

Our Contributors.

ONE OF THE BEST MEETINGS SO FAR.

BY KNOXIAN.

"It is not over yet," was the reply given by one of the oldest and wisest commissioners, on Monday evening to the question: "Is not this the best Assembly since '75?"

Anybody who knows the leaders of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, could easily guess who it was that gave that safe reply. He must be a wise man, a man of experience, a safe man, and above all things, a Scotchman.

"It is not over yet," but it will be in three days at farthest, and as far as it has gone the meeting is one of the best in tone that has been held since the union. The business qualities, as well as the tone, have been fairly good, and when we remember that a General Assembly is three hundred and seventy men doing business continuously for ten hot days, it is not a wonder that a little time is occasionally lost. So far there has not been much lost. As usual, the losses have for the most part been made in dealing with small items. Three hundred and seventy men are too many to settle little matters of detail quickly and well. A considerable amount of business done in the Assembly could be better done in committee. Some years ago there was a mania against committees and there is no use in arguing with a mania. The mania has pretty well spent itself, and the Assembly might easily do a worse thing than hand over more small items to good committees and let the big court attend to big things.

The Assembly is well officered, and that, no doubt, is one reason why things have run so smoothly. The Moderator has done exceedingly well. It goes unsaid that Dr. Reid can settle any point or straighten out any tangle in a minute or two. The veteran Clerk looks remarkably well, and his thousands of friends will be glad to learn that he seems to be renewing his youth. The new Clerk, Dr. Campbell, takes quite kindly to his duties and discharges them efficiently and with the manner of a gentleman. Dr. Laing and Dr. Torrance bring in the daily grist from the Business Committee and put it into the hopper for the fathers and brethren to grind. It is needless to say that the hopper part of the business is well done. The Guelph and Dundas doctors are two of the best business men in the Church. The Church ought to be thankful that it has so many men who can do business well. In its own place, and for its own purposes, the business side of the Church's work is just as important as any other. The shell is not the egg, but if you try to carry an egg without any shell, you may get into trouble. The boiler is not the steam, but steam without a boiler is not a very safe or useful agent. Mere shouting about religion without any system, or order, or organization, never does much good.

For the most part, the Conveners, Chairmen of Boards, and others bringing business before the Assembly, have done their work remarkably well. We do not recall any meeting of the Supreme Court at which so many men brought in their business in such good shape, explained the "points" in their reports in such clear, crisp, business style, and took their seats without wearying anybody. This part of the Assembly work has been admirably done, and the Church should be thankful that it has so many men on boards and committees who do their work so well.

On the whole, the speaking has been very good. The old-time speech which began with a long introduction and dragged out at the end like—well, like some sermons, is now seldom heard. With scarcely an exception, speeches, except at the popular evening meetings, are now short, crisp, and business-like—just what speeches on business matters ought to be.

The popular meetings on Home and Foreign Missions were exceedingly good. The climax of interest was reached on Foreign Mission night when the whole Assembly, audience and all, rose to receive Dr. Paton and welcomed the grand old man from New Hebrides in a style that manifestly touched his heart. The whole meeting was one of those fine things that one sees only once or twice in a life-time. A really good meeting of any kind cannot be made to order. It is not exclusively a matter of organization, though organization has something to do with it. You cannot organize the tone, the life, the spirit of a meeting.

But, as already stated, the meeting of Assembly is not over yet and therefore, we must not be too optimistic. There is plenty of time yet to strike several snags. Next week we can speak more definitely about the General Assembly of 1893.

THE CULTIVATION OF A DEVOTIONAL HABIT OF MIND.

BY REV. J. A. R. DICKSON, PH. D., GALT, ONT.

The minister, by virtue of his office, is exposed to many insidious evils, among which may be mentioned a peculiar hardness that comes of the routine through which he necessarily must go, week after week and year after year. He is in danger of degenerating into a mere official, and then his work is mechanical, hard and dry, lacking in that quality called "unction." That mellowness, heartiness, tenderness which comes of feeling deeply, and being oneself under the power of the truth. That sweet and subdued state of soul that enables one to sympathize with all to whom the truth applies. The want of that is a serious and grave deficiency in the minister's spirit. It may come from other causes than the routine of his work. It may be produced by a worldly disposition that carries one away from communion and fellowship with God. It may be the fruit of contention, and the bitterness that contention engenders. It may be the result of an overfull life, too many engagements being made, so that the time for heavenly converse and intercourse with one's own heart cannot be found. Life may be full of business and excitement—too full—the world being too much with us late and soon. Whencesoever this hardness comes, it should be guarded against by every means, as it destroys both the enjoyment of the preacher and also the profit of the hearer. It rests like the hand of death on the minister of the Gospel of God's grace. It is destructive of every good influence he may exert. It neutralizes all his work. To have others enjoy the truth that is preached, the minister must enjoy it himself. He must be its living epistle. He must adorn the doctrine he preaches, making it beautiful and attractive in the eyes of men, and grateful to their spirits. All ministers know how they are exposed to the incoming of this hardness. It steals upon them at unawares. And it too often gets a good grip of them, so that it holds its ground a long time before it be displaced. How long this goes on in many cases! Till discouragement and distress breed thoughts of giving up the work of the ministry altogether. The sermons may be brilliant, the prayers may be thoughtful and comprehensive, the people may be anxiously attentive, but no effect is produced. Nothing tells. There is no unction in the service, because he who, like the telegraph operator, is to send the message to its destination, does not touch the key of the proper instrument. This hardness, come whence it may, is all too common. Hence, ministers require to be constantly reminded of the need they have to cultivate a devotional habit of mind. That it is not by might nor by power that they succeed, but by God's Spirit; and that they must keep the channel open in their own hearts for the down-flow of divine power, through their word upon the people. There is not a professorial position, it is a ministerial position: one demand-

ing heart, feeling, sympathy. Thomas Binney, of the Welch House Chapel, London, preached a sermon before the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1845, entitled "The Closet and the Church," in which he set forth in a powerful way the need of prayer on the part of the minister. He says in one place, "This, then, is the defect that poisons everything; they are not men of frequent, earnest, private devotion. They have great abilities; but they do not pray. They are ministers of Christ according to outward order; but they do not pray. They are good, and perhaps even great preachers, but they do not pray. They may be zealous and enterprising, leaders in the movements of public activity, the first and foremost in popular excitement, abundant in their labours, working zealously in various modes and divers plans; but they do not pray. They are men of integrity, purity, benevolence; but they do not pray. And this one thing—their 'restraining prayer,' their not 'calling upon God', their not 'seeking a ter,' nor 'stirring up themselves to take hold of' Him—this, like the want of love in the Christian character 'stifles the glory' of everything else; it renders worthless their genius, talents, acquisitions; obstructs their spiritual prosperity, impedes their usefulness and 'blasts their success.' In another place he says: "A minister cannot live on his own official acts—his public prayers, his public preachings, his meditation on the Scriptures preparatory to that, the impressions of truth and the gushes of emotion which he may obtain or enjoy in the discharge of his duties. These are not the things by which alone, or even chiefly, his personal religion can be upheld or grow. If confined to these and dependent upon them, it will languish and die. He must enter his closet," etc. Then, elsewhere, we pick out these aphoristic statements: "We pray as part of 'the obedience of faith.'" "The success of the ministry is attributed to the Master, not to the servant." "If a minister have not God's aid in his work, he is left in a condition of appalling abandonment." "The private prayers of the pastor may be regarded as an essential part of his ministerial duty, inasmuch as they are necessary to the exercise of ministerial intercession."

In the letter of Frederick W. Robertson, of Brighton, we have this startling acknowledgment: "I will tell you of a want I am beginning to experience very distinctly. I perceive more than ever the necessity of devotional reading. I mean the works of eminently holy persons, whose tone was not merely uprightness of character and high-mindedness, but communion—a strong sense of personal and ever-living communion—with God besides. I recollect how far more peaceful my mind used to be when I was in the regular habit of reading daily, with scrupulous adherence to a plan, works of this description." These devotional works open the door to communion—they draw us within the veil, and quicken us with the spirit of prayer. Any help in this direction is good. Anything that will keep the heart in tune with the music of God's love, and in sympathy with the needs and sorrows of our fellow-men. The Rev. William Bull, of Newport Pagnel, the friend of John Newton, Cowper and Rowland Hill, a great and good man, who often preached in Surrey Chapel, drawing great crowds, writes thus to his son: "The more retirement you have before you preach, the better, in general will you preach. I like to read, before I preach, some good book, and the more spiritual it is, the better. Then I like to preach my sermon over to myself for at least two hours. When I do this I am sure to feel at liberty. In all your praying and preaching, never lose sight of the divine unction." Again, he gives us his estimate of religious biography: "I have just been reading the life of Mr. Boswell. It has affected me very much. I have always found the lives and experiences of great and good men to do me more good than any other books, except the Bible. The lives of learned and holy men are the most profitable of all books to a minister."

How many bear witness to the inspiration a holy life has ministered, even in a very meagre and imperfect record of it. As Alexander Vinet observes: "The true, the best monument of a beautiful life, is the detailed account of it; it is a monument which not only commemorates, but informs and instructs." In Dr. Chalmers' journals, we find many references to the cultivation of a devotional habit. Thus, "Find it essential to a religious frame that there should be more of devotional thinking and prayer." I am reading the "Marrow of Modern Divinity," and derive from it much light and satisfaction on the subject of faith. It is a masterly performance, and I feel a greater nearness to God, convincing me that Christ, is the way to Him, and an unconditional surrender of ourselves to Christ, the first and most essential step of our recovery. O my God, make me every day wiser unto salvation." "Finished the 'Marrow.' I feel a growing delight in the fulness and sufficiency of Christ. Oh God bring me nearer and nearer to Him."

Robert Murray McCheyne thus wrote to a brother minister: "You know not when your last Sabbath with your people may come. Speak for eternity. Above all things cultivate your own spirit. A word spoken by you when your conscience is clear, and your heart is full of God's Spirit, is worth ten thousand words spoken in unbelief and sin. This was my great fault in the ministry." This was written while on his visit to the East.

The biographer of Matthew Henry, notes among his graces his prayerfulness, saying: "He had both the gifts and the grace of prayer, in a very uncommon measure, and this duty was the delight of his soul; his early acquaintance with God and that clear conscience he had always endeavoured to keep, made the duty of prayer easy; and that were natural to him, he not only abounded in supplication for his family and friends, but had recourse to God, with great freedom, about all his concerns. Prayer made all his work pleasant, he went out in the strength of the Lord. He often prayed that he might get upward, upward towards God, and forward, forward towards heaven, and would be so earnest in these requests, that one would think his soul was, indeed, just upon the wing, taking its flight to heaven.

Look where we will, read where we will, we shall find that the most successful ministers have been those who keep their own vineyard cultivated, and clear of weeds, and lives in the presence of God, drawing from Him all necessary supplies of grace to keep the heart mellow, and the spirit sweet, and the life serious.

MONTREAL GROWTH OF PRESBYTERIANISM.

Montreal is the commercial capital of the Dominion, and is in every way entitled to this distinction; whether as regards its increasing population, its wealthy banking institutions, its extensive shipping interests, its merchant princes, or its educational institutions, all combine to place Montreal in the front rank of the cities of the Dominion.

Its progress within eight years is something phenomenal, the number of new streets leading to the suburbs, new buildings, and the great improvement in the class of buildings which are being erected. Presbyterianism is making rapid strides, which no doubt is much helped and sustained by the presence of the Montreal Presbyterian College, of which the Rev. Dr. MacVicar is Principal, and who on a late occasion was the recipient of a handsome present from the citizens and students, as a recognition of his valued services to the cause of education generally, and the faithful and unselfish services which he has rendered to Presbyterianism by his connection with the Presbyterian College in Montreal.

Two Presbyterian churches here have decided to re-build, at a heavy cost, during the present year. Erskine Church, which has had a prosperous history, will move to the corner of Crescent and Sherbrooke