

Our Contributors.

DR. REID ON PRESBYTERIES OF THE OLDEN TIME.

BY KNOXIAN.

Dr. Reid is a model of brevity in business and literary matters. His minutes are short; his reports are short; his speeches are short; his contributions to the press are short. His article in the "Year Book" on "Presbytery Meetings in the Olden Time" is far too short. A page on the mode of doing business in Presbytery fifty years ago, compared or contrasted with the modes that now exist, would have been a welcome addition to a paper admirable as far as it goes. Did the Presbyters of the olden time give more attention to vital questions than is usually given now? Did they spend less time on mere matters of procedure and give more to matters distinctly spiritual? Did they work less on the shell and more on the egg than their successors? These and many similar questions arise in a reader's mind as he peeps into those Presbytery meetings held in Kingston, Belleville, Gananoque and Cobourg fifty years ago. The meetings, Dr. Reid tells us, were generally well attended. The members usually had a journey of one or two days in getting to the meetings, but the journey was cheerfully undertaken. The roads were bad, but they put on their overalls, mounted their saddle and went to the meeting. One of two things must be true. Either the men were different from most modern Presbyters or the meetings were much more attractive and profitable than many Presbytery meetings now are. Who in these days would think of riding on horseback seventy-five or a hundred miles to a Presbytery meeting? There may indeed be Presbyteries in which the number of members who can mount a horse would not make a quorum. Some members deeply versed in metaphysics might mount with their faces to the wrong end of the animal. But hear Dr. Reid:

Notwithstanding long journeys, the Presbytery meetings were well attended. They were almost the only times when the brethren could meet together, and they were occasions of much enjoyment and pleasure. I am writing of a time nearly a quarter of a century before railways existed here, when the only way for the brethren to reach the place of meeting was to use their own conveyances. It was the time of saddlebags and overalls, and other equipments of the kind. But generally those from the same quarter travelled together in a large sleigh in winter and a double carriage in summer. There was much social enjoyment in these journeys, and much pleasant conversation on subjects both grave and gay. Sometimes the reverend travellers had the additional pleasure of female society. Some of the elect ladies or mothers in Israel, wishing to pay a visit to friends, occasionally timed their visits so as to make them synchronize with our Presbytery meetings, thus securing for themselves a more pleasant mode of conveyance than they could otherwise have obtained, and on the other hand, adding largely to the social enjoyment of the party.

The facts made clear in the foregoing are that in those early days, notwithstanding long journeys, Presbytery meetings were well attended, and were "occasions of much enjoyment and pleasure." Perhaps the one fact partly explains the other. Some of the members may have attended well *because* they found the meetings occasions of enjoyment and pleasure. No doubt a sense of duty was the prevailing motive, but possibly the members attended all the more regularly because they enjoyed attending.

How are modern Presbytery meetings attended? Some of them in this way. Some of the members go in on the forenoon train, while many arrive in time for the meeting, or arrive an hour or two later. They go to the meeting for a few hours, and then leave for home whether the business is finished or not. Their attendance is regulated by the time table of the railway. That may be the right way or the wrong way—we sit in judgment on nobody—but that is exactly the shape that attendance takes in many cases. The effect is, to say the least, dangerous. Important business is left in the hands of two or three members who may or may not be competent to deal with it. The more competent they are the less will they like to have responsibilities that should come upon thirty or forty thrust upon two or three. The wildest of all ecclesiastical fictions is that a Presbytery of fifty or sixty members does that which is done by two or three at the close of a meeting. It may be a legal fiction, but it is fiction all the same. A man who wants a fair hearing for a good cause always wants a full court, and is entitled to one. A man who wants to put a doubtful little piece of business through generally waits until nearly all the members are gone and the adjournment is very near. Have the members a right to leave? Are they doing justice to themselves, to their Presbytery, to their Church, if they leave simply because the train leaves?

Dr. Reid tells us that those early meetings were occasions "of much enjoyment and pleasure." Much enjoyment and pleasure! Does the average Presbytery meeting of to-day give much enjoyment to anybody? Does it give any? Is it not notorious that many of the ministers who are doing the Church's work most successfully look upon attendance at Presbytery as a dead loss of time? Others look upon a meeting as something to be endured rather than enjoyed. Some of the causes which make Presbytery meetings a matter of endurance may be discussed in another paper. It is not hard to find them, and it is not hard to find some of the causes that made the old time meetings profitable and enjoyable. Hear Dr. Reid again:

When the Presbytery did meet, it generally continued in session for two days at least. There were, of course, fewer items of business; still with calls and reports of missionary work—and every minister was then a home missionary labourer, often giving services, more or less frequent, at points twenty or thirty miles from his stated charge—there was always a good deal to occupy the time and attention of the members. Then there was almost always a

preaching service in the evening of one of the days. Such services were more common in old times than they are now. When a large number of the members travelled together they were compelled to wait for one another, and could not run away to catch a train when ever it pleased them. I am inclined to think that more full and mature consideration was given to matters that came before them than at our meetings now-a-days.

That is to say, the members did not try to rush through the business in time to get away on the afternoon train. Happily for the Church, there were no trains in those early days. Had there been, the foundations of Presbyterianism might not have been so solidly laid. The founders of "this great Church,"—General Assembly phrase sat down deliberately and did the Lord's work in a deliberate and dignified way. They did not do business with their eye on the clock, their overcoats in one hand and their caps in the other. But that is not all. They usually had a "preaching service in the evening." What intolerable fogies these men were! How deplorably they were behind the times. They actually stopped business and began to preach! Where was the Book of Forms? Where was that excellent lady, the deceased wife's sister? Were there no men in those primitive days who could spend the time profitably in discussing the "minutes," or in wrestling with questions as, "Is it legal?" "Is it competent?" is it in accordance with those venerable twins, "use and wont?" Were there no aspiring church lawyers, or petrified ecclesiastics, or new or old Doctors who could spend the evening splitting the difference between tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee? Why did these brethren preach at Presbytery meetings?

Why did they not hold a conference? Why not have a convention? Were they old-fashioned enough to think that preaching was more vitally connected with their Master's work than overtures, resolutions, reports and matters of that kind?

One almost suspects Dr. Reid of pawky humour when he says, "Such services were more common in old times than they are now." Such services are scarcely ever held now. We can remember only one in the last twenty years.

What would be the fate of a man now who proposed to have a "preaching service" at ordinary meetings of Presbytery? Some of the members—perhaps a majority in almost any Presbytery—would oppose on the ground that Presbytery meetings are for "business." Some would probably hint that the man wanted to preach himself. A few would probably remain away. Certainly the proposal would be coldly received in many Presbyteries, and tabooed in some. Presbytery meetings are different from what they were fifty years ago, and the difference in some respects is distinctly in favour of the old ones.

FRAGMENTARY NOTES,

TORONTO CHURCHES—COOKE'S CHURCH AND HIS ELOQUENT PASTORS—OTHER MATTERS.

Toronto may now be called the City of Churches, and indeed few cities of the same size can boast of so many handsome edifices. What a few years ago were plain lath and plaster buildings, have given place to brick or stone edifices, with all the modern improvements of heating, lighting and ventilation. The number of congregations now claiming ecclesiastical connection, with the Presbyterian Church in this city, I think, is twenty-four; these of course include the church on Sumach Street, and one on Carlton Street, which latter is connected with the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

Some difference of opinion exists as to the ground which the Rev. Mr. Burnfield and his congregation occupy, "whether in the body or out of the body," but I have no doubt, as in many other cases, time will make all things right. One thing is sure, Mr. Burnfield is doing good work in a church filled with earnest worshippers. He conducts his services on strictly Presbyterian principles, and that too with an ability deserving a much wider recognition. That part of the city in which the building is situated, is filling up very fast, and whatever may have been the irregularities connected with his settlement, there is now a congregation fully equipped; enthusiastic at present, and hopeful for the future.

COOKE'S CHURCH.

This is one of the Presbyterian churches in Toronto, which has a history. Founded nearly forty years ago, it has had, if not an unchequered career, on the whole a successful one. A number of its ministers were men of whom any Church might be proud, comprising such names as Irvine, Marshall, Gregg, Robb, and the present pastor Mr. Patterson.

The Rev. Robert Irvine, D.D., was the first pastor. He was a man of great power as a preacher, and who shortly after coming to Canada, while still a young man, was eagerly desired as pastor by the First Presbyterian Church in Londonderry. Dr. Irvine had charges in St. John, N.B.; Montreal, Hamilton, and Augusta, Georgia, U. S., where he finished his ministry, having died several years ago; his loss being deeply regretted by an attached flock. The congregation in Augusta, at great expense, invited the Rev. Dr. Bennet, of St. John, N.B., to deliver the funeral oration. The fine and eloquent tribute paid by the St. John divine, was highly spoken of at the time. Drs. Bennet and Irvine were from the same congregation in County Down, Ireland. They were licensed by the Presbytery on the same day, preached their first sermons on the same Sabbath, in the same church, and were successively ministers of the same church in St. John, N.B.

Of Dr. Gregg it is unnecessary to speak; his labours in Cooke's Church will never be forgotten by the present generation of worshippers. With a vigorous, well cultivated mind, an eloquence at once forcible and impressive, he built up a large congregation, which comprised many of the leading

people of the city, and when called to Knox College, he left a congregation in a prosperous and peaceful condition.

The next pastor was the Rev. Dr. Robb, from County Tyrone, Ireland, under whose ministry the congregation still continued to prosper. As a pulpit and platform orator, Dr. Robb had few equals in any Church; and it was no wonder that his sermons and lectures on controversial subjects attracted immense audiences, that sometimes the windows and joists in in Cooke's Church, responded to the power of his eloquence. As a reader of the Scriptures, Dr. Robb probably had no equal in the entire Church. Having been educated in the narrow views which still characterize the majority of the Irish ministers, he clung to these opinions, although deeply sensible of how unpopular they were on this side of the water. In response to a call from the city of Galway, in Ireland, Dr. Robb decided to leave Canada, amid the regret of multitudes, comprising many who had no sympathy with some views which he held. He was not spared long to his new flock—the summons came, and in the full powers of his manhood, and in the midst of great usefulness, he was called to the General Assembly and Church of the first-born. He was much missed in the Irish Assembly. His manly eloquence, his straightforward honesty and genial nature, made for him troops of friends. Taken all in all, we don't believe he left in that august assemblage of divines a man superior in brilliancy and power.

For some years after Dr. Robb's departure, Cooke's Church passed through a succession of troubles, until the hearts of many of its faithful friends were failing them for fear that it would become extinct. Many left the old ship lest they might get wrecked; but the darkest hour of the night is the hour before the dawn. In Knox College was being trained a youth, who was destined to lead this Church from its weak and dying condition, to a place again among the prominent Churches of the city. Rev. William Patterson, the pastor, is a descendant of men who bore an honourable part in Irish struggles in the days gone by. Having graduated in Knox College, Mr. Patterson accepted a call to this Church, which at that time, I think, comprised about eighty members. But many of them were men of the right stuff; determined that so far as they could help, Cooke's Church would yet be a power in the city. Immediately after Mr. Patterson's settlement, the Church began to lift, and soon the building was filled up. Many of those who left returned and at present the church is filled to overflowing. The evening audience is a packed one, camp chairs having to be used.

The building has been renovated, improved and painted, circular pews put in, the galleries lowered, and altogether it is now one of the handsomest and most comfortable of the Toronto churches. The income of the Church at present is over \$100 per Sabbath. There were 200 names added to the communion roll during last year. Every department of Church work is well maintained, and the greatest harmony prevails throughout the congregation. Among the managers are Messrs. P. G. Close, Ald. McMillan, and Thomas A. Lytle, who have been for years connected with the Church; and among the elders may be mentioned William Hunter, John Rogers, James Allison, and William Rennie, most of whom have held office for many years. The Church was formerly regarded as the Irish Church; but such distinction is happily fast dying out, and will soon be unknown in Toronto.

THE REV. WILLIAM PATTERSON

was born in Maghera, Ireland, and connected with a congregation which was organized in 1658, and it is stated that during the rebellion in 1708, when the Tipperary militia were quartered in the "meeting house," they burned the pews for fuel and held a court martial on the Bible.

Maghera congregation has been favoured with a succession of able ministers, including such men as Rev. Charles Kennedy, Dr. S. Robson, Dr. Withrow, Magee College, Dr. Leitch, Belfast College, under whose ministry Mr. Patterson grew up, and Rev. Mr. Dickey, B.D., the present pastor, who was within a few votes of being chosen professor of Hebrew at the last meeting of Assembly. Since the organization of Maghera congregation, the Church has been steadily supplied with pastors, eleven having preceded Mr. Dickey.

Mr. Patterson is a popular preacher; his delivery is rapid, and his sermons direct and pointed. He is a Gospel preacher in every sense of the word, and he speaks to his audience in plain, simple language. His method and manner of handling his subject at once arrests the attention of his hearers, retaining it to the close. He has the rare faculty of keeping close to his text, and his sermons are about twenty-five to thirty minutes in length. His success in Cooke's Church is now assured, and the congregation are looking forward to a career of great prosperity.

As is well known, the church is named after the late Rev. Henry Cooke, D.D., LL.D., of Belfast, whose centenary was so generally observed by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland last May. Dr. Cooke, taken all in all, was the greatest man the Irish Presbyterian Church produced in the last hundred years. He was born at Maghera, and baptized by Rev. Mr. Glendy, who afterwards was connected with the rebellion of 1798, and had to go to America, where he became minister of a large Church in Baltimore, and for a number of years was chaplain to Congress. He was an eloquent preacher, and a man of great personal magnetism.

We in Canada may wonder why men of intelligence would be mixed up with a rebellion, but the disabilities which people had to endure for centuries, were such that we would not submit to for any length of time, and the wonder is that so few joined the ranks of the opposing party.

We live in a better and more tolerant age, and can worship God, according to the light of our consciences, without molestation from man.