

## Our Contributors.

### CONCERNING THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

BY KNOXIAN.

The one thing on which everybody agreed was that the Seventeenth General Assembly was not a specially good body for business purposes. Good-natured in the main; breezy at times and talkative always; kindly enough, but not particularly discriminating in the use of the closure, the big court worried along for nine days, most of them frightfully hot, and did what work it didn't leave over in a style that will never make it immortal for doing business with neatness and despatch—especially despatch. That the ecclesiastical machine moved with even more than average Presbyterian deliberation is painfully apparent from the fact that on the morning of the eighth day no less than seventy items of business had not been touched. Were any further evidence needed to show that the Supreme Court did not do its business with reckless haste it might be found in the frequent and almost paternal reminders of Dr. Reid, who not only told the Court often that time was passing, but also informed the members that if they did not get on faster they must arrange for pulpit supply for another Sabbath. It was all no use, however. The Assembly never fairly settled down to business until the last day of the meeting. Then the skeleton that remained went to work with a rash, and—laid things on the table. Besides the tabling operation there was a good deal of business done on the closing day. In fact it was the best business day of the session, so far as expedition was concerned. Is it not rather rough on the Assembly to be forced to say that business goes on better when two-thirds of its members go home?

Along with the slowness there was at times a painful uncertainty about the business. "Carried," says the Moderator, whose good nature seemed almost infinite. "What's carried?" asks the veteran Clerk. Sometimes it was not easy to say just what was "carried," or whether anything at all had been honoured in that way. These uncertain moments nearly always came when small matters of business were being put through, showing clearly that a body of four hundred men is about the most unsatisfactory kind of organization to deal with little items of business.

#### INHERENT DIFFICULTIES.

It is not the fault of anybody in particular that business often goes slowly in the Assembly and is sometimes done in a rather unsatisfactory manner. Everybody wants to do the right thing, but the machinery for doing the right thing is clumsy in its working and often uncertain in its results. To begin with, the body is too large to work expeditiously. Four hundred men, some of them given to much talking, can never despatch small items of business quickly, at least if they can they seldom or never do. The General Assembly is more than four times as large as the Ontario Legislature. It is about twice as large as the Dominion Parliament. There is always a large and constantly-increasing amount of business to do, and there is a sort of unwritten law that the business must be done in nine or ten days. The question that lies behind all others is

#### THE POSSIBILITY

of four hundred men doing the work the Church requires to have done in nine days and doing it well. We honestly believe the thing is impossible. Looking at the amount of work done by political and municipal bodies and at the work done by the governing bodies of other Churches, at the work done in civil courts, it is impossible to come to any other conclusion. The Assembly is so large that it is unwieldy for business purposes. The amount of business increases each year and will continue to increase if the Church continues to prosper, and eight or nine days soon pass. The Assembly day has only about eight hours. The entire time given to business never comes up to more than seventy hours. Count out the time given to devotional exercises, to deputations, and time spent in various other ways, and we doubt very much if any General Assembly has much more than sixty working hours. Is this, on an average, half an hour for each matter of business? A committee of the best business men in the Church could not do the business in the time given. How can four hundred men, each of whom has a right to have his say, get through the work and do it well?

Then it should be remembered that the training of the average minister does not specially fit him for business. He may be a good Christian, a good preacher, a good pastor, a good scholar, a good almost everything, but may be perfectly useless or worse as an ecclesiastical legislator. Everybody who watches the methods of commissioners who are good business men and the methods of esteemed brethren who have no aptitude for legislative or judicial business, can easily see the difference. In fact part of the training and actual work of a minister has a tendency to unfit him for the General Assembly. A man who writes a sermon or essay whatever length he pleases is very apt to think he should take the same liberty with a resolution or report. A man who takes his own time in the pulpit or platform is very likely to want his own time in the Supreme Court or feel hurt if he does not get it. Speaking a hundred times a year where nobody dare contradict is sure to make people dogmatic and impatient of contradiction. There are many elders in the Assembly who have had a first-class business train-

ing, but changing them every year prevents them from getting the run of things in such a way as to enable them to use their abilities to the best advantage. An elder of good ability will not take hold of any business matter until he knows something about it. Some clergymen will take hold whether they know anything about it or not. That is one point of difference between elders and ministers.

Any one could easily see that the Assembly at times was making an honest effort to get on. The harder they tried the less they did. Haste is not always speed, and when a dozen men make haste they nearly always make confusion.

Assuming that the Supreme Court has more business than it can get through with in the usual time, next week we may suggest some remedies.

#### THAT ESTIMABLE LADY.

Leaning gently on the arm of a tall member from one of the Presbyteries of northern Ontario, the deceased wife's sister entered the Assembly. She came in answer to remits that had been sent down to Presbyteries anent her eligibility. The remits did not make it clear whether she was eligible or not. Dr. Gregg, like a gallant Irishman, offered the lady his arm, and proposed to escort her out of the Assembly. She declined. On the last evening of the session, ex-Moderator Laing, so the report says, moved that the "matter should now take end." Whether a man may even yet legally marry his deceased wife's sister is a question we dare not answer. Perhaps he may if the sister is willing. If not, he must just look out for somebody else's sister.

#### JOHN COOK, D.D., LL.D., PRINCIPAL OF MORRIN COLLEGE, QUEBEC.

"PROMINENT CANADIANS," BY REV. ROBERT CAMPBELL, D.D., MONTREAL.

The following is one of the series of papers now appearing in the *Week*: Dr. Cook, who was for forty-seven years pastor of St. Andrew's Church in Quebec, is entitled to rank with the foremost men of mark of whom Canada can boast. His personal qualities would distinguish him in any community. The physical proportions of the man have that degree of massiveness which befits his moral and intellectual stature. Strength is embodied in every feature of his countenance. The pose of his head and shoulders is statuesque still, though he is considerably above fourscore years of age. Every movement of his massive frame betokens energy. A stranger, on first seeing him, at once would ask: What remarkable-looking man is that? And a better acquaintance justifies the expectation of greatness of which his *personnel* gives promise. No discerning person can come in contact with Dr. Cook, even casually, without realizing that he is no common man. Clearness of intellectual vision is associated with mental hospitality, and both are animated by a fine enthusiasm very unusual in an octogenarian. There are no tokens of decay about him: he is still as open to receive new ideas as when he was forty years old. Not only have his faculties retained all their freshness, but his studious habits have kept him abreast of the intellectual movements of the age, with which he is in full sympathy.

Dr. Cook was born on the 13th April, 1805, at Sanquhar, a village in Dumfriesshire, Scotland, in the district which gave Carlyle to Scotland and the world, and which, at a somewhat later period, has yielded Paton, the distinguished South Sea missionary. In no part of Scotland did the Puritanism of the Reformation period more thoroughly leaven society than in Dumfriesshire, in which the memories of martyrdom still linger, perpetuated by revered churchyard monuments. Whatever faults belonged to the system in which Dr. Cook was nurtured, it at least begot a moral earnestness without which there can be no real greatness. Buckle was too contracted in his sympathies to be able to appreciate the influence for good which the religious teaching of Scotland exercised over the formation of the national character; but others of his countrymen—notably Froude and Dean Stanley—have done justice to the subject. The home training of the Scottish people gave them a fine start in life, begetting self-helpfulness and independence. The Shorter Catechism built up a strong moral and religious fibre, as iron does entering into the blood of the physical man; and whatever accomplishments the youth of Scotland afterwards acquired, they never outgrew the earnestness and thriftiness which were instilled into their minds at their fathers' fireside. With this mental and moral outfit, young Cook went first to the University of Glasgow, and afterwards to that of Edinburgh, where he received his professional training under Dr. Chalmers. He was a fine subject for the great Scottish divine to pour out his enthusiasm upon, and no student of the period more thoroughly absorbed Butler's Analogy, with Chalmers' prelections on it, than the future minister of St. Andrew's Church, Quebec, as the influence of the great English thinker is manifest in the style and manner of Dr. Cook's thought. The evangelical impulse which Chalmers imparted in general to his students has long been apparent throughout Dr. Cook's long career. At college he was the contemporary of Dr. Candlish, Principal Campbell, Professor MacDougall and other men who afterwards made their mark in Scotland, and was on all hands counted the equal of any of them.

Having had the advantage of professional experience for three years in the afterwards noted parish of Cardross, it would appear from the ecclesiastical records that he was

ordained by the Presbytery of Dumbarton on Christ's Day, 1835; and designated minister of St. Andrew's Church Quebec; and he immediately set sail for what was then regarded as a distant colonial post, entering upon the duties of his charge in the spring of 1836. At that time Quebec was relatively a far more important place than it is to-day, and the young minister was at once ushered into a sphere of great influence as the representative of the Church of Scotland in the capital of Lower Canada. There were here only great social opportunities, which he filled to the credit of the Church to which he belonged; but also, as often as the civil affairs of the community demanded his attention and assistance, his recognized business ability was at the disposal of his fellow-citizens. Notably was this the case at the period of the disastrous fires which devastated so large a part of the ancient capital in 1845 and 1866; and it shows how much prudence and tact he must have exhibited in his relations with a population, the vast majority of which was of a different race and creed from his own, that he has lived among them on terms of amity and goodwill for fifty-five years, and earned their universal respect.

From his first entrance into the ecclesiastical arena, Dr. Cook was accorded a leading position. Two years after his settlement at Quebec he was chosen Moderator of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada in connection with the Church of Scotland, the highest position in the gift of his brethren, a fact which shows how speedily he gained ascendancy in their councils. For at least half a century, at the end of which period he virtually retired from public life, no voice was more influential than his in the discussion of matters affecting Presbyterianism in Canada. Even within the last two years the old man eloquent was aroused to utter a fiery denunciation of what he deemed a breach of the good understanding that had hitherto been observed between the Protestant minority and the French Roman Catholic majority in the notorious Jesuits' Estates Bill. Yet Dr. Cook is no ecclesiastic in the ordinary acceptation of the term. The head of a faction he neither was nor would be. Canvassing, caballing, or any of the tricks to which party leaders too often resort, were abhorrent to his nature. He trusted entirely to the merits of the case he had to put, and after arguing in favour of any position with the clearness, force and brevity that distinguished his speeches, he was wont to leave matters to their fate in the hands of others, and not unfrequently was absent at the conclusion of a debate in which he took part. Believing in the right of free speech, he credited his brethren with honesty of purpose; and whether his views prevailed or not, discussions ended in such a way as to preserve the good understanding between him and his colleagues. Rev. Dr. Mathieson, of Montreal, and he very often differed in debate; but after it was over, it was nothing unusual to see them walk away from the place of meeting arm in arm. Impulsive by nature, the heat of discussion might excite him and lead him to say and do regrettable things, but the generosity of his heart made it impossible for him to bear a grudge against any man on account of differences of opinion.

It is on great occasions that men of light and leading are naturally drawn to the front. There have been a few such passages in the life of Dr. Cook. The first was when the wave of the Scottish Church disruption controversy struck the shores of Canada in 1844. Himself a Scot and a minister of the Established Church, he could not but be profoundly moved by the ecclesiastical upheaval that had ended so disastrously on the 18th May, 1843; and not being what might be called a pronounced Churchman at any rate, many suppose that he had not a little sympathy with the position of his former distinguished professor, Dr. Chalmers, and of many young friends of his who were stout non-intrusionists. But whatever thoughts he might have had on the Free Church movement as it affected Scotland, he was resolute in maintaining the position that the Canadian Synod was not called upon to disturb itself on account of the question—that the relations subsisting between the Colonial and Parent Churches were not compromising to the former—and that therefore there was no valid pretext for breaking off the connection established when the Canadian Synod was formed in 1831, or for forfeiting the advantages which such connection had secured. A minority, however, having been carried away by the old Scottish sentiment of enthusiasm for ecclesiastical independence, which had revolutionized the Established Church the previous year, into actual secession from the Synod, and the Moderator, Rev. Mark Y. Stark, among others, Dr. Cook was elected Moderator in his room by the brethren remaining as the man best fitted for dealing with the crisis which had arisen, although it was unusual to elect to that office for a second term. It was meant also to be a conciliatory appointment, as Dr. Cook was known not to be an extreme man, but one who commanded personally the sympathy and confidence of the brethren who had seceded, and it was hoped that even yet the breach might be healed. This expectation was not then realized, but Dr. Cook never lost sight of Presbyterian re-union as an object to be sought, and one in the way of which no insuperable obstacle lay; and as time had already mollified irritated feeling on both sides, and modified the situation otherwise, he proposed to the Synod in 1861 a resolution looking to re-union. The resolution did not then carry, but it launched the question on the ocean of discussion: and as reasonableness and charity were on Dr. Cook's side, and only prejudice and resentment were against him, so far as the Synod was concerned, it needed only