

CONCERNING INNOVATIONS.

By Knoxonian.

"That is an innovation," says our conservative friend, when any change is proposed, and he generally says it with the air of a man who feels certain he has settled the matter. Well, supposing it is. Your first baby was an innovation. Webster defines an innovation to be: "Change made by the introduction of something new." Every law, custom, rite and practice in existence was an innovation when first introduced. The very customs that extremely conservative people cling to so tenaciously were at one time innovations. That which they fight for now because it is old, was fought against years ago by the same kind of people because it was new. The innovations of one century become the good old things of the next. It is a little perplexing that the same class of people should denounce a change when made and not very long afterwards fight for the thing changed. Such a procedure would almost lead one to believe that the merits of the question are not taken into account and that mere age is the only thing considered. Now a custom is not necessarily good, simply because it is old. Drinking customs are old. Profane swearing is an old custom. It is a long time since men began to cheat. Lying began soon after the creation. Sin in a hundred forms is old. Satan is old. An old custom is not necessarily good any more than an old man is necessarily good. Some old men are terribly wicked.

Every man that ever did anything conspicuously good for God or humanity might be charged with introducing innovations. The Priests of Baal might have accused Elijah for introducing innovations on Mount Carmel. The fire test was certainly a new thing. Daniel figured as an innovator in Babylon. Every prophet or priest or king that broke up a system of idolatry might have been charged with innovation. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost was a decided innovation. [No preacher in Jerusalem ever delivered a sermon like that before. The Twelve introduced an innovation when they asked the Church to elect deacons. The cry against the founders of Christianity everywhere and always was that they were overturning established rites and customs. That cry was put in a condensed form when they were charged with turning the world upside down. Turning the world upside down is an extensive and rather startling innovation.

Martin Luther was an innovator. So was John Knox. So was John Wesley. The late Dr. George Leslie Mackay introduced some innovations in Formosa.

Now we think we hear some good men say: "Oh, there is no analogy between these cases and the case of a man who wishes to make changes in these modern times." Well, we admit the comparison does not go on all fours, but we do most emphatically assert that it is good in one particular: it shows that to shout "innovation" proves nothing in regard to any given question. Any proposed change should be considered on its merits and merely to say "innovation" is to say nothing.

The utter emptiness of the cry about innovations may be seen in another way. Railways are innovations, steamboats are innovations, telegraph lines are innovations, printing presses and reaping machines are innovations, coal oil lamps are innovations, the electric light is an innovation, daily newspapers are an innovation, improvements of all kinds are innovations when introduced. We live among innovations, work with innovations, make money out of innovations, enjoy innovations, and would feel that many of the comforts of life were withdrawn if the innovations were removed and we were forced back to the old state of things. Of course people who are pinched a little by any improvement are apt to cry out against the innovation. The proprietor of a line of stage coaches never likes to hear the whistle of the locomotive. A manufacturer of tallow candles is of course opposed to gas, and the gas companies are not in love with the electric light. A man who sells whiskey thinks the Local Option Act a most outrageous innovation. When the material improvements mentioned were introduced somebody always shouted "innovation," which proves, not that needless and useless changes are good, but the mere cry of "innovation," in and of itself, is no reason why a proposed change should not be made.

Over against the very conservative people who contend against any change, no matter what its merits, there is another class, equally unreasonable and far more dangerous—the class who want to change everything. They fight against everything old just as the others fight against everything new, and with just as little reason. They never look at an old institution, without feeling a burning desire to pull it down. They clamour everlastingly for change, just for the sake of change. They are uneasy, restless and dangerous. It gives them great delight to prove that their fathers were fools and their grandfathers asses, —propositions the truth of which we might almost infer from the character of the progeny. It grieves these people very much that we can't have a new sun every day and a new moon every night. They want a new Bible, and new standards, and a new church, a new way of salvation, and a new minister, and new elders and new managers, and new Sabbath school officers, and if they would tell the truth most of them want a new God. This last mentioned want is probably the parent of all the other wants. If they ever get to heaven, which is rather doubtful, unless greatly changed, they won't be there any time until they begin to clamour for changes. As between these people and the people who oppose every change there is not much to choose. Probably the people who cry "innovation" are the safer of the two. The right course lies between these extremes. A proposed change should be examined on its merits. The main question is not: "Is it old or is it new?" but "Is it on the whole the best thing to do now and here?" What a world of trouble would be saved if everybody kept this very elementary question before his mind!

A Canadian newspaper recently stated that with many ministers to-day it appears to be only a matter of salary. The Herald and Presbytery thus defend the clergymen:

"Our experience is exactly the opposite. As age comes on and our acquaintance with ministers is extended, the more our conviction strengthens that they are the truest, best, and most sincere men on earth. It is no discredit to a minister that he wants a living salary. The Scripture doctrine is that he should have it. 'They which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.' It is no discredit that, where other things are equal, he accepts the call offering the largest salary. He has the right to give his family the best available advantages."

LITERARY NOTES.

The Biblot for January is a reprint of Shelley's Defence of Poetry. Such a fine piece of work does not need special commendation at this time of the day. It is enough at the opening of a new year to say that those who send to the publisher Mr. T. B. Mosher, Portland, Me., the modest sum of fifty cents will receive each month a pleasant reminder that the money has not been spent in vain. We reproduce, however, for the enjoyment of our readers Swinburne's tribute on the Centenary of Shelley.

Now one hundred years ago among us
flame,
Down from some diviner sphere of purer
flower,
Clothed in flesh to suffer, maimed of
wings to soar;
One whom hate once hailed as now love
hails by name,
Chosen of love as chosen of hatred. Now
no more
Ear of man may hear or heart of man
deplete,
Aught of dissonance or doubt that mars
the strain,
Raised at last by love where love sat
mute of yore.
Fame is less than love, and loss is more
than gain,
When the sweetest souls and strangers—
fallen in fight,
Slain and stricken as it seemed in base
men's sight,
Rise and lighten in the graves of foemen
slain;
Clothed about with love of all men as
with light,
Suns that set not, stars that know not
day from night.

The World to-day, (Chicago and New York), is a fine specimen of a monthly magazine that is bright without being sensational, and solid without being dull. It takes a good all round view of the world, and is especially helpful to those who are interested in the purification of politics and the elevation of social life. Where there is so much "literature" of the "yellow" type magazines of this kind are one of the most hopeful features of our modern life. The paragraphs in the "Events of the Week" are well written. One of the special features of the February number is an article on "The Awakening of China." There is also, among other interesting features, a sketch of Mary Eddy, by one of her admirers, the spirit of which may be seen from the following paragraph: "The excitement which prevails when a patient dies under Christian Science treatment might be calmed by the consideration that forty millions die annually under Materia Medica. The exasperations caused by the statement that matter is not substantial might give way to sincere enquiry, since now that natural scientists announce that matter has been found to consist, not of atoms, as has previously been believed, but of force." This does not touch the question as ordinary people are not troubling much about the ultimate nature of matter, but they are annoyed to be told that they only have "a belief of a pain"; and then the fact that forty millions die, notwithstanding all the best efforts, does not excuse us for neglecting the use of "Science" that might be helpful.

A noteworthy feature of The Living Age for Feb. 2, is the leading article on "France and the Pope's Move," by Laurence Jerald, which gives what is perhaps the clearest and most intelligible account of the crisis between the church and state in France which has yet been published. It is written in a candid spirit, but if it has any leaning it is anti-clerical. By way of offset, The Living Age for February 9 prints an article from The Saturday Review, called "Christianity at Bay in France," which is distinctly Catholic in its view. A readable and piquant account of "Stray Religions in the Far North-West" in The Living Age for February 2, describes the Menonites, the Doukhobors and other queer religious sects.