

Our Contributors.

CONCERNING A WORSE THAN USELESS TRIBE

BY KNOXIAN.

In the preface to his great book, Principal Fairbairn says that the criticism which neither ends in construction, nor makes construction easier has no scientific character, and no function. These may not be his exact words but they express the idea accurately enough for popular purposes. Put in the concrete form, the learned Principal's theory is that a critic who does not construct anything himself, nor help others in construction, is a useless kind of a biped. The making of that discovery did not require the profound learning and splendid ability of the Principal of Mansfield College. Some of us who are not Principals, and never will be Principals of anything, found that out long ago. A critic who does nothing useful himself, and who never helps any other person to do anything useful, is often worse than useless. Quite frequently he is a downright nuisance.

Still it may not be quite correct to say that a critic of that kind has no function. His function may be to show that he is a fool. If he kept his mouth shut people might take him for a man of sense. Taking him for a man of sense, they might assign some work to him that only a sensible man can do. Serious mistakes may be obviated by the revelation which this kind of a critic makes of himself. The function of showing oneself a fool may not be particularly dignified nor inspiring, but it may be overruled for good.

The function of another critic may be to show that he is an ass. If he indulged in no criticism people might take him for a philosopher. We have it on good authority that there is no substitute for wisdom, but that silence comes nearer it than anything else. If a critic said nothing, and contented himself with merely looking wiser than even Solomon looked in his best days, people might mistake him for a second edition of Solomon enlarged and greatly improved. But the man said something intended for criticism, and by so doing classified himself. His function was to show the class he belonged to and he did it.

The function of a third critic may be to prove that he is a perambulating vinegar cask. He is on bad terms with everybody and finds fault with everything. Strictly speaking he does not criticise; he merely snarls.

Some critics criticise merely to show that they are there. They rise in the church courts, or at public meetings, or in the public papers mainly to keep themselves in evidence. If they did not keep themselves in evidence the human family might forget all about them. Critics of that kind are comparatively harmless. As soon as they have put themselves fairly in evidence they usually subside.

There is a good deal of criticism in the Ontario part of the Presbyterian Church just now, and the subjects handled are Theological education, the raw material out of which a good theological professor can be made and the finished product got ready for the chair. Whether the criticism will be of any use or not depends entirely on the result. If it proves constructive and puts two good professors into Knox College, it will be of great value to the Church. If it neither constructs, nor helps those who are constructing, it may be worse than useless. The policy that puts the nomination of professors in the hands of Presbyteries is on its trial, and, truth to say, the outlook is not specially encouraging at present.

Parliament is the place in which you see useful and useless criticism in full play. One member rises and slashes away at a bill, finds fault with it on general principles but sits down without suggesting any improvement. Another points out what he

considers weak or bad clauses, suggests improvements, amends some clauses, strikes out others and thus helps to construct what he considers a much better measure. Two or three members of constructive ability do that and the result often is a good act of parliament.

The two kinds of criticism, the useful and the mere snarl, are ever present in the church courts. The useful never, or very rarely, finds fault without suggesting improvement, the useless simply snarls. We have occasionally heard a man of good constructive ability point out defects in a measure, and candidly confess he could not suggest anything better, but he almost invariably asked those around him if they could not suggest an improvement. That, however, is a vastly different thing from mere fault finding for the sake of finding fault.

Have you gone into the criticism business? How do you propose to carry it on? Do you mean to work at it in a way that will lead to the construction of something useful, or help others who are trying to do something useful, or do you mean to do nothing more than snarl?

ANOTHER REJOINDER TO REV. R. P. MACKAY.

BY REV. CHARLES W. GORDON, B.A.

Even when he goes to war Mr. Mackay bears himself with true Highland courtesy, but I hope indeed it is not war at all.

Let me at the outset set myself right with Mr. Mackay on two personal matters. First.—If Mr. Mackay reads again my words upon the point to which he refers, he will see that they can not fairly be made to carry the charge of "insincerity" which he finds in them, though he is kind enough to relieve me of "intention" in the charge. My words simply state a certain tendency of mind in Mr. Mackay which makes it easy for him to fall into the error of accepting a private letter of the convener of the Home Mission Committee for a decision of that committee. "Insincerity" cannot in my mind be associated with the name of Mr. Mackay.

And second.—Mr. Mackay should not have used the expression "antagonizing the Church's efforts to obey the Lord's command" in discussing the question we have in hand. That is a serious charge to make; so serious that one wonders if Mr. Mackay realizes its full nature. If Mr. Mackay says "I do not apply these words to Mr. Gordon in particular," the answer is "What place have they then in this letter?" for I fancy Highland courage forbids that Mr. Mackay should strike at another over my back. Perhaps I should not have noticed the charge, serious though it is, and rubbed in though it is by a little homily, were it not that it bears upon a matter of far more importance than that I should have some hurt, more or less, done to my feelings; which, after all, is a matter of comparatively small moment I judge to you Mr. Editor or to your readers. And the matter of importance is this, that when men set forth methods of work they must expect and must allow full and free criticism of these methods. There are who cannot distinguish between a work and a method of doing that work, but Mr. Mackay is not one of these, and he must allow me to discuss in the freest manner his methods or those even of the Foreign Mission Committee, without impugning my loyalty to the cause of Foreign Missions, to the Church, or to our Lord. Anything else is both hopeless and intolerable. Full discussion of methods is essential to the development of a wise and liberal policy, and profitable discussion is possible only between men who have confidence in each other's purity of motive and loyalty to the work in question.

Now I want to set down some reasons why I do not like this new method of work proposed by the Foreign Mission Com-

mittee. For it turns out that the circular has the authority of the Foreign Mission Committee and Mr. Mackay will allow that I provided for a possibility of mistake upon this point. Now this is somewhat awkward for me, for a committee is not a man, but is a thing of inconvenient and perplexing impersonality with which it is difficult to deal. I shall avoid the Foreign Mission Committee and devote myself to the circular, by which they evidence their reality and palpability, and shall venture humbly to suggest certain reasons why the scheme should not be pushed.

I. The scheme should have been presented to the Church through the General Assembly. We do not insist upon our great committees laying the details of their plans before them, we confide these details to them, with the utmost confidence. But this scheme is too far-reaching in its effects upon our Church life at its most vital spot, viz, in the young people, to be introduced without the very fullest consideration by the Church. Then, too, in its operation, this scheme will come into touch with other important departments of work, and hence should be the result of the deliberations, not of a single committee, but of the Church as a whole, and finally the scheme involves a new principle not yet approved as in full consonance with Presbyterian polity. This aims at doing the work of the Church by what has been called "the fractional method." Instead of advancing by congregations it is proposed to advance by sections of congregations, by societies. It may be a good plan (personally I do not think so) but the point I make here is that good or bad, it has not been adopted by our Church. But some one will say: "What of the W.F.M.S.?" The principle involved in the W.F.M.S. is not the same. It is not the assigning a particular fraction of territory to a fraction of the Church, for a fraction of time, and besides there is a natural and special propriety in allowing the women of our Church to show their devotion to Him "who discovered the world's women and children" by assuming the care of all the heathen women and children found within the sphere of our Church's influence. And were it not for this very special propriety it might be difficult to find a *raison d'être* for the W.F.M.S. at all. Hence, because it seriously effects the young life of our Church, because it must come into touch with other important schemes, and because it involves a principle not yet approved by the Church, for these three reasons the scheme should have been presented to the Church upon the floor of the Assembly.

II. The scheme is of doubtful value either to the cause of Foreign Missions, or to the Young People's Societies.

Like Calvinism this circular has its "Five Points," but unlike the Calvinistic points they will not bear examination.

(1). "The spirit of union between societies." I have already shown that, though this has a pleasant sound, it has no practical value. What union would this scheme effect between the societies, say, of Paris and Portage la Prairie. Besides this effort at union is along quite wrong lines and the very attempt constitutes one of the dangers Mr. Mackay finds imaginary. There is a very strong tendency in this age to individualism and to the consequent loosening of congregational bonds. To do our best work as a Church we must work as one body, but the first essential is that each congregation be a unit, an organism with one spirit and one aim. To this end our young people must be trained to absolute loyalty to the congregation. It is our conviction that, as a rule, loyalty to our master finds best expression in the life and work of the congregation. The unifying element among congregations is the Church, not any society in the Church, and the strongest bonds the young people should be trained to recognize are those reaching down to them from the Church, through the congregation. The Christian Endeavor movement with its splendid spiritual dynamic, and its warm glow of feeling,

has a specially strong cohesive tendency, and so marked is this tendency, that, at almost every convention, the utmost stress is laid upon the spirit of the motto: "For Christ and the Church," lest unity amongst the societies should be at the expense of unity between societies and their respective congregations. This union among societies for a specific work is an extremely doubtful business.

(2). "The confining of Church funds to approved schemes." The plan proposed by the committee for attaining this most worthy ends can only be successful if all the fund of the Y.P. Societies are devoted to Honan which is not proposed by the committee, for what is to prevent funds not so devoted from dribbling off to extra-denominational schemes.

(3). "Correspondence with missionaries secured." It is indeed most necessary that our young people and all other people should receive full and accurate information in regard to our foreign mission work, but no one will say that this scheme is needed to accomplish this.

(4). "Concentration of study upon one field for one year." This is particularly bad. I could not learn all there is to know about Honan even in a year's study; but with India to know about, and Africa, and the Neglected Continent, and all the other sad dark spots of earth, I can not afford to concentrate study upon Honan for one year.

(5). "United prayer." I can't understand the view of prayer underlying this proposal. Are we asked to concentrate prayer upon a certain field for a year? Men cannot pray to order like that. Prayer is a movement of life and like all life movements is spontaneous. "You can't stop praying," as a very wise man aptly put it, "on the 31st of December."

The scheme will not do for Foreign Missions what the Committee hopes it will do, and it will do a lot of things that the Committee would rather it wouldn't.

III. The scheme was introduced to members of congregations in an unconstitutional manner. A circular proposing a new and comprehensive scheme of work on the part of the young people is sent to a lady who happens to be the secretary of the Christian Endeavor Society. With the circular comes a letter urging by strong arguments prompt and favorable action, but without any manner of consideration for the Kirk Session, or reference to its opinion much less its authority. Now if the lady happens to be judicious, as is likely, and the young people patient to await the opinion of the Session, which is possible, and the Session with the minister at its head chances to be composed of "douce buddies" that don't mind having their business done for them by an outside authority, which is, to say the least, doubtful, then in such a combination of probabilities there may be no trouble. But I question the right of any committee to approach members of a congregation with an important proposition without first taking the Session into its confidence. Now what I have written in this letter is in the interests, first, of Foreign Mission work, which I believe will be injured by the adoption of the scheme proposed by the circular, and, secondly, in the interests of a better understanding of the relations that the various departments of our Church work hold to each other and to the life of the Church as a whole. I may have "Home Mission eyes," but just for the present I am resolutely careful to regard this matter not from a Home Mission point of view. For any sake let us be done with this talk of "antagonism" between departments of work which cannot exist apart from each other, and of which one cannot fail without disaster to the other. We are clear about that point. Then if we find men representing these departments in antagonism to each other, either these men are wrong, or they are the victims of wrong in the system under which they work. When we are convinced that the men are right men, as is my conviction with regard to Mr. Mackay, we are driven to the conclusion