

Our Contributors.

LIFTING CONVERSATION OUT OF THE DITCH.

BY KNONONIAN.

In one of the best chapters of that charming and instructive book, "Imago Christi," Dr. Stalker says: "It is a rare gift to be able to lift conversation out of the ditch and lead it to manly and profitable themes."

It certainly is a rare gift, so rare that many people say conversation is fast becoming a lost art. Is there any reason why we should not be able to converse as pleasantly and intelligently as our grandfathers and grandmothers did? We can all talk enough—why should we talk in the ditch? It is easy to understand how cheap postage, the railway, the telegraph and the telephone and the daily newspaper have almost made letter-writing a lost art. If a letter costs three cents you are not likely to put as much or as good matter in it as if it cost fifty. If you expect to go by rail to see your friend or if he may happen to come your way almost any time, you cannot bring yourself to write a long letter to him. Nobody writes a long account of anything to a friend if he knows the friend may read a better account of it in his daily paper. Lovers and people of leisure may still write long letters but very few other people do. Business letters are nearly always short. It is amusing and might be useful for some clergymen to note the way in which a busy man of affairs can condense on a postal card. Condensation is not a lost art except in Church courts and other deliberative bodies.

Perhaps it might be a useful thing to glance at some of the ditches into which conversation often falls and from which it is the duty of every good citizen to try and lift it "to manly and profitable themes." The most common is

THE WEATHER DITCH.

Fine day this.
Yes, fine day.
Good deal of rain last week.
Yes, a good deal.
Very warm this time last year.
Really don't remember—never do remember from one year to another.
Yes, it was very warm in the beginning of last September.
Think we'll soon have winter.
Yes, winter will soon be coming on now.
Very mild last winter.
Yes, very.
Probably this winter will be colder.
Perhaps it may.
Our winters are usually cold.
Yes, we generally have pretty cold weather in winter.
This weather ditch is a time honoured and useful institution. What could we ever have done without it when we began to go out for a quiet evening. How could we have existed without it when we were seated beside silent sweet sixteen or beside a bashful man. There were times when life would not have been worth living had there been no weather to talk about, but still the fact remains that discussing the weather is a stale, unprofitable business. It does not affect the weather and certainly it does not edify the mind or improve the heart. It simply kills time and killing time is a grave offence.

THE GOSSIP DITCH

is a dirty one. Nearly every sentence begins with—did you hear.

Did you hear that about the Smiths?
Yes, isn't that dreadful.
Perfectly awful.
Did you hear about Mrs. Jones?
No. Do tell what it is.
Mrs. Jones did so-and-so.
Dreadful—what an awful woman she is.
Of course you heard about Jemima Brown.
No, dear me, what is it?

And there it goes until every miserable little bit of gossip in the neighbourhood is raked up and turned over and threshed out. What condition must the mind of a human being be in if it can delight in feeding on such street sweepings. Women are often blamed for gossiping but there are things dressed in men's clothes who are just as fond of gossip and talk as the most voluble sister that ever wagged her unruly member. And, tell it not in Gath, there are clergymen who would be formidable rivals to the hag who clutches her baby and runs across the street after breakfast to retail some gossip that she cannot keep until the afternoon.

THE SCANDAL DITCH

is the worst of all. Talmage says that when the devil has any work to do in Brooklyn that he is ashamed to attend to personally he always gets a few well-known scandal-mongers in his neighbourhood to undertake it. Just how bad the devil is it is hard to say but unless he has lost every vestige of his angelic nature it is impossible that he can be as vile as some scandal-mongering members of the Adam family are. Satan may not be quite as black as he is painted and it is quite possible he would be ashamed if caught buckstering garbage in the style in which some of his agents conduct the business.

The ditch of

ECCLESIASTICAL SMALL TALK

may be harmless enough but it is always rapid, sometimes a bore, and, to many who are forced into it, painfully, cruelly monotonous.

Dr. Smoothbore is called to Smithville.
Yes, I wonder if he will go.
Dr. Boanerges is spoken of for Pumpkinville.
What on earth do the people see in him?
The deceased wife's sister will soon be up again.
Yes, that is a great business.
Hope they get it settled this time.
Do you know Mr. Punk, of Punktown?
Yes.
What do you think of him?
Did you ever hear Dr. Forcible-Feeble?
Yes.
How do you like him?

And there it goes perhaps for a whole Sabbath afternoon. The most uncomfortable ditch of this kind a mortal ever gets into is a mission station that has been supplied by about forty students or a vacancy in which fifty preachers have got a "hearin'." Surely it is everybody's duty to study the art of lifting conversation out of the ditch.

THE BI-CENTENARY OF "THE GLORIOUS RETURN" OF THE WALDENSES IN 1689.

IV.

We come now to

III—THE FESTIVAL AT PRALI,

which took place August 28, 1889.

The occasion of it was the placing of a stone above the door of the temple there, in remembrance of the fact stated in the inscription thereon, which is as follows: "This temple, profaned by idols during their exile, was the first in which the Waldenses, after they returned into their valleys, celebrated Evangelical worship, August 28, 1689."

Those who took part in the Balsille festival, and wished to do so in this one, had to leave shortly after the former. After five hours' walk, in broad daylight, during which they had to climb an immense hill, in order to go down into dark and deep valleys, they reached Prali about sundown. Now, no more vines, as they had seen as far as Maneille, now, no more fruit trees, but pines, larches, streams and bare rocks. They were shown the curiosity of the country, a cherry-tree whose fruit ripens sometimes in October. It is 1,445 metres (4,700 feet) above the level of the sea. What a dismal country! Hospitable for all that. They got good beds and plenty to eat. Life there is not very stylish. One has to wash himself at the village fountain, and patiently wait his turn to perform this necessary operation.

The temple is the one into which Arnaud entered. He took away the images in it, made them be thrown out at the windows, and preached at the door, on a plank laid on two casks. It was now, as then, too small for the occasion. The meeting was held in the grove of Augeres, twenty minutes' walk from the principal village. The attendance was smaller than at Balsille; about 700 perhaps. A choir of young girls, like a beautiful young flower-plot, was there. They rose to sing, and it was most pleasing to see their young countenances express deep emotion when they sang the "Return from Exile." The men had in their hats branches of edelweiss which they had gathered as they were coming over the mountain.

The exercises began with the reading of Psalm cxiv., "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side," etc. Then M. Tron, pastor at Villar, told the story of August 28, 1689. He described Arnaud preaching from the text, "Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth." He said that the pastor-colonel's hearers were all armed peasants, Waldenses who wished to re-establish their worship in the country, and to die there. He spoke of the mist, the rain and the snow, which were means of protection and deliverance to their forefathers two hundred years past. He added: "Our help has been, our help is now, our help will be in the name of God." Then he applied these words to the old men, to the men in their prime, to the children, to the doctors, to the lawyers, and to the young Alpine officers, who listened to him attentively, with their hand on the hilt of their sword.

M. Ribetti, pastor at Pisa, came next. Though he has preached thirty years in Italian, he is quite fluent in the mother-tongue* of the Waldenses. He asked why were they there? Because the scenes around them spoke of an immovable faith, and they needed to have their own strengthened. How strong was the faith of that great Arnaud who put off his mail and sword, put on gown and bands, and then preached and dispensed the Lord's Supper, two hundred years ago in the adjoining temple! The speaker proved that liberty of conscience was won by the heroic witnesses for the faith whose memory they were honouring. Would his hearers do anything to express to God their gratitude for the happy times in which they lived? He defended proselytizing. He said that those eminent Italians, Lignano and Mariano, applauded their evangelistic efforts. His fellow-citizens owed all to the Bible, and to be truly thankful for it, they should make it known. He assured them of victory. He hoped that indifferent Waldenses would return into the kingdom of God.

The "Return from Exile" was sung, then Mr. Piggott, representing the Wesleyan Methodist Churches in Italy, spoke in Italian. He was happy to take part in their festivals. He had taken an interest in their history from his childhood.

*The French. The Waldenses are as warmly attached to it, as the French-Canadians are. Italian is, however, spreading among them.

His sympathy with their Church had grown since he had come into Italy. These festivals would bring it to maturity. He was a comrade of theirs in the war for the Gospel, a leader of one of the regiments of the army engaged in it. The Waldenses were the first regiment. It was for them to lead others forward. His Church would always rejoice in their progress, and he hoped that they would rejoice in that of his. Their history did not belong only to them, but to all Christian Churches, just as their mountains, in some measure, belonged to all who came there to breathe fresh, pure air. Their history strengthened the faith of others. The Lord would reward them for all their weariness and conflicts.

Mr. Simpson, of the Free Church of Scotland, spoke. He accounted it an honour to help them in their great festival of commemoration, however little he might be able to do. He felt yesterday at Balsille, that he should remain bareheaded in reverence. But we do not live in the past. Our motto is: "Higher." To complete the work of Arnaud, the Gospel must be shed abroad into all Italy. That is the work which God has given the Waldenses. Italy has a glorious past. Why should not Italy of to-day, enlightened from above, carry Christ's banner to those in darkness and the shadow of death? He prayed that all heavenly blessings might rest on that glorious Church.

M. Segers, a deputy from the Churches of Holland, spoke next. Since the Glorious Return brotherly bonds had not ceased to exist between the Waldensian Church and those of his country. When the Waldenses came to Prali, they took out of the temple everything which smelled of Romanism. In like manner, take all idols out of your hearts. God be ever with you!

M. Maerkt brought the salutations of the Waldensian Churches of Wurtemberg. He is not, himself, of Waldensian origin, but he is the pastor of a Waldensian Church in Wurtemberg.

M. Ferrier, a pastor in Geneva, followed. Your history is told the children in our schools. We have in our cities, Waldensian colonies which do the name honour. Love your country as Jesus loved His. But the heavenly one is still better. Press on to the peace of the Eternal Kingdom. Half way up all very high mountains there are peaks which seem to be the very top. But when one reaches them he finds that he was mistaken.* They are called "lazy people's fields," for lazy people declare that they have no wish to go any higher. You have gone far up but you are not yet at the top. Up! up! leaning on Jesus. Let us make for the home in the country on high where Jesus is waiting for us.

M. Gonin, a missionary to South Africa, came next. He was happy to be present, for he was himself a Waldensian, yea more, a descendant of Arnaud. He brought the best wishes of their brethren in South Africa, where there are descendants of Waldenses who went thither with French Huguenots. He brought also the salutations of M. A. Murray, who represented the Dutch Churches in South Africa. May God load you with His blessings. Rest on Him and let your help be in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

M. Juhle, a German minister, brought also the greetings of friends in Brandebourg.

The exercises closed with the singing of the 25th hymn and prayer. Then the meeting broke up. Some went by the Col. Julien, others by the Roux, to go home. The less daring took the way of the Pèrier.

T. F.
Elder's Mills, Ont.

A CONTRAST—THE WORSHIP OF ONE GOD AND OLD HEATHENISM.

Anything that can be written to show the glory and beauty of the Jewish religion as instituted by Moses when compared with the practices and superstitions of heathenism found in Egypt, where Moses was educated, and in the old empires of Babylon, Persia and Assyria, and the after-great republics of Greece and Rome, is interesting and assuring to Christians. Religion is necessary in the world. Civilized men cannot do without religion. We must have some hope, belief and trust higher than the mere level of human nature. The difference, as seen in old history, between Hebrewism and heathenism is most glaring. The first is ennobling, elevating, virtuous, grand, raising men and women from the dust as it were of humanity; the other grovelling, vicious, inhuman, dragging their gods of gold, silver and stone which the people worshipped and the worshippers into the sloughs of vice and human bloodshed. We therefore come to the conclusion that one is from a God of supreme love, purity and grand spiritual nature, whilst the other is the product of an evil spirit, and the worst human passions. I have lately read two works on the customs of the heathens of old—the histories of Josephus and Herodotus—the great historian of Halicarnassus, who lived 450 years before Christ. The first, Josephus, not only gives us a history of the Jews, but of the customs and vices of heathen nations that surrounded them, from the time of Abraham down to the appearance of our Saviour. The great characters that stand out in Jewish history, such as Abraham, Job, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, David, Elijah, Elisha, and the noble army of prophets, so prominent for wisdom, philanthropy and virtue, form a wonderful contrast to the more wicked and blood-thirsty heathen great men.

* Hills peep o'er hills, and Alps on Alps arise.—Pope.