

Our Contributors.

TWO THINGS SOME PEOPLE SAY THEY WANT.

BY KNOXONIAN.

Some excellent people say they want progress in theology. Their idea seems to be that theological science should make continual progress, just as chemistry, geology, astronomy and other sciences do. Whether a science made known to us in one book and that book a finished revelation two thousand years ago should be expected to make progress in the ordinary sense of that word, is a question we shall not now discuss. Do our friends expect that theologians will discover a new doctrine occasionally as astronomers discover a new star? Do they think that as many discoveries will be made in theology as have recently been made in the use of electricity? If theology may change as quickly as any other science, we see no reason why some theological expert may not discover a new system one of these days. Some specially daring explorer may find a new doctrine of justification by faith in the Epistle to the Romans. But let these questions pass for the present.

What we want to show in this paper is that if any good brother wants to make progress he can find ample opportunity for doing so along most useful and practical lines. There is no earthly reason why any brother with a hankering after progress should allow his genius go to waste for want of cultivation. Progress, why that is just what we all want or should want if it is progress in the right direction. For example, what could be better than progress in

PREACHING.

There is any amount of fair average preaching in this country, but not much that can be truthfully described as far above average. Perhaps it does more good than it would do if it were more brilliant. Very likely it does, and after all the preaching that does most good is the best preaching. Still it would not hurt the country nor any denomination in it if we had a few preachers of extraordinary power. They would be very useful for special occasions and they would stimulate the average preachers to try harder. It has often been said that a church never becomes great without a few really great preachers. Now, brother, if you are sighing for progress, here is an opening for you. Go up and possess the land. Nobody will interfere with you for preaching great sermons. Go on and preach better than Chalmers. Beat Guthrie in word-painting. Leave Spurgeon out of sight in making divisions. Throw Beecher into the shade by your illustrations. Brother, out-class all the pulpit princes that ever lived and nobody will interfere with you. There is room for some progress in the important work of

PASTORAL VISITATION.

The pastor who does scarcely any has a great field here. The pastor who visits in a spasmodic, slipshod way might make a little progress with profit to himself and his congregation. These pastors who visit systematically and put conscience into the work will be the first to admit that the work ought to be better done. How can a family be visited in cities and towns? The head of the house is at his work. The children are at school. How can you read and pray with that family if they cannot be found together any day but Sunday and perhaps not even then.

There is room for a very considerable amount of progress in the method of

DOING BUSINESS

in our church courts. With the exception of the few men who want to hear themselves talking all day, everybody admits that the length of time spent in our church courts is out of all proportion to the amount of business done. Too frequently there is much precious time spent in doing nothing at all. There are few things more trying to an earnest, studious minister than to sit all day in a church court listening by the hour to men who say nothing, while he thinks of how many families he might have visited or of how much he might have read, or of how much he might have done on his sermons for next Sabbath. The loss is all

the more exasperating when the men who spend the time have nothing else to do or having something else to do never do it.

There is any amount of room for progress in the matter of

LEGISLATION.

The church is suffering severely for want of some workable plan for supplying vacancies and finding employment for ministers without charge. Nobody seems able to draw up a plan. Brother, go in and distinguish yourself as a church legislator. Do up something that will put Chalmers in the shade for all time. The fact is, nobody need sigh in this church for want of a chance to make progress. Progress is just the thing we all want. Nor need any one suffer on the score of

LIBERALITY.

Brother, you may give a thousand dollars to Foreign Missions and five thousand to Augmentation. They need about ten thousand in the Home Mission treasury. You may square the account if you wish. In fact, you may endow a chair, or two or three chairs in any of our Divinity Halls. You may be as liberal as you like to any of the schemes and nobody will complain. Only don't try to be liberal with God's truth, or God's day, or God's book, or the ordinances of God's house. These things don't belong to us and we have no right to give them or any portion of them away.

THOMAS A KEMPIS.

BY W. H. M.

To us in these days when everything, however honored by ancient custom or belief, must give a plain account of itself or go, it is not surprising to discover, that many learned men cannot be persuaded that Thomas a Kempis wrote the "Imitation of Christ," and that, even if he did, his name wasn't Thomas a Kempis, but Thomas Hammerkin. However most scholars are agreed that a little genial, fresh colored man, with soft brown eyes, named Thomas Hammerkin, who spent nearly all his placid, uneventful life (a ninety-one years) in the convent of Mount St. Agnes, near the junction of the Rhine and Meuse, wrote that book of communings with Christ, which is on nearly every Christian table (by way of pious ornament), and which has been translated into more languages than any other book except the Bible. It has, since the first edition published at Augsburg in 1470, run through five thousand editions. A beautiful fac-simile reproduction of this edition, with a preface by Canon Knox Little, has just been published. He wrote many other books besides, and copied more, among which is a now famous manuscript Bible, for the gentle saint loved books and quiet corners, and took little interest in the practical affairs of the world, either within or without the walls of the Augustine convent. He occupied for a time a superior post, but with such little success that he was deposed, and given his old position of sub-prior. He was "too simple in worldly affairs," and too absent-minded for an office involving large practical duties.

The purity and spirituality of "The Imitation of Christ" is in strange contrast to that bad and turbulent age in which it was written. The clergy were then at their worst, which is saying a good deal, and the church was altogether distracted, the world witnessing the edifying spectacle of two rival "Vicars of Christ," one at Rome and the other at Avignon, anathematizing each other. The old order had changed, but had not yet given place to the new. Wyclif had been dead only four years when Saint Thomas was born (1380), and Luther was not to be heard of for upwards of one hundred and forty years. The religious event of the time was the preaching and martyrdom of Huss in Bohemia, and for wars, there were fightings between France and England, and between Burgundy and France. But Thomas was apart from all this, and perhaps heard little of it.

His great book may, I suppose, be safely taken as the noblest expression of the heart religion of Latin Christianity, and as exhibiting at its best the fruits of the ascetic life in doctrine and conduct. In reading it, one is at first impressed with the difference between his and our teaching and Christian ideals, and

is led to reflect sadly on the changefulness of all that men from time to time have held most sacred and indubitable. I remember reading a letter from Thackeray, where he (speaking as a Christian) denounces with indignation, and almost with horror, the ideals of Saint Thomas a Kempis. And yet "the pure in heart shall see God;" we cannot hold that an empty phrase. Let me put side by side an extract from the "Imitation," and a few words of Drummond:

"Converse not much with the young, nor with strangers. . . Desire to be familiar with God alone and His angels, and avoid the acquaintance of men. . . One said, 'as oft as I have been among men, I returned home less a man than I was before.' . . Whoso therefore withdraweth himself from his acquaintances and friends, God will draw near unto him with His holy angels. . . It is better for a man to live privately, and have regard to himself, than to neglect his soul, though he could work wonders in the world."—Thomas a Kempis.

"Do not quarrel with your lot in life. Do not complain of its never-ceasing cares, its petty environment, the vexations you have to stand, the small and sordid souls you have to live and work with. Above, all do not resent temptation, do not be perplexed because it seems to thicken round you more and more, and cease neither for effort nor agony of prayer. . . Therefore keep in the midst of life. Do not isolate yourself. Be among men, and among things, and among troubles, and difficulties, and obstacles."—Professor Drummond.

It would, perhaps, not be impossible, having in view past history and all the circumstances, to justify both writers:

"The old Order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

But there is very much in the "Imitation," which must ever be the highest truth to men, and that portion is the heart of Thomas a Kempis' teaching. Could anything be more profound or more impressively spoken than these well-known lines?—"If a man should give all his substance, it is as yet nothing, and if he should practice great repentance, still it is little, and if he should attain to all knowledge, still he is far off, and if he should be of great virtue, and of very fervent devotion, yet there is much wanting, especially one thing which is most necessary for him. What is that? That leaving all, he forsake himself, and go wholly out of himself, and retain nothing of self-love. The more any man dieth unto himself, so much the more doth he begin to live unto God. Know that the love of thyself doth hurt thee more than anything in the world. If thou perfectly overcome thyself, thou shalt very easily bring all else under the yoke. The perfect victory is to triumph over ourselves. If thou desire to mount unto this height, thou must set out courageously, and lay the axe to the root, that thou mayest pluck up and destroy both that hidden inordinate inclination to self, and all love of private and earthly good. On this sin dependeth whatsoever is thoroughly to be overcome; which evil, being once vanquished and subdued, there will presently ensue great peace and tranquillity. But because few labor perfectly to die unto themselves they remain entangled, nor can they be lifted up in spirit above themselves."

We have not learned anything wiser than that during all these four hundred years of "progress," and, notwithstanding our "wonderful invention," there have been found no easier means of ascending the Delectable Mountain.

As is to be expected in such a book, there is much repetition of thought and expression, but it is full of deep spiritual sayings, comparable only to those found in the Bible.

It is wonderful to consider that of all the great figures of that age, popes, emperors, statesmen, and teachers, this shy recluse, the son of a hard-working peasant and a school dame of Kempen, should to-day be the one best remembered and best loved; that the "still small voice" of Thomas a Kempis, from the quiet of the cloisters, should be almost the only one by which God still speaks from those times. And as we picture him, bending over his missals in the monastery of Mount Saint Agnes, unregarded and unknown, we hear again the great saying, "The meek shall inherit the earth."

MR. SCOTT'S REPLY TO DR. PATON.

Mr. Editor: Your issue of May 2nd contains a letter from Rev. Dr. Paton, addressed to me, which characterizes an article in the February *Presbyterian Record* as an 'attack' upon him, as marked by 'animus,' 'a malicious misrepresentation,' a 'series of statements either untrue in point of fact or so placed before my readers as to suggest what is untrue.'

Though his charges are general statements, rather than specific instances, I think that under the circumstances, I should reply

In order that what I say may be fully understood, will your readers please remember that the Presbyterian churches in the different colonies of Australia, such as Victoria, Tasmania, New South Wales, etc., while independent of each other, have formed themselves into a Federation, having a Federal Assembly, and that they are all carrying on mission work in the New Hebrides, together with the Presbyterian Churches of New Zealand, the Free Church of Scotland, and our own church, in all, eight churches supporting eighteen missionaries.

Permit me now a few words as to (1), the motive which I had in writing the said article, and (2), the character of its statements.

1.—ITS MOTIVE.

I can only say that there was neither 'animus,' 'malice,' nor 'attack.' My motive was simply to give information, and I did so without a discourteous, or ill-sounding or ill-meaning word. In some way or other, from reports that sometimes appeared in the newspapers and from other causes, many people had the idea that Dr. Paton was now engaged in mission work in the New Hebrides Islands, that he was but recently from the field, that he was seeking five or six more missionaries, and money to support them, and that with the aid thus obtained, he was to return, reinforced, to his work; and some individuals, societies and Sabbath schools, under this impression, were giving to what was popularly known as 'Dr. Paton's Mission.'

I felt that all should know definitely, that in such giving they were simply giving to the Foreign Mission Fund of an Australian church. I felt it to be my duty to remind the members of our church that we are carrying on the same work that the Australian churches are, that our Foreign Mission Fund which supports that work is in debt, and that if they had anything to give for the New Hebrides, it was a first duty to support our work there, for which we are responsible, and after that if they wished, to help Australian churches.

Again, many were giving for a steam vessel under the impression that it was essential to the success of the mission, that the money had been raised to build it, that the churches working in the New Hebrides were waiting and anxious to have it, and that if £1,000, (\$5,000) more could be raised yearly, in addition to the present annual *Dayspring* expenditure, to meet the additional running expenses of a steam vessel, she would be built at once. I knew that some of these impressions, however they were obtained, were not correct, and I felt our church should know as definitely as possible what the facts were. Such was the motive that led me to write of Dr. Paton's work in the New Hebrides, and his present relation to the mission.

When speaking of motives, I may add that the reason I declined to publish his reply which has appeared in your paper, was partly because of its tone and language, and partly because it contained statements regarding early *Dayspring* history that I could not print without controverting them, and this I did not wish to do. Had it called my attention to points regarding which I was in error, I would have been glad to publish such corrections.

II.—ITS CHARACTER.

Permit me now to refer to the second point, viz., the character of the article referred to. Dr. Paton calls it a 'malicious misrepresentation,' a 'series of statements, either untrue in point of fact or so placed before my readers as to suggest what is untrue.'

Let us look at the statements in order. I said that 'Dr. Paton's work on the New Hebrides was as follows,' viz., that:

1. 'He was on Tanna about two years, from 1859 to 1862.' This was an error that