Presbytery and its Vacant Churches.

An abstract of a sermon delivered before the Presbytery of Clarion in session at Sligo, September 29, 1875, by Rev. D. W. Cassat and requested for publication in the papers within the bounds of Presby

tery:
*But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepard."-

Matt. 1x : 36. The figure of our text is one that would enlist the sympathies of every Jew. Scarcely any thingwould be more expressive to an oriental mind of exposure to certain destruction than a flock of sheep scattered over the mountains without a shepherd to defend them from the wild bears, as well affording the as the thieves and robbers which abounded ing pastors in that land. Such thoughts filled the mind of our compassionate Savior as he saw the multitudes of people surround him on the hills of Galiles, and knew the certain and awful destruction awaiting them unless brought into the true fold. As this sight of men, with no one to care for their souls, touched the heart of our Savior, so the spiritual destitution which exists in our own land and all around us should move us to compassion. if we have the spirit of Christ, and if not, we are "none of His." This thought lends very naturally to the subject which Presbytery has assigned for a sermon at this time viz: "The Duty of Presbytery towards the Vacant Churches

This subject is one of great importance on account of the growing tendency towards Congregationalism in many of our churches. It is a question which involves some of the fundamental principles of

Presbyterianism, Our "Form of Government" gives the following as the reasons for the existence of the Presbytery as a church court, that, "The church being divided into many seperate congregations, these need mutial ecunsel and assistance, in order to preserve soundness of doctrine and regularity of discipline, and to enter into common measures for promoting knowledge and religion, and for preventing infidelity, error

and immorality.'

If all the churches "need mutical counsel and assistance," surely the vacant churches, those that have no paster to look after their interests-flocks without a shepherd -have an especial claim on Presbytery for aid and assistance, just as a weak or invalid member of a family has on that ac count a stronger clal r on the other mem bers for care and protection

1. In what does the duty which Pres bytery owes to these vacant churches con-Every vacant congregation has certain duties to preform for itself, and being, when vacant directly under the care of Presbytery, it is the first duty of Presby tery, to see that these churches pretorm their own duties which are thus set forth in our "Form of Government."

"Considering the great importance of weekly assembling thepeople for the public worship of God, in order thereby to im-prove their knowledge, to confirm their habits of whyship and their desire of the public ordinances; to augment their reverence for the most high God, and to promote the charitable affections which unite man most firmily in society, it is recommended that every vacant congregation meet to gether, on the Lord's day, at one or more our Presbytery places, for the purpose of prayer, singing nearly as great.

As we see the together with the works of such approved divines as the Presbytery within whose bounds they are may recommend and they be able to procure, and that the elders or deacons be the persons who shall preside and select the portions of scripture and of the other books to be read, and too see that the whole he conducted in a becoming

and orderly manner."
The O. S. General Assembly of 1847, de clared it to be the duty of Presbytery to in terrogate the roling elders representing such congregation concerning the obser

Vance of this recommendation.

This decision makes the duty of Presbytery clear on this important master The elders representing these vacant churches should be require to report at regular meeting of Presbytery whether their churches meet for worship as recommended, and in case any vacint church fails to send a representative for one year Presbytery should, by committee or otherwise ascertain the reason of such

failt res as well as its general condition. Il But in the next place it is the duty of Presbytery to furnish as much preaching as possible to these vacant churches, and see that the ordinances of the gospelare regularly administered. In order to ac complish this in the best way Presbytery should appoint a standing committee on Vacant Churches, who should have control of the whole matter, with power to act in the interim of the meetings of Presbytery and report in full at each regular meeting This committee would take the place of the committee appinted "on supplies" at each meeting, and be able to discharge their duties far more efficiently As nutherto managed the matter of supplies by Preshytery is very unsatisfactory. It savors to more of Congregationalism that Presbyter ianism. Nominally, they go to Presby. tery but practically, they control the matcharches that apply to i'resbytery simply ask leave to supply themselves, and their request is granted, usually, without asking any questions When asked to report at the next meeting if they have done so. there will probably be no representative present, or if there is Presbytery is satis fied with a simple affirmative answer Withcut inquiring by whom or to what extens they have been supplied But there are some churches that do not honor P esby tery even with the formatity of asking per mission They will employ whoever they please without recognizing the right of Presbytery to know who is supplying them This is not consister t with the principles of our church polity We should either g ve up some of our Presbyterian principles, or enforce the right of Presbytery having the oversight of all the churches under its care

If the standing committee suggested above were appointed it would then be the duty of every church as soon as it would become vacant to apply to this committee stating how often they wished to be supplied, and how much they were willing to pay for such service They should all have the privilege of suggesting the name of any unemployed manister or student whom they wished to supply them On the other hand all ministers and licen. tiates that wish to preach in any of our vacant churches should apply to this committee for work, stating their preference for any particular church If this plan was cordially adopted, it would secure loyality to Presbytery from both ministers and churches, which in itself would be a most important point. But the great ob ject is to furnish the means of grace, so far as possible, to all the vacant churches, and at the same time assist these churches in

obtaining pastors for themreives. We believe this plan, which is substantially the same as that recommenced by the General Assembly, would secure both these objects as well as any that could be adopted. A minister brought before a church through a judicious committee, if acceptable to the people, would be more likely to prove a successful pastor than one who would apply on his own authority, or be in-

roduced by a friend, If he was not acceptable to the people he would not be mortified by their rejection, for he was simply sent as a supply to the church. It would, in a great measure, do away with the whole busi-ness of candidating, which is a most un-pleasant and severe ordeal to every modest minister old or young If a church that pays a good salary becomes vacant the session soon have plenty of offers, and are perplexed to decide whom they should hear and if there was a com nittee of Presbytery on whom they could throw the responsi-

Brethern should be willing to seek their fields through Presbytery They should say, as did one lately, whose ability is equal to his loyalty, "I would not become a candidate upon my own motion before any church, but I should feel bound by my ordination vows to go to any church which Presbytery might direct mo to supply"

In brief we would say that the duty of Presbytery towards the vacant churches under its care consists in seeing that these churches faithfully perform their own duties as set forth in our ' Form of Government," in furnishing them with the preaching of the word so far as possible, and in affording them the best facilities for secur-

II Consider briefly in the second place the great need for the performance of this duty, and the exercise of this care by Presbytery

It is well known that there is quite number of small vacant churches in our Presbytery that are not able to support a pastor, and the most of them being line of railroad communication, find it dirficult to secure supplies for themselves

The territory in which some of these churches are situated is destitute of evan gelical preaching by any denomination This is emphatically the case in a large portion of Elk county With the exception of St Marys- which does not belong to our Presbytery-we have but one small. church-Eikton-with a membership of sixteen scattered over a district of country having a ratius of eight or nine mile-This organization has been neglected until it has scarcely an existance, and the whole region of country was for a considerable length of time destitute of the gospel This year a local Methodist minister has been preaching there part of the time Buthere are many persons there who are anxious to have Presbyterian preaching and it is our duty to give it to them if can be done. The whole county, having a population of at least 9,000 is destitute, so far as our denomination is concerned except St Marys At Wilcox a Durch Re formed Presbyterian caurea has occupied the ground The great majority of people do not belong to any church It is as truly missionary ground as any of ou Western territories, and the fields are white already to the harvest-would tout there were reapers sufficient to gather it. It is undoubtedly the first duty of Presby tery to foster and nourish the churches already organized, but it is also a duty to furnish the gospel to other destitute places

charches In Forest county, with a population of probably 5,000, we have one little church of twenty-three members, and the other denominations are not strong. The county is sparsely settled, but from the num ber of inhabitants many of them must be without the means of grace. In that par of Clarion county north of the pike, with an estimated population of 10,000, we have only four little churches whose combined membership is but eighty-seven, and only one of these-Mill Creek-is regularly supplied. The churches of the other evan gelical denominations are also small. In the part of Verango county belonging to our Presbytery he destitution seems to be

which desire it, or which may grow into

As we see these small flocks scattered over the mountains of sin and wickedness without any shepherds to protect, gaide and feel them, our compassion should be aroused in their behalf

Itt. This leads us to notice in the third place some of the methods in which Presbytery can best furnish the gospel to these destitute fields.

Here we should learn a lesson from our Saviour, and pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his barvest. But we must unite works with faith and in order to accomplish this work most successfully, we should have a Presbyterian Missionary to preach in the weak churches and destitute places, to visit the 1e ple. and do the general wirk of an evangelist The means to sustain such a missionary heside what could be raised on the field could be easily provided if the railing elders n our Presbytery would undertake it.

If this met'and is not deemed dractionble present, then it is the duty of our pastors go forth two by two and visit these de-tifields trusting that the Great Saupherd of the sheep will abundantly bless their labors in their effects to gather into t e true fold shose that are scattered abroad After the above discourse an earnest and delightful Conference was held on the same opic. A deep interest was manifested in he prosperity of our vacant courches and missionary fields. A Standing Committee Vacant Churches and Presbyteria Missions was ordered to be appointed to have control of the vacant churches, mis sion fields and supplies in Presbytery. The ruling elders in all our churches were respectfully requested to contribute five dol-iars each, or see that it be provided, fo. the support of a Presbyterial Missionary for six months; and that the ministry he re ponsible for furnishing an equivalent ser vice for six months more. The following paper, defining some of the duties of the ommittee on Vacant Churches and Resbyterial Messions was adopted:

1. That the committee have supervision and control of all missionary work within our bounds, including vacant churches and missionary fields of labor not yet organized as churches.

That in answer to request from vacant churches and with reference to charches that have made no requests for supplies, appointments be made by said ammittee for their supply with preaching aking care to so group these churches and anissionary field together, as to form con venient fields of labor.

3 That it shall be their duty to stir up these vacant churches and missionar, fields, to raise by subscription as much as they can to sustain the preaching of the gospel among them; and having ascertained what amount can be raised for the support of a Presbyterian missionary to secure the services of such a missionary as in their judgment will most successfully proscute

4 That the committee shall have charge of the matter of raising funds for mission a y work as provided by resolution of Dr Colbert and Rev. Fields and adopted by

That the present standing committee on Home Missions constitute said com-

Said committee shall report to Presby

tery at each stated meeting.
This committee, at a meeting in Brook ville during the sessions of Eynol, prement of committees to visit vacant churches and missionary points, which was

adopted. Ridgway, Eikton, and Brandy Camp .-Rev. Mes rs, Leason and Filson Maysville and Richardsville-Rev. Mes srs Fields and Cussat

Shitoh, Greenwood' Scotch Hill and Tylersburg-Rev. Messrs Elder and Mo-

East Brady and adjacent points-Kev. essrs. Mcliherrin and Hawk Each committee to spend on week or more in preaching and visiting; time to be arranged by committee and session or residents on the field, and that each committee

report fully at the next meeting.

Presbytery also adopted the following rule: That the session of each vacant church be urged to select some neighboring ninister to act as moderator of the session of said church while the same remains vacant; and further, if any session neglect to do this, that Presbytery proceed to appoint a moderator over such sessions J. S. ELDER, Stated Clerk.

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