

Our Contributors.

CONCERNING SUDDEN TRANSITIONS.

BY KNOXIAN.

One of the most difficult things in public speaking is to pass in a natural, easy, graceful kind of way from one point to another. Many a speaker can hammer away well enough on one point, but when he has to pass from that point and take up another, trouble often comes in. The transitions are always the most difficult part of a speech that has anything in it. Of course if a speech has no points the difficulty is obviated because then the speaker has no point to pass from or come to. In that case the difficulty comes upon the hearers.

The difficulty of sudden transition is not confined to rhetoric. Would that it were! Many of our people are just now feeling the inconvenience of passing from years of fair commercial prosperity to a season of comparative dullness in business. Short crops, low prices, lack of snow and "la grippe" have combined to pinch Ontario just a little bit. We don't take kindly to pinching. We are not used to that sort of thing. Most of us take three fairly good meals a day, wear pretty good clothes, live in reasonably good houses, pay our debts and on the whole have about as good a time as any people in the world. A goodly number have a little pile that they like to add a little to as they go on the journey of life. Now whilst a dull season does not seriously affect the personal comfort of any but the very poorest it does in many cases seriously affect the additions to the little pile. A man who expected to add to his little pile is disappointed if he does not get anything to add and he is worse than disappointed if he has to subtract. Never does a human being realize so vividly the difference between addition and subtraction, as when he has to subtract from his little pile at the end of the year instead of add to it. It is this sudden transition from addition to subtraction that is troubling so many Ontario people just now. Sudden transitions are always hard to manage gracefully.

A sudden transition from depression to inflation is called a "boom." A boom is an unmitigated, unrelieved curse, financially, morally and every way you take it. The only real cure for a boom is a lunatic asylum and a gaol large enough to hold about half the male population of the place in which the boom is raging. To divide the people who are unfit to be at large and say who should be put into the asylum and who into the other institution would be as fine a piece of judicial work as ever fell to the lot of a jurist. To pass from good business times to depression in a reasonably contented frame of mind is not easy: to pass from depression into the midst of a boom and keep fairly honest and passably sane is an impossibility for some people.

Sudden transitions from wealth to poverty or from poverty to wealth are always trying. Perhaps not one person in five hundred can go suddenly up or come suddenly down and keep a warm heart and a level head. There is a large amount of grace and good sense needed to make such transitions in a creditable way. Of course most of us think we could stand ten thousand a year without any danger. If the Almighty thought it would be better for us to have ten thousand a year most likely we would have it. He knows us much better than we know ourselves and perhaps sees that it would not be safe to give many of us ten thousand a year suddenly. One reason assigned for giving many clergymen small salaries is that large incomes would make them proud and unspiritual in mind. Most people are willing enough to risk the effects of big incomes upon their own spirituality, but some of them don't like to put temptation in the way of poor ministers. It is very kind of people to watch over the minister in that way. Kindness of that variety costs nothing and that may be one reason why there is so much of it.

The transition from the position of a candidate to that of a fully fledged member of parliament or municipal man is not always gracefully taken. We have heard of candidates who got through an extraordinary amount of shaking hands, clapping on the back, enquiring for the wife and family, baby-kissing and other electioneering expedients during the campaign, but who in some mysterious way didn't know some of their leading supporters as soon as the campaign was over.

There is no transition that tires like getting married. Men who act rationally all the rest of their lives often make fools of themselves when they marry. Old fellows are always the worst. Brides do sometimes seem to think that they ought to be waited on to a very great extent. Newly married couples are as a rule easily recognized on a railway train or steamboat. Marrying is a trying kind of exercise and the number of people who can make the transition from single to married life with perfect good taste is not quite as large as the number who marry.

THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH TO THE AGE.

BY FIDELIS.

The Church of Christ is always to be a "Light in the world"; a witness for the truth of God against the darkness and rebellion of the human heart. Each age has its own special evils to be contended with—its own special claims on the faithful witness against Roman idolatry and atheistic philosophy, against Judaising formalism and rationalizing subtleties,—against northern polytheism and southern corruption.

At a later period, the true spirit of Christianity arose in its might against those who would have taken away the "liberty with which Christ had made her free; against the fetters of ecclesiastical and priestly tyranny and the traditions of men," which "made the commandments of God of none effect."

In our own day, the Church of God, taking the term in its widest sense, is a witness still. But what are the more special forms of evil that to-day demand her emphatic witness; and is her witness as emphatic as these evils demand?

The most cursory glance at the present state of society and modern currents of thought makes it plain that secularism, in its myriad forms, is to-day the great enemy of Christianity. The favourite scientific philosophy is openly determined to deny the spiritual in man and Nature; to identify the law of an intelligent lawgiver with a blind necessity; to enshroud man in the meshes of an iron fatalism that is "without God and without hope in the world." There may be no more actual opposition to spiritual religion than there has always been in the carnal heart of man. But the opposition is far more openly declared, systematic and aggressive. With a large portion of society there is an absolute cutting adrift from the whole idea of personal religion, in its widest sense, even from the very idea of a personal God. The influence of the apostles of this philosophy, influencing directly the cultured classes, has filtered through these down to the lowest. A large class of men and women in all our communities have drifted entirely away from revealed religion, and are living "without hope and without God in the world." The decided increase of suicide generally and of crime in the higher classes of society, is only one out of many signs of the drift and trend of the anti-Christian spirit—this force of the spirit of Antichrist.

In the presence of this increased concentration of force on the part of the great enemy of the Church, surely the Church should be wise in her generation, and concentrate her forces to meet the enemy! When the great fundamental forces of the truths of God and Christ and immortality are the points at issue in the most momentous battle ever fought, it is no time for the army of the Lord to be trifling with internal contentions over the minor points that divide them. Human minds are so differently constituted in many ways that it is simply impossible that all should arrive at the same conclusions in regard to abstract truth, utterly vain to expect intellectual agreement in all points of Christian doctrine even among the members of the same Church and the same family. And the more complicated such schemes of doctrine are, the more impossible must be absolute unanimity concerning it. Most thoughtful people are beginning to recognise that was a mistake of our forefathers to compile long and elaborate systems, at least in so far as they were intended to formulate the creed of a whole Church. In regard to such, we may safely say, that, the more complete and logical they are, the more they are open to suspicion; for they are simply the projection of the human mind into a region too rare for the powers of the human mind to grasp. Consequently the history of elaborate creeds and complicated theological systems is the history of the disintegration of the Christian Church over the "mint, anise, and cummin" of system; while "the weightier matters of the law" were left in the background. A more adequate and reverent sense of the profound mystery of the being of God has made the most thoughtful and reverent spirits disinclined to dogmatize too definitely in regard to such matters as His eternal purposes; while a larger and truer view of inspiration has conducted to the same result: and the great exigencies of our day emphatically call on the Church to merge minor differences in the grand uniting points of living faith and practice, as distinct from speculative opinion; and to do this among her own children as well as with Christians of other communions. For we can hardly make much progress in the cause of promoting Christian unity, with other denominations, if we are ready to visit with ecclesiastical censure and penalty similar deviations from stereotyped formularies on the part of Presbyterians themselves, in regard to such purely theoretical problems as eschatological mysteries, or rival theories of sanctification! As to such questions the only real preventive of "divisive courses" is to allow a margin of liberty for inevitable difference of opinion. By any other course the Church is sure to incur the guilt of Schism—the cutting and wounding of the mystical body of Christ—besides hardening those dividing walls that so unfortunately hamper and discredit our modern Christianity. But it is a hopeful sign of the times that the call for the modification of the present terms of creed-subscription has become so influential and so urgent that it must needs command attention. When men like Dr. Philip Schaff and Dr. James McCosh unite with others in urging important modifications of the Confession of Faith; in particular, "that it should contain some clear, explicit, and emphatic statement of the love of God to all His creatures," we may well hope that steps will be taken to remedy an evil which has been the cause of more harm than, in some quarters, would readily be believed. One of the first requisites however, to a greater unity, must be the free admission to the communion table of all who "love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," on the ground of that divinely given test of fitness alone, without insisting on a concurrence of intellectual opinion in sectarian shibboleths. As Rowland Hill put it long ago, the table "is the table of the Lord," not of the particular denomination,—and "no other term of communion should be insisted on in any Church, but what are necessary to constitute a real Christian."

The second duty of the Church to the age, is to make greater efforts to secure the purity and consistency of her membership. This critical age is lynx-eyed with regard to the morality of "Church-members," in whom it naturally expects to find Christians. And it happens too often that they fail to meet our Lord's test: "By their fruits ye shall know them." It is a common taunt with sceptics that they do not find a higher morality prevalent among Christians than among those who repudiate Christianity altogether. Certainly the Church of Christ is far from doing what she might, in holding up a living Christ, speaking through "living epistles," to a restless and craving world! And the world expects to find grapes on vines, though it knows better than to look for them on thorns. But the scandalous shortcomings and inconsistencies of many professing Christians might well draw down the solemn denunciation which comes out so clearly in our Revised Version. "I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meeting." The Church witnesses feebly indeed to the reality of the "great salvation" from sin, to the promise and potency of a full and complete sanctification in Christ's holiness and the truth that "without holiness no man can see the Lord," does not receive, as a rule, a sufficiently prominent place in her preaching. A superficial view of salvation as a mere escape from penalties, to be gained by a mere assent to certain great truths, is widely prevalent, and is at the bottom—not only of much of the spurious Christianity of the day, but also of the frequent misconception of the relation between "faith and works," as if the one could ever truly exist without the other; and this widespread unfaithfulness of the Christian Church is the cause of far greater injury to the Christian cause than are all the attacks of all the sceptics put together. Let the Church, in unmistakable tones, teach her people their true duty and privilege in this particular of holiness, and a better day will soon dawn for her and for the world.

And, in connection with this duty, the Church cannot afford to stand idly by, and ignore the great social problems of the day, the present issue, more especially, between rich and powerful capital and poverty-stricken and toiling labour. Many thoughtful observers feel that "Society must undergo a transformation or perish;" and Christianity can and should be the chief agent in bringing about such a transformation. She, inspired with the fervour of her first love, and with the full enthusiasm of humanity, can be a true peace-maker and bridge the gulf between the "classes and the masses." In the past, she has too much left this, her part, to mere humanitarians,—too much left the masses, outside the gates of her fine churches, in which soiled and threadbare garments seem so much out of place that their owners seldom venture in.

"Where," asks Father Barry, in a strong article in one of the English reviews, "where are the multitude that should throng nave and aisles? Outside, I say, brawling, drinking, tearing their bread from one another, working with despair in their hearts the while, as many hours of the day and night as they can toil and live. Are we surprised that they find no salvation in the name of Christ? The more the pity, I say. But whose sin is the greater, their or that of the nineteenth century Pharisee, who in the place of bread gives them a stone?" These words are not too strong and show the direct interest that the Church has in such movements as those which tend to secure shorter hours and fairer wages for men in the bitter scramble for bare life. They will neither find their way into our churches, nor would they be very hopeful listeners if they should. Beside which, the sin of those who refuse them a fair share in the wealth their labour produces lies at the door of the Church, if she does not deliver her message to men of wealth with the faithfulness that is her sacred duty.

Hitherto, to the Church's shame be it said, the men who have courageously fought the battles of the poor against their oppressors have been mainly secularists and atheists, thus creating the impression that the Church, unlike her Master, cared nothing for the present bodily and keenly-felt needs of a suffering world. But there are signs that she is beginning to awake to her responsibility in this respect, though they come as yet most prominently from the Anglican and Roman Catholic communions. And all honour to those who lead the way! The noble stand taken during the past year by Archbishop Manning and Bishop Temple in the great London "strike"—to which was mainly due its orderly course and peaceful termination—is one of many tokens that the Church at large is beginning to take the place that Frederick Robertson long ago foreshadowed for her,—that of a peace-making Abigail between the selfish Nabals and Dives of modern life, and its down-trodden, struggling Davids!

A not less significant sign is the manifesto issued in the name of the Lambeth Conference of 1888, in the name of 145 bishops, in which occurs the following remarkable passage: "Intimately connected with these moral questions, (such as that of the Sabbath) is the attitude of the Christian Church towards the social problems of the day. Excessive inequality in the distribution of this world's goods, vast accumulation and desperate poverty, side by side; these suggest many anxious considerations to any thoughtful person who is penetrated with the mind of Christ. No more important problems can well occupy the attention—whether of clergy or laity—than such as are connected with what is popularly called Socialism.* To study schemes proposed for redressing the social balance, to welcome the good

*To promote an intelligent knowledge of a subject which Dean Plumptre says the clergy cannot afford to ignore, he recommends for their perusal John Rae's "Contemporary Socialism."