

Our Contributors.

CONCERNING AN UNDESIRABLE CAPACITY.

BY KNOXONIAN.

Fond Mother: How is my boy getting on at school?

Teacher: He is not a bright boy at books.

Fond Mother: Does he show any capacity?

Teacher: Yes, he has one talent unequalled in my school.

Fond Mother: What is that?

Teacher: His marvellous capacity for doing nothing.

That boy was a typical lad. He was the representative of a large and growing constituency. He had more constituents than some politicians have when they leave the election courts. The number of boys and girls who have a marvellous capacity for doing nothing is painfully large. A few elderly boys and some elderly girls too also give undoubted evidence that they possess this capacity in a high degree.

In every school, public, private, high, or separate, you find pupils richly endowed with the capacity for doing nothing.

Among the students of every profession you find young men endowed in the same way.

There is an awful possibility that even some of the students in ladies' colleges may have a little capacity for doing nothing.

Among the hundreds of students attending our universities it is said that a certain proportion can always be depended on to do nothing except spend their father's money.

Years ago when the country was young, "rough, raw and democratic," a very small proportion even of divinity students might sometimes be found working hard at nothing. Of course all that is a matter of ancient history now. In these modern and much better days of full courses, high culture and higher criticism such a thing as an idle student of divinity is entirely unknown. The fellows who indulged in doing nothing at times all belonged to the old fogy age when men like Dr. Donald Fraser, Principal MacVicar, Dr. McLaren, Dr. Munro Gibson and President Patton got their education.

Some full-grown men have a marvellous capacity for doing nothing. They live on year after year and never do a decent day's work in a twelvemonth. Had we any influence with Mr. Abbott we would urge him to put a column for "idlers" in the next census returns. The Premier would have a capital precedent for a move of that kind. Solon required the Council of the Areopagus to investigate every man's means of living. Mr. Abbott might not be ashamed to follow a precedent set by Solon. Solon was, according to all accounts, a wise Premier, as wise, perhaps, as Mr. Abbott or even Mr. Mowat. If Solon had been favoured with the presence of a Chapleau in his Cabinet perhaps his wisdom would have been more severely tested, but let that pass. Solon required that all the men in his realms who had a marvellous capacity for doing nothing should be chastised. Perhaps public opinion in this enlightened age and country would scarcely stand such heroic treatment as Solon prescribed. His drastic legislation was well enough for the primitive times in which Homer wrote spring poetry and Demosthenes spoke his piece on the Crown, but it would never do for Canada and the United States in this nineteenth century. Chastising a man for idleness is too violent an interference with the liberty of the subject. The subject must be allowed to loaf in this country and live on his relations if he pleases.

Draco punished idleness with death. Draco was an extremist. His radical measures would never do for Canada. In fact if he legislated in this country he would have hard work to find a constituency. Nothing but boodle could elect him. He would need to promise his constituency a railroad and a canal and a tunnel and a bridge and a postoffice and a custom house and an office of some kind for every "worker." Draco would soon clear a country of tramps and loafers, but his measures were too extreme for this country.

Various kinds of people besides those who go absolutely idle have a marvellous capacity for doing nothing. Critics as a class rarely do anything but nibble at the work of others. They do nothing useful themselves. The whole brood of fault finders, high and low, lay and clerical, male and female, are generally as useless as they are disagreeable. All men who have no constructive ability, who cannot or will not build anything up, are as a rule more or less endowed with the capacity of doing nothing.

Doing nothing is doing wrong. Idleness is a sin. That may be old-fashioned doctrine, but it is found in the Old Book which even Dr. Briggs solemnly declared the other day is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

The Athenian enactments referred to seem fearfully severe. How much severer are they than the New Testament law on the same matter? Paul commanded the Thessalonians that if any man would not work neither should he eat. If he did eat for a few days he would end just where Draco would have ended him. It never seems to dawn on the minds of too many people that to do nothing is to do wrong.

The worst feature of the case remains to be told. A marvellous capacity for doing nothing generally ends in marvellous ability for doing mischief. The boy or man who has nothing to do but behave himself is generally the one that never does behave himself. An idle man, even though a Christian, needs a vast amount of grace to keep him straight.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S SABBATH SCHOOL COMMITTEE.

The following is a synopsis of the most important business transacted by the above Committee at its meeting in Ottawa on October 28 and 29 last.

The Convener's financial statement showed that \$116.17 more had been received than at the same date last year, the total amount being \$254.75. This encouraging advance is chiefly due to the heartiness with which "Children's Day" was observed. Of the "Harvest Home" responsive service 21,000 copies were distributed. The Committee resolved to issue a strong appeal for funds. Unpaid bills were passed amounting to \$388.39, and it was estimated that fully \$400 more would be required. The Convener was instructed to ascertain whether the same method of raising money to meet current expenses before contributions began to come in, as is followed in other committees of the Church could be applied to this one.

It was resolved to request the editor to publish an acknowledgment of contributions both in the *Record* and in the children's *Illustrated Magazine*.

The Committee recorded its satisfaction with the action of the other committees having charge of the Schemes of the Church, which had, in compliance with its invitation and the instructions of the General Assembly, prepared responsive services for use in the Sabbath school, but found itself unable to undertake the publication and distribution of them. It hopes that the committees concerned will lay the information relating to their work in an interesting and attractive form before Sabbath school scholars.

In response to a request from the Toronto Presbyterian Sabbath School Teachers' Union through Rev. J. McP. Scott, the Convener was authorized to circulate any information regarding views of mission schemes which the Union might wish to bring before Sabbath school scholars, and otherwise to further their wishes in regard to the matter as far as practicable.

The Convener laid on the table a statement regarding the "Home Study Leaflet," showing that it had met with a very encouraging reception and that there was every prospect of its becoming self-sustaining by the end of the first year. A copyright is applied for. A committee was appointed to frame the questions for it during the coming year, the Convener to exercise editorial oversight.

The syllabus for 1892 was fully considered and some proposed modifications were remitted to the consideration of a large sub-committee. The following are the subjects of examination for next year, saving any change in the Biblical department that may be made by the sub-committee just mentioned:—

EXAMINATION SYLLABUS, 1892.

DEPARTMENT I—BIBLICAL.

Junior and Intermediate.—The International Sabbath School Lessons for 1892.

Senior.—The same as for Junior, but with somewhat more difficult questions. Also additional papers on "The Life of the Apostle Peter," by Professor Salmond, D.D.

DEPARTMENT II—DOCTRINAL.

Junior and Intermediate.—"The Shorter Catechism," by Professor Salmond, D.D. Part I. (Questions 1-38.)

Senior.—"The Shorter Catechism," by Alexander Whyte, D.D. (Pp. 1-100.)

DEPARTMENT III—HISTORICAL.

Junior and Intermediate.—"The History of the Reformation," by Professor Witherow, D.D.

Senior.—"The Reformation," by Professor Lindsay, D.D. As the primer on "Scottish Church History" has not yet been published the period of the Reformation is continued for another year.

DEPARTMENT IV.—ESSAYS.

Theme for all Grades.—"The Life and Writings of the Apostle Peter."

REGULATIONS

1. Examinations will be held at as many places in each Presbytery as the convenience of candidates may require; in every Sabbath school if desired. Presiding examiners will be appointed to make necessary local arrangements and superintend the examination.

2. Examinations will be held simultaneously on the day and at the hour named for each paper.

3. Question papers will be sent to any minister, Sabbath school superintendent, teacher or other responsible person who shall apply to the Convener for them before January 1, 1892. In the requisition the candidates must be classified according to the grades (Junior, Intermediate or Senior) of the departments in which they wished to be examined. (See Regulation 5.) It is not necessary to send names as the coupon returned after the examination will contain all the particulars required for enrolment. The applicant will be held responsible for the proper observance of all regulations, and must either, if not a candidate, act as presiding examiner, or suggest the name of some trustworthy person, whose consent has been obtained, for appointment to that duty. Question papers cannot be issued to any candidates whose names do not reach the Convener before January 15, as after that date parcels will be made up for presiding examiners.

4. Candidates may enter in any of the prescribed departments, but are recommended to limit themselves to one, or at most two. When the same work is prescribed for successive, or subsequent, years, as in the Doctrinal and Historical departments, no second diploma, prize or medal will be given for it to any one, nor will a medallist be eligible for a prize. Successful candidates of a previous year are not excluded from entering, but if the work is the same as that on which they were formerly examined, they must take a higher standing, i.e., a former diplomist must obtain at least seventy-five per cent. on the second occasion, and a prize-winner at least ninety per cent. in order to receive recognition.

5. Candidates between ten and fifteen years of age will rank as Junior; those aged fifteen and under twenty as Intermediate, and those twenty years of age and older, as Senior. Ages to be reckoned as on January 30, 1892.

6. Candidates obtaining ninety per cent. of the full marks in any department will be entitled to a silver medal; those obtaining seventy-five per cent., but less than ninety per cent., will be entitled to a book prize; and all candidates who obtain fifty per cent. will be entitled to a diploma.

7. The value of each paper will be 200, and two hours will be allowed for writing the answers.

8. One question paper for the whole Church will be set on each subject, and copies forwarded, under sealed covers, to the presiding examiners. The covers shall not be removed until the candidates are assembled, and the written answers shall be covered and sealed for transmission to the Convener of the Assembly's Committee before the candidates leave the place of examination. The packages must be posted thereafter without delay.

The foregoing regulations do not apply to essayists.

9. Essays must be forwarded to the Convener not later than January 30, 1892. Each essay must bear a motto written at the top of the first page; and the writer's name must on no account appear. It must be written on foolscap paper, and the sheets must be securely fastened together. Each essay must be the composition and in the handwriting of the candidate. A list of books consulted in the preparation of the essay must be given at the beginning of the manuscript, and quotations must be carefully marked. The writer's name, address, congregation, age on January 30, 1892, and motto, must be written upon a slip of paper and enclosed with the essay to the Rev. T. F. Fotheringham, M.A., 107 Hazen Street, St. John, N.B. Medals, prizes and diplomas will be given to essayists as in the examinations.

No essay in the Junior or Intermediate classes shall exceed 5,000 words, nor in the Senior 10,000 words in length.

INSTRUCTIONS TO EXAMINERS OF ESSAYS.

(Published for the information of Candidates.)

1. The merits of each essay to be estimated more by the excellence of its matter than its literary form.

2. A fixed round number, say 200, to be taken by all the judges as representing the "full marks" due to an essay in all respects such as might be expected from a young person of the maximum prescribed age.

3. Of these marks a certain definite proportion, say three fourths, to be given on the ground of (A) excellence of substance, and the remainder for (B) excellence of form. The marks may be apportioned as follows:—

A. I. For fulness of historical research combined with accuracy of historical statement, a maximum of seventy-five.

II. For aptness, sagacity, originality of investigation, illustration, comment or deduction—seventy-five.

B. III. For excellence of style, as regards choice of appropriate words and grammar, vigour, rhythm of sentence—twenty-five.

IV. For symmetry and proportion of the composition as a whole, indicating some feeling for literary form—twenty-five.

Committees were appointed to set the papers in each department, and the examiners were, with a few necessary changes, re-appointed.

The committee was much pleased to hear a letter from Dr. Buchanan, of Ujjain, which indicated the possibility of extending the scheme of Higher Religious Instruction to our mission schools in India. The Convener was given full power to carry out any arrangements that might be practicable.

The Convener brought before the Committee the subject of a course of instruction for Sabbath school teachers, and laid on the table the details of the system of teacher training, followed so successfully by the London Sabbath School Union. The matter was remitted to a small committee to consider and report at the April meeting.

The question of the organization of a Presbyterian Young People's Guild was fully discussed. It was unanimously agreed that action in this direction could not longer be delayed, but the majority preferred that individual members should institute the movement by means of overtures in their respective Presbyteries, believing that in this way the matter would be more effectively handled than if it came first before the Assembly through a recommendation of the Committee.

The Convener was authorized to procure such assistance in office work as might be required, the expense not to exceed \$100.

T. F. FOTHERINGHAM, Convener.