

Our Contributors.

ARE CANADIANS HUMOURLESS?

BY KNOXONIAN.

The speech delivered in London the other day by the Hon. Edward Blake when presenting the portrait of Gladstone to the National Liberal Club was in the honourable gentleman's own peculiar style, and will no doubt rank as one of his best efforts. The occasion was great enough to call for the best that is in any Liberal leader, and no doubt our Canadian orator put his best foot foremost. Some of the press-men, however, tell us that the effect was somewhat disappointing. The speech was lofty in tone, severely classical in style, and was delivered in capital form, but it was not the kind of speech an English, Scotch, or Irishman wants to hear after dinner. John Bull can be severe when severity is the proper thing, but he wants no severity after dining. The speech was good—perhaps too good—but it was not the kind of speech expected. British after-dinner oratory is supposed to be humorous; and Mr. Blake, though he has good Irish blood in his veins, never was very successful in putting Irish humour into his speeches.

Are Canadians lacking in humour? Is it lack of humour that makes many Canadian speakers even of the first class dull almost to stupidity, while the British speaker generally has more or less sparkle? Of course there are marked exceptions on both sides. Joe Howe and Sir John Macdonald were lively, bright speakers. Sir Oliver Mowat is serious enough when he lectures on Christianity, but the honourable gentleman rarely speaks on the platform without saying something that tickles you a little and makes you indulge in a quiet healthful little laugh. Laurier is the one Canadian who is bright every time. On the other hand there are intolerably stupid men in the public of Great Britain. It is said that one prominent Gladstonian—a Q. C., whose name is well known in Canadian legal circles—lost his seat at the general election simply because he is a bore. Making all due allowance, however, for exceptions, the rule is that Canadian oratory is likely to be strained, severe and destitute of sparkle, while the best British oratory is as a rule genial, humorous, good-natured and without strain. The cause of the difference is easily found. The typical man who speaks in Britain is a well fed, well clad, well educated gentleman, who takes plenty of sleep and has a good balance at the bank. He has time to make a few impromptu jokes for each speech. The Canadian public speaker is often an underpaid, over-worked, under-slept man, who has no balance in his favour at the bank and perhaps one against him at the establishment of his tailor and grocer. There is all the difference in the world between a rich man who follows statesmanship as a profession and a man who takes the hours given to public affairs out of his own daily struggle for bread and butter, and who knows that every hour given to the public makes the butter on the bread thinner.

Still it would be a good thing if our Canadian oratory were formed more after the British model. The difference between the styles may be strikingly seen by comparing a speech recently delivered by Lord Rosebery, and most of the speeches delivered at the Board of Trade Banquet in Toronto the other evening. Rosebery is one of the grandest men in the world, a man of high character, noble aims and splendid ability. But he did make a witty speech on Scotchmen. Even when he talked politics he was humorous and bright; and though he made one or two points for the party, he made them in such a neat, happy way that even Lord Salisbury could not have objected. Now just compare that speech for a moment with the speeches delivered by Sir John Thompson and the Finance Minister at the banquet the other evening, and you get a clear idea of the difference between the

British and Canadian styles. Sir John Thompson started out well but he did not go far until a change seemed to come over him, and the part of his speech that dealt with toleration was almost menacing in tone. Mr. Foster's effort might have done for part of his budget speech, but no Englishman of even third rank would like to have delivered it after dinner. If compelled to do so, he would have put the matter in a more attractive form. Sir Oliver Mowat comes nearer the British model than any public man we now have. Even Lord Rosebery himself cannot make a pawky allusion or sugar-coat a pill more successfully than Sir Oliver does. Sir John Macdonald's humorous, anecdotal style was formed on British models, and his mode of delivery for years was what is known as the House of Commons style. Laurier is unique. He has the polish and easy grace of a Frenchman combined with the hard thinking of a typical Scotchman and the humour of an Irishman. This combination gives him an immense advantage over most other men and will doubtless always keep him in the front rank.

In Canadian ecclesiastical oratory the contrast with the British style is equally marked. The British speech is likely to be dignified, quiet, easy, argumentative, and occasionally humorous. The Canadian effort is likely to be strained, nervous, jerky, laboured and perhaps at times a trifle ill-natured. The Canadian is too likely to look as if he were standing guard over his learning, his dignity, his orthodoxy and several other things real or imaginary. The old country man of the first class sweeps along in easy style as the ex-Moderator of the Kirk did in the Montreal Assembly, last summer, and allows the learning and dignity and orthodoxy to take care of themselves. Of course there are marked exceptions on both sides.

The adoption of the British style, in so far as we nervous, over-strained Canadians can adopt their style, would be an immense advantage to both church and state.

A professional humourist without a high moral purpose soon becomes the most wearisome kind of man. A speaker with a light play of humour on a deep moral substratum, one who has high aims and noble purposes, who sparkles naturally and often unconsciously, will always be the most influential and attractive. A really strong man is seldom severe in anything. The highest kind of men are not grim.

THE LATE REV. WM. FRASER, D.D.

The late Rev. W. Fraser, D.D., was born on May 19th, 1808, at McLellan's Brook, near New Glasgow, in the County of Pictou, Nova Scotia. He was of Highland Scotch ancestry, his paternal grandfather, Hugh Fraser, of the parish of Kiltarlity, Invernesshire, was one of the pioneer band of Scottish emigrants who came to Pictou on the ship "Hector" in 1773. He brought with him three young children, the eldest of whom, Donald, known afterwards as Donald, "miller," was the father of the subject of this sketch. The maternal grandfather, Thomas Fraser, of the parish of Kirkhill, arrived later in 1784.

His childhood and youth were spent under his father's roof at McLellan's Brook, his minister being the apostolic Dr. James McGregor. He received his academic and theological education in the Pictou Academy, of which Dr. Thomas McCulloch was the head, a man of light and leading, whose name is inseparably linked with the beginnings of higher education in the Lower Provinces. Prior to his ordination, Mr. Fraser did missionary work in various places, travelling as far as New Richmond on the Bay Chaleurs. At the age of 26 he was ordained and was sent as a missionary to Upper Canada, and after a year devoted to missionary labors in the north western portion of the Province, was settled in 1835 at Bond Head, in the County of Simcoe, where he remained during all the succeeding years of his active ministry. His field was in connection with the Missionary Presbytery of the Canadas,

afterwards the United Presbyterian Church. He was the last survivor of the pioneers of that body.

From the first he heartily identified himself with his chosen sphere of labor and with this western country, but retained till his dying day the fondest recollections of his old home and an ardent love for his native Province, which he revisited on several occasions. He followed the course of public and ecclesiastical affairs in Nova Scotia with close and unflagging interest; and possessed of a singularly retentive memory for time, place and circumstance, his reminiscences of men and things in the earlier days there were vivid and entertaining. Nova Scotians, and especially Pictou county people, wherever he met them, found immediate access to Dr. Fraser's heart.

Bond Head was but struggling into existence when the young minister was placed there in 1835. The country, since one of the finest portions of Ontario, was new and rough, and the settlers scattered. It was a wide field, embracing, in whole or part, the townships of West Gwillimbury, in which Bond Head lies, Tecumseth, Essa, Innisfil, and King. Mr. Fraser's labours were necessarily abundant; but possessed as he was of a sound constitution and unvarying good health, and always methodical in his duties, he was able to overtake them with efficiency, as well as to attend to the cultivation of a small farm, with which the very scanty stipend of the minister of those days was eked out. Nor were his labours in vain. The cause took root. The soil was good. The little congregations grew, if not rapidly, at least with a wholesome and encouraging growth; and as he withdrew successively from the outlying portions of the field, confining his labours, at length, to Bond Head alone, he had the satisfaction of seeing several strong and fully equipped congregations occupying the ground.

From an early date Mr. Fraser took an active part in the educational work of the district, and as Local Superintendent of Schools and Secretary of the Board of Public Instruction for South Simcoe, was connected with the administration of the Common School system from its organization till the year 1871, when the local superintendences and the County Boards of Examiners gave way to the present arrangements. On more than one occasion the teachers under his jurisdiction united in handsome testimonials of their regard. As a young man in his native Province, Mr. Fraser had stood out as a total abstainer and an ardent advocate of total abstinence, when such a position made one quite singular. The only change of view on this point was in the direction of more urgency. He was always to be found in the front rank of temperance reformers. As secretary for many years, and afterwards, until his removal from the locality, President of the Bond Head Bible Society, he rendered important service. His interest in public affairs was keen. There were few better informed on the great questions of the day; but, as is usually wise for a minister to do, he refrained from active interference in local contests.

Mr. Fraser was one who gave good heed to the vow of conscientious attendance at the courts of the Church. To go to Presbytery or Synod meant something in those primitive days. If, as sometimes happened, Presbytery met as far east as Newcastle, 90 miles distant from Bond Head, the horse back ride thither and return, with the soderunts of the Presbytery, meant a whole week's toil. In the Church courts, even when length of days and service gave him the right to take a leading part, Dr. Fraser spoke but seldom, and then briefly. But his knowledge of Church law and procedure, his calm and judicial spirit and excellent business qualities were early recognised, and in 1851 he was appointed to succeed the late Dr. W. Proudfoot as Clerk of the United Presbyterian Synod. At the Union of 1861 he became associated with Dr. Reid in the clerkship of the Canada Presbyterian Synod, and at the Union of 1875, with Dr. Reid and Prof. McKerras

in the clerkship of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. His work, that of recording the minutes, was done with unvarying care and accuracy; seldom was a criticism offered or sustained; and, blessed by nature with a clear, distinct, and commanding voice, even the reading of the minutes and the calling of the roll became in his hands a not uninteresting exercise. The duties of the clerkship were laid down only in June last, when he had entered on his eighty-fifth year. The tribute then paid by the General Assembly to their venerable officer was felt on all hands to have been well earned by his forty years of admirable service. The Assembly of 1872 of the Canada Presbyterian Church had honored him with the Moderator's chair.

Shortly before his retirement from the active duties of the ministry at Bond Head in 1879, Queen's University, Kingston, conferred upon Mr. Fraser the degree of Doctor of Divinity. In 1881 he removed to Barrie, the county town and seat of Presbytery, where he resided till the close of his life, giving help to brethren as opportunity offered, and maintaining uninterrupted interest in the work of his Presbytery. A little more than two years ago he was seized with neuralgia of the heart, but rallied sufficiently from the first attacks, which were very severe, to be present at the General Assembly at Kingston in 1891 and to do a portion of his work as clerk. From that time he slowly and gradually failed in strength. He was strongly desirous of attending the meetings of the Presbyterian Council in Toronto in September last, and, to the surprise of his family and friends, was able to come to the city and be present at several of the sessions, taking a keen pleasure in the proceedings. Early in December his weakness increased, and it became evident that the end could not be far off. His general health was almost perfect, but there was a fatal decay of heart power. For several days before his death the failure of strength became very urgent. He was in much distress through weakness. The end came on Christmas Day, when he gently fell asleep.

Funeral services were conducted at Barrie, and afterwards at Bond Head, where a large concourse of old parishioners and friends assembled to look their last upon his face and to commit his body to the dust. His pastor, Rev. D. D. McLeod, made touching references at both services to Dr. Fraser's religious experiences, and at Bond Head, Principal Caven, the Moderator of the General Assembly, and a dear and valued friend, reviewed his public life, especially in connection with the General Assembly. It was a remarkable tribute to one who always reckoned himself as a very humble servant of the Church.

In person, Dr. Fraser was of medium height, but firmly built and erect, and of calm and dignified bearing. In his later years he was a venerable and imposing figure. Of strictest integrity, unvarying punctuality, and rigid fidelity to duty, he yet held to a high ideal of kindness. "I have never known any man," said Principal Caven from the Moderator's chair at the last Assembly, "who united in himself more completely two qualities not always found in the same man, extreme accuracy and perfect courtesy. I never saw him fail in his duty as a Christian gentleman. He was a perfect model to us all." What he was before the public he was also in the more private walks of life, and his hand and purse were ever open to the poor.

As a preacher, he was characterized by a strong evangelical spirit, fulness of knowledge, care in preparation, and clear and plain delivery. His later sermons were more elaborate in style. He was a conscientious pastor and through his long ministry in one place, came to be looked upon as a father in many homes. Not many months before his death he was sent for to perform the marriage ceremony for one of the third generation. He had married the parents and the grandparents. He was early in his advocacy of missions