

Reminiscences of Septuagenarian.

1854—Then and Now—1900.

IX.—THE START.

There seem to be some moods of mind and classes of experiences common to humanity, irrespective of age or nationality, or upbringing. There seems to be an experience that besets ever body at some time or other in life, that when there comes a change for which we have been longing, or some excursion to be undertaken, for which we have with much worry and expense made arrangements, we shrink from making the change, and feel inclined to back out of undertaking the long anticipated journey.

I had been chafing under the enforced idleness. I had fretted and complained that no work had been mapped out for me—no appointments to be filled—and now when I was ordered to commence work by supplying North Gower for two Sabbaths, then Perth began to have charms for me, and the companionship of Mr. Duncan indispensable and my feeling was "this is my rest, and my choice would be to stay here, for I do like it."

But I had to shake off sentiment, and pack my baggage and get to work. I had made arrangements for the campaign. Dr. Willis furnished me with a series of skeleton sermons that would have occupied all my undivided attention to decipher, even had I nothing else to do. Like the ordinary chirography of Horace Greely, any one of these skeletons would, if presented to a druggist, have set him immediately to putting up a prescription. How I could have filled up those outlines and covered them with flesh and skin, I know not, for I never tried. Like David with Saul's armor, I could not have used them for I had not proved them.

I benefited more from a prescription from Mr. Thomas Fenwick, a fellow student, who had received it from a queer elder who gave him directions how to be popular and successful in one particular field—and if so "de uno" it might be equally so "de omnibus." I give this prescription without authority from memory, on which it is deeply branded:

1. Preach with animosity.—(animation.)
2. Never tak a text frae the Apokrykimpha.—(Apocrypha.)
3. When ye leave the mission dinna rin awa' like a hen that has just laid an egg.
4. Hae naething to dae wi' the Methodees. Armed with these and my homily, which again and again I had made use of at Mr. Duncan's week day meetings in the country, I started early one morning on one of the most horrible journeys I ever made in my long and varied life.

I clambered up beside a youthful driver on a rickety post gig, and what with mail bags, and parcels, etc., we had no space left to roll about in.

To Franktown we had fair roads, but from there to my destination it beggared description. Miles of corduroy, timbers of various kinds and girth, plentiful crooks and elbows, and bulges, with not a sod nor appliance of earth to smooth or cushion the irregularities.

Over these Jehu drove as if he were trolling along a macadam or asphalt avenue, deaf and heedless to my protests and not infrequent groans. "I must make my time so!"

Well, I had only one way of taking it out of him, or impressing myself upon him. When the depression was on my side of the road he rolled over on me, not much to my discomfort—which he could not say when conditions were reversed and the gig swayed to the other side.

In addition to my excess of avoiduposis over his, there arose the religious antagonism between Protestantism and Papacy, and when I was on top of him, I, as the embodiment and representative of the former, leaned upon him and chuckled at every grunt which I took out of him representing the latter. I fancied I was Protestantism with Rome under me, and so did not dislike that this continued, with slight variation, until I reached my resting place for the night, in the house of Mr. Harvey, blacksmith, and maker of the then famous Harvey plough, and who had been a member at one time of Mr. Duncan's congregation in Perth.

On Saturday he had me driven over to North Gower, where I was domiciled with old Mr. Thompson, a leading man in the congregation there. I preached my homily on Sabbath, and for the first time had unfettered charge of the service.

During the week, which was an eventful one, I had the most varied experience of the pleasures and unpleasantnesses of life.

The house was not of a palatial character; only an ordinary log building; sitting and bed-room combined—plenty of company day and night. I was never alone. The mosquitoes were of a breed that would compare in size and number and blood-thirstiness with any with which I have had the honor and pleasure of forming and cultivating acquaintance.

Though it was the month of May I was favored with a fire in my room—not that I required heat—it was smoke that was needed if not to banish, so restrain, the ardour of my aggressive associates. There was a pan set in the centre of the room with cedar chips alive but not aflame, and that formed a smudge to secure harmony between Me and Co'y. That was maintained during the whole period of my position as "locum tenens."

As if to fill up the cup of my discomfort the heavenly bodies took a hand, and to deepen the darkness of the smoky room and intensify the gloom, there was, one day, darkness over all the earth. Not a sound could be heard, not the flutter of a bird's wing—even the mosquitoes sheathed their blades and were silent. There was a full eclipse of the sun, so I had time and material and conditions for strange meditations.

During the week I wrote my first sermon, which is yet in my possession unpublished. It was from the text and along the lines of the sermon preached by Mr. Wardrop when I was in Bytown, and which, in my judgment, I sometimes surpassed, but more frequently failed in excelling; but that of course is a matter of opinion and depends on taste, which is variable. That I preached on Sunday.

On Monday morning I was driven over to Mr. Harvey's, where I rejoined the post gig, and renewed the struggle over the Papacy and Protestantism in the form in which it was waged when coming from Perth. But we were kinder, we were acquaintances—and I was in better humor, in view of spending a day or two with J. B. Duncan, and then to enter on steady work for the summer.

But the recollection of the experiences of that trip haunts me and makes me shudder up to the present—a horror only approached and renewed after a long study of Dantes Inferno—or after a perusal of the witch scene in MacBeth, or a rehearsal of the night scene in Alloo Kirk; or after reading an account of an all night session of the House in Ottawa, when they have been striving to establish some precedent to be called "Parliamentary" in act or speech and in the doing of which a member retracts what he had offensively uttered,

with the rhetorical finish "Mr. Speaker, with regret I withdraw the expression, and apologize; but, Sir, let the hon. gentleman repeat outside the House, the irritating statement which drew from me the offensive retort—and if there be none to interfere to prevent me, I'll smash his face!"—(Uproar.)

Or last, but not least, the horror of these old experiences and recollections are approached after reading a report of daily occurrences in the new City Hall of Toronto, which are so common as not to be a matter of astonishment, when discussing the affairs of the city the mayor and aldermen bandy accusations and hurl inuendos at each other in terms and temper that savor more of "the cock-pit" or "the ring."

From the foregoing learn:

First—That life is a continuous succession of changes, and our duty is to be prepared to face them.

Second.—It is our duty to brace up and be of good courage, and on the march and in the strife to "quit us like men"; and

Third.—For the accomplishment of this, let us adopt the practice of Col. Otter, when marching his men in long trying stretches in South Africa—let us cheer up our hearts and the hearts of our fellow travellers with frequent inspiring song.

Let the road be rough and dreary,
And its end far out of sight,
Foot it bravely, strong or weary,
Trust in God and do the right.

NEMO G. D.

A More Ancient Mariner.

The swarthy bee is a buccaneer,
A burley, belted rover,
Who loves the booming wind in his ear
As he sails the seas of clover

A waif of the goblin pirate crew,
With not a soul to deplore him,
He steers for the open verge of blue
With the filmy world before him.

Out in the day, hap-hazard, alone,
Booms the old vagrant hummer,
With only his whim to pilot him
Through the splendid vast of summer.

He looks like a gentleman, lives like a lord,
He works like a Trojan hero,
Then loads all winter upon his hoard,
With the mercury at zero.

—Bliss Carman.

The Ideal Bed-Chamber.

"The importance of the sleeping and bathing arrangements of a house is not half appreciated," writes Maria Parloa in the November Ladies' Home Journal, giving some suggestions as to furnishing the house. Every bed-room should be provided with the essentials for healthful sleep and the daily sponge bath. As nearly as possible, the room should be kept free from anything that would tend to contaminate the air. It should be as large as one can afford, and the windows so arranged that they may be opened at the top and bottom. If possible the floor should be bare and the rugs so small that they may be taken outdoors with ease for cleaning and airing. Everything about the room should be washable. The bed should be light and fitted with strong casters, so that it may be readily moved; the springs ought to be firm and strong, and the mattress of a kind that will not allow the heaviest part of the body to sink, and to cause the sleeper to lie in a cramped position. My own preference is for a cheap hard mattress next the springs and a light one of hair on top, but any kind of a hard mattress is better than one that is too soft. Above all, do not overfurnish the bed-room.