

Our Contributors.

SOME CRUMBS OF COMFORT FOR MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY WHO WENT HOME NOT IN GOOD HUMOUR.

BY KNOXIAN.

Some members of Assembly go home very well pleased with the proceedings of the Supreme Court, and some not quite so well pleased. The brethren who had things pretty much their own way are always delighted. They think the General Assembly is a fine body of men, and have great respect for its sayings and doings. People who agree with us and do pretty much what we want them to do are always excellent people. We have great respect for the opinions of the people who agree with us. Brethren who have gone home from Montreal flushed with victory, cannot expect to have a prominent place in this paper. They have had honour enough already. Let them enjoy their triumph in peace. They should even be allowed to bore their neighbours a little with a description of how well they did it. The members who, from some cause or other, have gone home in not very good humour, are the brethren whose cases must be attended to here. They need help.

Here is a brother who *did not succeed with his business*. His motions were defeated. The prayer of his overture was not granted. The overture was perhaps laid on the table. Some member was perhaps cruel enough to suggest in an undertone that it be laid under the table. This unfortunate brother has not quite as high an opinion of the General Assembly as he had when he was a boy. He does not admire Presbyterian polity quite as much as he once did. He sees some good features in the Methodist and Episcopalian forms of government now. He won't make a speech on the excellencies of the Presbyterian system of government for a long time—perhaps not until the Assembly does something that he wants it to do. Brother, don't be in such bad humour. Bear your defeat like a man and a Presbyterian. You are in good company. Gladstone was defeated the other day. The Grand Old Man never whimpered. While the Tories were cheering and the Parnellites yelling like demons, he was quietly engaged in writing a report of the day's proceedings for his Sovereign. Next day he came in smiling, and when he stood up before the first parliament of the world, even his opponents felt that he was every inch a man. Imitate Gladstone in your defeat, and hope for better luck next time. And brother, remember there is a remote possibility that the majority against you may have been right. Of course, that is very improbable, but it is possible.

Here is another brother who needs consolation. The General Assembly *cut his speech short*. When he was getting fairly uncer weigh with a good head of steam on, as he thought, the court become impatient and signified with painful plainness that they did not want any more. This brother feels hurt. An Irishman once fell from the top of a three storey wall on which he was working. "Were you hurt by the fall?" asked a friend. "It was not the fall that hurt me," answered Pat. "*it was the sudden stop.*" The sudden stop in his speech hurt this brother in the Assembly. Now, brother, just console yourself with the thought that the Assembly lost more by not hearing that speech out than you did by the sudden stop. Don't conclude that your brethren are rude and unfeeling and all that sort of thing. You may have risen at a bad time. You may have been longer than you thought you were. Perhaps you speak too often. Possibly your temper was none of the best. Of course you were not tedious—you never are. Of course you did not say anything that anybody else had said you are always original. But the Assembly may have differed from you on these points. We know all you can say about a free country and the right of free speech and all that sort of thing, but men who listen have some rights as well as men who speak.

Here is a brother who tried to speak half a dozen times but could not get a hearing. He cleared his throat, pulled himself together, stood up, struck out his index finger, but his vocal organs in motion, and was just about to say "Mr. Moderator," when somebody else struck in and he had to subside. That good man had the notes of a long speech in his breast pocket. He sat up at night working on these notes. He had his

figures and facts and arguments and illustrations finely arranged—as he thought. That speech might have shaken something to its centre, but it didn't. Of course this member needs consolation. Now, brother, the lack of that speech may not do as much harm as you fear. The Church has done without it since the days of Abraham, and the Church may get on without it for a while longer. The world has done without that speech of yours for six thousand years, and though it would no doubt be much benefited by hearing from you, still, this old world has had a good deal of experience, and may wag on a few years in safety even though your speech is not delivered. Besides, brother, your speech may keep for a year. Some of your sermons have kept for a much longer period. And then think of the amount of possible trouble you may have saved yourself by not delivering that speech. Had it gone off, well, you might have got two or three calls on the strength of it, and what trouble you would have had in deciding which call you should accept. Then you don't know how much damage that speech might have done. You might have hurt some committee, or wounded one of our numerous colleges in some way, or done something that you would be sorry for. It may have been a good thing your speech was not delivered.

And here is a brother who feels bad because the *Assembly meeting was not the kind of thing he expected it to be*. Once upon a time a young man entered one of our colleges and was greatly disappointed. He thought the students spent the greater part of the time in singing and praying and reading religious books. He could see no connection between mathematics and the ministry. He lingered long though not lovingly on *pons asinorum*. It was a suitable place for him to linger. He did not like the college because it was not what he expected. This brother thought the Assembly was a strictly religious meeting. Well, brother, a considerable amount of time is always spent in religious exercises. Were you always present at these exercises? Did you take part in them? Did you help them forward? Now honestly, did you stand around the door and talk about the Franchise Bill or the war, or go up to see the mountains, or down to see the Allan Line: when you might have been at the opening exercises or at the elder's prayer meeting? If you did that *once* you have no right to complain. Besides, you know, brother, the business of the Church must be done. It is just as important in its own place as worship. The machinery must be kept moving. The Apostles started the machinery, or at least a good part of it, and told us to run it. We must do so. The shell is not the egg, but if you try to carry the egg without the shell, you may have trouble. The machinery is not the steam, but you can't use steam without machinery. Brother, I think I detect a slight odour of Plymouthism around here, and I am certain it does not come from me.

There are several other dissatisfied members,—one was not properly reported, another was not put in any committees, a third was not pleased with his accommodation, a fourth had a bad berth in the steamer and caught cold. About 300 spent more money than they expected to spend, and so on. Brethren, if you can't stand these minor ills without complaining, stay at home the next time.

Blessings on the cheery commissioner who stood his defeats and disappointments like a man and a Presbyterian and says he had a good time.

SOME DESULTORY THOUGHTS ON MAN IN NATURE.

BY SIR WILLIAM DAWSON, LL.D., F.R.S., ETC.

Few words are used among us more loosely than "nature." Sometimes it stands for the material universe as a whole. Sometimes it is personified as a sort of goddess, working her own sweet will with material things. Sometimes it expresses the forces which act on matter, and again it stands for material things themselves. It is spoken of as subject to law, but just as often natural law is referred to in terms which imply that nature itself is the lawgiver. It is supposed to be opposed to the equally vague term "supernatural"; but this term is used not merely to denote things above and beyond nature, if there are such, but certain opinions held respecting natural things. On the other hand, the natural is contrasted with the artificial, though this is always the outcome of natural powers and is certainly not supernatural. Again it is applied to the inherent properties of beings for which

we are unable to account, and which we are content to say constitute their nature. We cannot look into the works of any of the more speculative writers of the day without meeting with all these uses of the word, and have to be constantly on our guard lest by a change of its meaning we shall be led to assent to some proposition altogether unfounded.

For illustrations of this convenient, though dangerous, ambiguity, I may turn at random to almost any page in Darwin's celebrated work on the "Origin of Species." In the beginning of Chapter III. he speaks of animals "in a state of nature," that is, not in a domesticated or artificial condition, so that here nature is opposed to the devices of man. Then he speaks of species as "arising in nature," that is, spontaneously produced in the midst of certain external conditions of environment outside of the organic world. A little farther on he speaks of useful varieties as given to man by "the hand of Nature," which here becomes an imaginary person; and it is worthy of notice that in this place the printer or proof-reader has given the word an initial capital, as if a proper name. In the next section he speaks of the "works of Nature" as superior to those of art. Here the word is not only opposed to the artificial, but seems to imply some power above material things and comparable with or excelling the contriving intelligence of man. I do not mean by these examples to imply that Darwin is in this respect more inaccurate than any other writers. On the contrary, he is greatly surpassed by many of his contemporaries in the varied and fantastic uses of this versatile word. An illustration which occurs to me here, as at once amusing and instructive, is an expression used by Romanes, one of the cleverest of the followers of the great evolutionist, and which appears to him to give a satisfactory explanation of the mystery of elevation in nature. He says, "Nature selects the best individuals out of each generation to live." Here nature must be an intelligent agent or the statement is simply nonsensical. The same alternative applies to much of the use of the favourite term "natural selection." In short, those who use such modes of expression would be more consistent if they were at once to come back to the definition of Seneca, that nature is "a certain divine purpose manifested in the world."

The derivation of the word gives us the idea of something produced or becoming, and it is curious that the Greek *physis*, though etymologically distinct, conveys the same meaning—a coincidence which may perhaps lead us to a safe and serviceable definition. Nature rightly understood is, in short, an orderly system of things in time and space, and this is not invariable, but in a state of constant movement and progress, whereby it is always becoming something different from what it was. Now man is placed in the midst of this orderly, law-regulated yet ever progressive system, and is himself a part of it; and if we can understand his real relations to its other parts, we shall have made some approximation to a true philosophy. The subject has been often discussed, but is perhaps not yet quite exhausted.*

Regarding man as a part of nature, we must hold to his entering into the grand unity of the natural system, and must not set up imaginary antagonisms between man and nature as if he were outside of it. An instance of this appears in Tyndall's celebrated Belfast address, where he says, in explanation of the errors of certain of the older philosophers, that "the experiences which formed the web and woof of their theories were chosen not from the study of nature, but from that which lay much nearer to them—the observation of Man;" a statement this which would make man a supernatural or at least a preter-natural being. Again, it does not follow because man is a part of nature that he must be precisely on a level with its other parts. There are in nature many planes of existence, and man is no doubt on one of its higher planes and possesses distinguishing powers and properties of his own. Nature, like a perfect organism, is not all eye or all hand, but includes various organs, and so far as we see it in our planet, man is its head, though we can easily conceive that there may be higher beings in other parts of the universe beyond our ken.

The view which we may take of man's position relatively to the beings which are nearest to him, namely,

* "Man's Place in Nature," *Princeton Review*, November, 1878. "The Unity of Nature," by the Duke of Argyll, 1884, may be considered as suggestive of the thoughts of this article.