

Our Contributors.

A MILD SUGGESTION.

BY KNOXIAN.

It is alleged that there is a great deal of restlessness in the Presbyterian Church of this country. People with itching ears are said to be on the increase. Solid men are dying and feather-heads are taking their places. The lovers of sermonic strong meat are passing away, or are being put on back seats, while the lovers of veal and pulpit confectionery are shouting in the front. There are mysterious whispers about "under-tones," and other terrible things in many congregations that present a smooth enough surface. All this, and a good deal more, has been discussed in the press during the last few months. It is useless to deny that there is some truth in it. Smoke cannot be produced without some fire. Various factors may have been at work sapping the respect that people have, or ought to have, for the church of God. Each age has its characteristics and morbid restlessness may be the characteristic of ours. There is no use in fighting a mania. A mania may be treated; it cannot be crushed. It has been already stated more than once in this corner that the restlessness complained of may be greatly exaggerated. Restlessness is noisy and demonstrative. One person who takes hysterics in a church during worship makes more noise than a thousand devout worshippers. One congregation with a call, or an eviction on hand, gets more dead head advertising than a dozen congregations quietly doing the Lord's work.

But supposing there is some restlessness in the church what are we doing to guide it and lessen its baneful effects. There is nothing to be gained by scolding. You cannot scold restlessness out of people any more than you can scold sin out of them. The restlessness is not sin is one of the effects of sin. "Men cannot be scolded out of sin or lectured into virtue," said Dr. Punshon or some other man who knew human nature. Have we no resources on which we can draw for something to lessen restlessness. We have already given it as the opinion of this corner that better preaching and better pastoral visitation are the only human remedies that can be relied on, but they are not the only remedies. We believe

AN OCCASIONAL EXCHANGE OF PULPITS would be a good thing. Here are some reasons for our belief. No man can preach all the truth and a stranger in the pulpit will very likely present some truth that may not have been presented by the pastor.

Most ministers have a habit of looking at truth from one point of view, a preacher who looks at truth from another point of view will give a pleasing variety to the congregation.

It is difficult for the most industrious minister to do his other work faithfully and prepare fresh matter for the same people one hundred and fifty times a year.

People who are not cursed with itching ears and who may be thoroughly loyal to their own pastor may be willing enough to hear a neighbour occasionally. Is there anything wrong about that? What class of people go round more than clergymen when they get a chance.

An occasional exchange gives a minister a week and a week is a great thing for a busy man. During that week he can take a rest, read a good book or two, bring up arrears of pastoral visitation and do a good many things that he could not touch if he had two sermons to write.

Viewed from a wider standpoint an exchange may be a good thing. Theoretically we say a minister is the servant of the whole church. Practically he works for one small fraction of the church. If our theory is good for anything it surely might do us a little good to try and live a little up to it.

The *personnel* of the ministry would, we believe, be considerably improved by occasional exchanges. There is none too much sympathy among clergymen, and truth, to say, many Presbyterian ministers do little to help one another.

Here as everywhere else there would be some difficulties.

The young man who pays himself and his congregation the compliment of thinking that the congregation would go to pieces if he left for one day, would of course not want to exchange with anybody. If his work is so poorly put together that he has to stand by and watch it all the time he ought to stand right there and hold it up. We once knew a young pastor who declared he could not bear to leave his "dear people" even for a day. The "dear people" did without him altogether not long after he thought they could not do without him for a day.

Then in most congregations there are one or two males or females who always go up to a stranger and say, "if we only had a man like you here," or something to that effect.

The most serious opposition would come from a conscientious class of ministers who might wish to avoid the suspicion of laziness. Hitherto, "exchanging" to any extent has been considered evidence of laziness or of the fact that a minister had got to the bottom of his barrel.

Far be it from this corner to suggest anything that would encourage clerical *inertia*. What we mean is such occasional exchanges as would give ministers a chance to preach *better* sermons and give the people a pleasing variety. Why should anybody advocate even a modified itinerancy when we do not avail ourselves of the variety we have in exchanges. There is an immense variety of gifts in the Presbyterian ministry between Principal Caven and the young minister who rides a bicycle dressed in knickerbockers.

FOR THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

STUDENTS' CONVENTION AT DETROIT.

BY REV. R. P. MACKAY, B.A.

In July, 1886, a conference of college men was held at Mount Hermon upon Mr. Moody's invitation, for the purpose of Bible study. There were 251 students present representing 87 colleges. Ten days had passed before a word was said about missions, but a few men, especially young Wilder, were cherishing the conviction that God intended a number of these students for the foreign field. On the evening of July the 16th a missionary meeting was held at which Dr. Pierson pressed home the Lord's call for laborers and the perishing world's need. Another meeting was held and another and another and at the close of the conference an even one hundred volunteered to become messengers for Jesus Christ amongst the heathen, if God should open up the way. That is the origin of the Students' Volunteer Movement. The fire soon spread. A deputation of students was appointed to visit the colleges, with the result that 477 institutions of learning have been reached and over 7,000 have volunteered to take part in this ministry. It very soon became apparent that enthusiasm evaporates; many students who volunteered during the first three years of the movement vanished and cannot be accounted for. This unsatisfactory state of affairs made it at once apparent that careful organization was necessary in order to secure what had been gained. Travelling secretaries were appointed to visit the colleges systematically and keep the machinery in order, with the result that after the first three years very few who enrolled themselves retreated from their declaration, and there are at the present time on this continent 3,200 *bona fide* volunteers who declare it to be their purpose, if God permits, to obey the Saviour's command—to carry the gospel to the regions beyond. The first convention of this organization was held in Cleveland in the spring of 1891, which was considered in every respect a successful gathering. The second convention was held in Detroit on the 28th Feb. and the four following days. There were present 1,187 students, representing 294 institutions of learning, 151 of these students being from Canada. There were 38 religious bodies represented, 50 missionary societies, 50 missionaries who had been in the foreign field—some of them for over 40 years. So large a representation from abroad, together with the widespread interest existing amongst the Christian people of Detroit, secured very large audiences throughout the whole convention, the evening audiences overflowing into two of the neighbouring churches.

The object of this organization is not the sending out of missionaries. That is the work of the boards, and the students do not purpose to invade their territory. Their aim is the cultivation of a missionary spirit in the colleges and thus meet the demands of the various boards in order to *evangelize the world in this generation*. That will to many appear to be a hopeless undertaking—and yet is it? In the light of the commission "All power is given unto"—"Lo I am with you always"—"Go ye therefore." Is it too much to undertake? If it is not undertaken and overtaken in this generation, so far as this generation is concerned, it will never be done. They will be gone into eternity not having known Christ. With the promise and command of the Lord of missions, and the world's awful need, surely the students are right in this holy ambition, although so impossible to unbelief.

There were three mottoes displayed which answer all difficulties: "Go ye therefore and disciple all nations," etc., "Let us advance upon our knees," "The evangelization of the world in this generation." These mottoes translated into practice will remove all mountains and reach the end in view. It is not, of course, expected that all students can go abroad, but if the 250,000 students on this continent are duly impressed with the importance of the work, those who remain at home will do their part in the church, and there will be universal effort towards this the greatest and most important service ever undertaken by Spirit-inspired men. By organization, missionary meetings, literature, etc., the students of America have inaugurated this movement and are labouring to that end. Already 686 of these volunteers are known to be in the foreign field, and yet it was only in 1886 the first meeting was held. In the colleges of Great Britain there are only 700 volunteers, but 80 or 90 per cent. of all volunteers who graduated since the movement began found their way into the foreign field. Surely the possibilities are incalculable and should elicit the sympathy and co-operation and prayer of every one who has a heart that can feel for perishing men and a conscience that urges obedience to the Lord's command. It has been said by an American scientist that if the heart-beats of one man could be brought to bear on the Bunker Hill monument, it would crumble to dust. So if the heart-beats of the church were brought to bear upon the great rock of heathenism, which has been intermittently assailed for sixty generations, before one generation more passed the gospel would be preached to every creature. Does not the very thought thrill us with an ambition to be partners in this glorious enterprise? The tone of the Detroit meetings was pre-eminently spiritual. That was ever kept in view. Prayer was always in order, speeches were begun and ended in prayer and delivered to praying audiences. There was no strong manifestation of emotion, the addresses were not fitted to produce such results, but were rather intended to deepen a sense of responsibility as soldiers of Jesus Christ by the presentation of His claims upon us and His interest in this world for which He died. That the services were effective appeared in many ways, especially at the close, when 31 students stated that during these days they had resolved to consecrate their lives to Foreign Missions. When the chairman asked how many in the meeting expected to go to the foreign field within a year 52 men and women arose and each in a sentence or two named the field to which they expected to go and stated the motive that actuated them.

It is easy to speak of conventions as a fad and simply emotional and evanescent in their results. No doubt we have a great many of them and often they may have been disappointing. However, that cannot be said of the conventions held in Toronto and Hamilton and Brantford and London and Detroit. That they were immediately fruitful in many lives is quite apparent and that there will be a future harvest can be doubted only by the unsympathetic. Yet it ought not to be forgotten that it is as needful that we should have much prayer after as well as before. If every Christian would accept the Student Volunteer motto, "Let us advance on our knees," what might not the harvest be?

WHAT IS MEANT BY SUBSCRIBING TO THE CONFESSION OF FAITH?

The question at the head of this article has special importance to-day when those who appear to be openly departing from the traditional forms of faith are so frequently charged, not only with the holding of false views, which so-called "false" views may be honestly held and eventually found to be correct, but also with violating their fraternal obligations as covenanted in their ordination vow, with being dishonest in retaining their position in a church with whose standards they know themselves to be at variance. In our present and humble contribution towards an answer to the question with which we began, we shall seek brevity and confine ourselves chiefly to facts which may be viewed as precedents, leaving the definition of limits, which we hold to be variable, to other hands and another time.

When the negotiations for union between the old and new schools of the American Presbyterian Church was nearing a critical point, the elder Dr. Hodge contributed an article to the old *Princeton Review* upon this very point, and its manifest breadth did very much, if, indeed, it was not the turning point towards completing successfully the negotiations. We have not the article by us, and it is long since we read the same, but our line of thought we know to be but a following of Dr. Hodges' argument as to its general divisions.

Three views may be held as to what is meant by subscription. It is related of a certain Scottish professor, whose chair could only be occupied by one who subscribed to the Confession, that being asked on his installation—Is this the Confession of your faith? replied as he took the pen in hand, Yes, and a great deal more! That such a relation to subscription has been practically maintained by some cannot be well doubted; as readily may it be asserted that no church has yet ever accepted such a relation as implied in its demand for subscription. That view, which means anything or nothing, need not detain us.

Nor the opposite extreme, that as with a contract so with subscription, every article in every part must be taken as binding. In which case all subscribing would be bound to maintain the six-day theory of creation, the incestuous character of a marriage relation condoned by the entire church at least for a generation, with many details of controversial doctrine in many instances utterly forgotten. Certainly not one representative Presbyterian Church has ever asked such subscription from its ministers, or attempted thus to fetter faith.

There is a middle ground, but the limits have never been rigidly defined, and here, if anywhere, the question presses as to how far the Confession is to be accepted by those who subscribe. Our American friends define their acceptance by the term "System of Doctrine," i.e., the Calvinistic system in general as in contrast to exclusive Arminianism. Yet the definition needs defining. What is the system? If the Synod of Dort's decisions be the norm of the Calvinistic system of doctrine we must not look to the general declarations from the pulpits of present day Presbyterianism for any very plain manifestation thereof. Indeed the Institutes of Arminius rival those of Calvin in the accepted system of doctrine, especially in this the case in respect to the extent of the atonement and the unconditional decrees. If this statement is questioned in its applicability to ourselves as well as to our American brethren, let it be remembered that in the school of divinity connected with one of the bodies forming our present happily united church, Wardlaw's system of theology with its governmental theory of the atonement was a text-book. This, however, may safely be said, any system that would displace the sovereignty of God from its centre, especially by substituting therefore the will of the creature, would not be the system of doctrine required by the church that asks general acceptance to the Westminster symbols. That "general acceptance" is all that the church means is not only to be gathered from its tolerance of broader views, but also by the actions of its supreme courts. Let two examples suffice. The premillennial theory of the second