genius, who independently of the drudgery of apprenticeship, equals and excels, in this or that craft, most of those who have served the customary term; but for the rank-and-file of men this is out of the question; without an apprenticeship, or something of the sort, they will turn out to be wretched bunglers; and, perhaps, those who have distinguished themselves without the advantage of an apprenticeship would have been none the worse if they had received a thoroughly systematic training. The Christian ministry is no exception to this rule. Here, as elsewhere, it is important that there should be something resembling an apprenticeship. The desirableness of some preparation for the ministry at an academy or a college is generally allowed, and such preparation is enjoyed or endured by most of our ministers in common with those of other denominations. And the college course, embracing as it does with us, a large amount of practice in preaching, as well as a large measure of theological and other instruction, fulfils a very important part in fitting the students for the work that awaits them. Still, it is thought by many that it is not well for a young man to enter all at once and fully into ministerial life without some practical knowledge of its duties, difficulties, and responsibilities. It is only a part of the apprenticeship that is served, or can be served, at any college. Most ministers know that there are many things which they never apprehended there, and there never would have apprehended. They learned the art of church navigation, and learned it on very sound principles, so far as books and tutors could teach it; and on Sundays, in fine weather, they tried their skill on board this craft and that; but all that they had learned stood them in poor stead afterwards, when, as captains of the ships, they found themselves in some raging storm of strife—(laughter)—in which case the Church too often makes a Jonah of the posed and baffled ministers, and, without such consideration as the shipmen showed the prophet—for they did first row hard to bring the ship to land—heaves him overboard forthwith, and seldom meets the reward that followed when Jonah was thus dealt with, for then “the sea ceased from her raging, and the men feared the Lord exceedingly.” (Cheers and laughter.)

MINISTERIAL APPRENTICESHIP—PAST AND PRESENT.

Something akin to ministerial apprenticeship is to be found in the church of the apostolic age. It is true that we find in that age no trace of colleges for the training of ministers, unless we regard as such the house of that excellent couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who took to them the eloquent Apollos, “and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.” If the churches of that time had no colleges, I will only say it was their misfortune, as it was their misfortune to lack very many of our most useful helps in Christian work—printed Bibles, for instance, and Sunday-schools, and the public observance of the Lord’s-day as a day of rest and worship. Of ministerial apprenticeship, however, I think we do find some hint in that early time. When Paul and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey, they had as their “minister” John, whose surname was Mark. I think we may conceive of his relation to the apostles as something like that of an apprentice. I am sorry the instance is not a happy one—(laughter)—since that young man proved to be a runaway apprentice, and Paul would have no more to do with him; but the less rigorous “Son of Consolation” gave him another chance, and he did well, as many apprentices do notwithstanding their having got into a scrape. But Paul chose Silas, and afterwards we find Timothy with him, and Luke, and Titus, and Tychicus. Some one may say, Yes, and Demas, too, was one of Paul’s apprentices. Well, apprentices, though they have good masters, sometimes turn out badly. However, the great Apostle of the Gentiles appears to have had with him almost always one or more Christian brethren, young men whom he calls his fellow-labourers and his sons in the faith, and whom he sent hither and thither on a variety of errands to the

churches. It was not an apprenticeship in name, but it was such in fact; in and through their companionship with Paul, those young men apprehended their work and duty as faithful ministers of Christ. “Thou hast fully known,” or as we read in the margin, “thou hast been a diligent follower, of my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions.” Thus Paul writes to Timothy, certifying that he had served his apprenticeship, and served it well. In most churches of the present day a system of what may be called ministerial apprenticeship prevails. Notably so in the church of England. There the apprentices are known as curates; a word not free from objection, because it hints, what I feel sure is in most cases not the fact, that the care of the parish and the cure of souls are left by the beneficed clergyman to the young man just ordained; whereas all the clergy of the Church of England, those in the episcopate excepted, are distinctly called curates in the prayer—“Send down upon our bishops and curates, and all congregations committed to their charge, the healthful spirit of Thy grace.” The elder minister is quite as much a curate as his young assistant; nay, rather, the elder minister is in the truest sense the curate, the man to whom the charge of the parish or district is entrusted. Further, the word curate does not meet the case we are considering, because there are clergymen who, all their lives, occupy the humble position which the word incorrectly but popularly implies; and, in many a case, if years, experience, and efficacy are to be the test, the rector is more the curate’s apprentice than the curate himself. In the various Methodist churches there is what amounts to a period of apprenticeship; the younger men serving for a time under the direction of their elders, instead of going straight from college into the full exercise of the pastoral office. I believe that, with very few exceptions, the various denominations adopt some method by which the minister is prepared for his work, not merely by his college training, but by a term of practical service placed between his leaving college and becoming the pastor of a congregation. The ministries so formed will bear very favorable comparison with those in which there is no such arrangement.

OUR WANT OF SYSTEM AS A DENOMINATION.

According to Professor Newth, the Congregationalists and the Baptists stand alone in the non-observance of any practice resembling the apprenticeship system. Speaking, as I do, of the latter denomination, there is no need in this assembly to show, or even to say, that the learned Professor is correct. In commerce there are sub-managers; in mechanical trades, foremen; and these attain their positions, inferior as such positions are, only through long trial and practice; but in our churches, the student, or the man who, though nothing of a student, has a glib tongue, and has been heard three or four times in the pulpit, just takes one stride and is the pastor of the church, its teacher, example, and guide, and the chief, if not sole, director of all its affairs.

HOW OUR PLAN WORKS.

It may be said, however, that this way of choosing a minister is not so much a thing of hap and hazard as it seems to be, for this reason—that none of our churches ever chooses a minister without first asking God’s guidance in prayer. What we call prayer for God’s guidance may be prayer, not that God would send us His man, but that He would accept ours. By all means let God’s guidance be sought in honest prayer; but let us remember that asking God’s guidance in such a matter as this is like asking His help in regard to the supply of our temporal wants. To obtain our daily bread we must think and work as well as pray; we must not only pray, but also exercise our judgment in all carefulness when the question is—Who shall be our minister to break to us the Bread of Life? It may be urged that, whatever objections be raised against our method of appointing ministers, it is fairly successful, and that the work of the ministry is as well done among us and the Congregationalists as among denominations that are more slow and cautious, making the pastorate the last step of a long series of preparatory trials. I acknowledge that the success is considerable, and I feel that it is wonderful. Is the success of our method so great as to make us feel satisfied? I venture to think not.

MINISTERIAL CHANGES—CAUSE AND CURE.

The very frequent moving of our ministers to and fro is no sign of success. In many cases the meaning of such changes is that a mistake has been made by the minister, by the church, or by both, and that neither knew the other well enough when the pastoral relationship was formed. Happily, the marriage can be dissolved without much difficulty; though this is not always the case; but it had been better if some man or men of sense had forbidden the banns and required a longer period of courtship, that it might be seen whether the gentleman were an honest fellow or a mere adventurer, and whether between him and the lady there were “compatibility of temper.” In the statistics of our “Handbook” there is a column which refers to the ministers of the churches, and is headed with the words “When settled.” The “when settled” column in our “Handbook” discovers a degree of unrest which shows that the settlements of our ministers are far from satisfactory. Do not these frequent changes arise, in some measure, from the fact that not a few good men who enter our ministry are not qualified to make their ministries successful, partly because of their not having had the early practical training which an apprenticeship would have given them? At any rate, it seems to me that there is room, and that there is reason, for some arrangement whereby the necessary experience might be gained at a less price to both ministers and churches than it often costs. It would be no disadvantage if in some districts we had fewer churches, provided they were stronger—(Hear)—and, in many a small town, the existence of two, three, or four struggling Baptist churches, instead of one with some power in it, is a folly, a weakness, and, in some cases, a scandal. And if a number of little churches, three or four, situated within as many miles of one another in a thinly-peopled district, were to agree to have one minister, with one or two youthful apprentices, it would be in every way a great advantage. As to the independence of which we are so proud, and which so often means dependence upon some charitable society, surely three or four churches welded into one would be quite as independent, when united, as they are when standing apart?

BENEFITS OF THE APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM.

I am not so hopeful as to think that the plan which I advocate will be largely taken up, and am well aware that much more than any advocacy of mine is necessary to obtain for it even a patient consideration; yet I will, with your permission, try to point out some of the benefits which, it seems to me, might be looked for from the adoption of some form of the apprenticeship system. It would be good for the young minister. It would enable him to be a hearer, as well as to give him opportunities of preaching, for I would venture strongly to advise that he should not be fully engaged in pulpit work, but should often have half the Sunday free, that he might listen to the pastor or some other minister, and so learn some lessons, either of instruction or of warning, in the work of preaching. It may be that when at college he had far too few opportunities of hearing, having so often been required to occupy vacant pulpits; and thus, during the very time when hearing would have been most serviceable to him, he has been almost shut out from it. Our young friend would have the benefit of finding more time for reading and thinking than he is likely to have when he has to bear the entire burden of the pastorate. He need not be continually attending meetings and speaking at them. Indeed, I am inclined to think that if we had fewer meetings, the religious life of both pastors and churches would be stronger and healthier than it generally is. And then, the counsels that might be given him by the pastor ought to be of some value—counsels of experience which none but a pastor some time in the work could give. Thus, learning by degrees the various departments of his calling, he would be the sort of man whom a church might, with some confidence, invite to be its pastor; not a novice, but a man well tried, who has made full proof of his ministry. Failures we must expect, but the apprenticeship system would make them less injurious, both to the candidates for the ministry and to the churches, for the failure would be found out before much mischief had been done.

ADVANTAGES TO THE PASTOR AND HIS HELPER.

The plan which I venture to advocate

would often prove advantageous to the pastor of the church. He would probably do his work all the better through being relieved of a part of it. It may be a brave thing to “die in harness,” but it is cruelty to the animal, and bad policy on the part of those who work him, if the burden be made so heavy that he dies before his time. (Hear) Although the proverb says that “the drawn well is seldom dry,” some of us are wells, which, through too frequent drawing, are apt to become exceedingly dry; and then we are blamed, and people say that our hearts are not in such free and full communication as they ought to be with the unfailing springs that should fill them. We ought to consider, and must consider, not only the quantity, but also the quality of our work; this is of far more importance than that; and less work, done with greater care, and in a less worn and worried state of mind, would do much more good than the endless talking that is expected of us, and for which careful preparation is out of the question. The apprentice should hear the pastor, and it would be well for the pastor to hear the apprentice. Youth may learn from age, but age may also learn from youth. Old ministers, as well as young, sometimes need to have their conceit taken out of them; and the pastor and his apprentice would, to their great and mutual benefit, take the conceit out of one another.

ADVANTAGES TO THE CHURCH.

This arrangement would be good for the church that should adopt it. For one thing, not a great matter, but still of some importance, if the apprentice were at all up to his work, the church would be saved the trouble and the cost of finding ministers to supply the pulpit in the pastor’s absence. It is not every minister who has such health as enables him to work on and on, with no more than a vacation of three or four weeks in the year. He ought to be of great service in the Sunday-school, especially in its senior classes, speaking as a young man to young men, who would feel that he had more in common with them than a pastor their elder by a whole generation or more. In a large and widely scattered church, pastoral visitation—which I hope will never be neglected or undervalued by any of us—could be carried out much more thoroughly than is possible where it is all laid upon an unaided pastor, to whom a round on foot of ten or a dozen miles has become a rather serious matter. The number of our preaching stations might be largely increased by means of this agency; and I think that our lay brethren who do so much good service in such stations would be the first to welcome the young minister as a valuable fellow-worker. It would also be for the safety and comfort of the church if, when, through age, infirmity, or death, the pastor’s services failed, it had in its apprentice a young man who could just at once step into his shoes.

GENERAL GAINS TO THE DENOMINATION.

The apprenticeship system would, I submit, be a good thing for the whole denomination. If largely taken up it would do much towards furnishing a supply of trained, tried, and able ministers. The churches would know where to meet with such men when pastorates became vacant, and would not be obliged either to accept a man of whom they knew very little, or to rob some other church of a minister whom it might be very desirable to displace. It may be impossible, with all watchfulness and prayer, to keep every wolf in sheep’s clothing out of the ministry, but I think that the intrusion of such creatures would be made more difficult, and therefore more infrequent, if the entrance to our ministry were by the door of apprenticeship, and if no talents, however brilliant, were to pass a man in without that test of character which apprenticeship might be expected to supply. We are not Prelatists, and have no desire to give prelatical authority to any class of ministers; but we are Episcopalians, and might, with advantage, so far extend our episcopal action as to encourage some kindly oversight of many churches on the part of our ablest overseers.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE QUESTION.

It was scarcely possible for me to think this subject out, in so far as I have thought it out, without seeing that many difficulties beset the plan which I have endeavoured to lay before you, and that many objections may be urged against it. There is the cost—great, and much too great, for all but a very limited number of our churches; there is the unwillingness of the smaller churches, and especially of the very

smallest, to be grouped together; there is the possibility of faction in the church—the minister’s party and the apprentice’s party; there might be difficulty in fairly and wisely dividing and adjusting the work; considering the weakness of human nature, even when helped by Divine grace, it is not altogether unlikely that the pastor and his apprentice would disagree, and there might arise miserable jealousies, for it is not every minister who can say without a murmur, “He must increase and I must decrease.” It may be said that the plan has been tried and failed, and instances of failure may be pointed out; I am told, also, that many, if not most, of the students in our colleges are not at all likely to approve of this method; they have before them so many cases in which a student has gone straight away into some important pastorate and succeeded admirably; they entered college with the intention and hope of pursuing a similar course, and they will not submit to what they will look upon as a term of tedious drudgery and humiliating enslavement.

SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION.

These difficulties and objections, and many more that I have not time to mention, deserve to be considered. I wish that I could speak from experience. Perhaps in one sense I can; but it is neither the experience of success nor the experience of failure—it is simply the experience of want. I felt the want of apprenticeship when, with far too little practical preparation, I entered the ministry, and now I feel the want of an apprentice, not that I might do less work, but that he and I together might do more, for church work, in most churches, has greatly altered since I became a pastor. It has become more extensive and more various. Over the present state of things we have much reason to rejoice, showing, as it does, in the face of all that is said about the decline of Christianity, that it is splendidly renewing its youth, and is still able, not only to “walk and not faint,” but also to “run and not be weary,” and even to “mount, as on the wings of an eagle,” high, as high as ever towards the empyrean glory whence it came and whither it is its destiny to lead mankind. But this renewal of strength and activity calls for more and more workmen, tried and proved, and affords a fine scope for an assistant ministry; such a ministry is more wanted now than it was in former times. And now, with every feeling of profound respect for our churches, ministers, deacons, college tutors, and students, I beg to submit these remarks to their kind and indulgent consideration. (Prolonged applause.)

Mr. Spurgeon proposed that the Rev. George Gould, of Norwich, be cordially invited to accept the Vice-Presidency of the Baptist Union for the ensuing year. He spoke briefly and concluded by saying: I hope that this will be one of the best years the Union has ever had, and I beg to wish Mr. Brown and his apprentice the best possible success.

The Rev. J. P. Chown seconded the proposal which was very heartily carried.

Our Wednesday the 1st Inst. the MISSIONARY BREAKFAST was held, as usual, preliminary to the meetings of the Foreign Missionary Society.

Please remember our offer, and mention it to your friends who do not see the *Messenger*.

THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER for the remainder of this year to January 1st, 1879.

FOR ONE DOLLAR, to New Subscribers, in advance.

Let them send for it at once.

Rev. J. D. Pope has just returned to St. John from a visit to the United States, in vigorous health, and hopeful of enlarged success in preaching the Gospel.

The New Brunswick press is much concerned as to who shall be the next Lieutenant-Governor of that province. The *Visitor* says:

“The names of Sir A. J. Smith, Hon. Mr. Anglin, and Hon. L. Burpee, have been mentioned in connection with the office, and latterly the name of Hon. A. McL. Seely has been referred to in the same connection. The first three gentlemen named are active and vigorous politicians, and could hardly be spared from the positions they have been accustomed to hold with ability; while Mr. Seely’s sterling qualities, his experience and moderation in respect to party politics, commend him, and would render his appointment popular.”

Yes, we vote for Hon. Mr. Seely for Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick.

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