

Our Contributors.

SOME SUBJECTS THAT THE COMING LECTURERS IN KNOX COLLEGE MIGHT DISCUSS—WHEN THEY COME.

BY KNOXIAN.

A few months ago Mr. William Houston, M.A., had a paper in the *Knox College Monthly* that attracted considerable attention and drew hearty amens from many readers. Mr. Houston undertook to show, and we think did most clearly show, that the chief defect in ministerial education at the present time and in this country lies in the direction of English. A minister may be well read in classics and mathematics; he may have a generous knowledge of metaphysics and theology; he may be accomplished in the sciences and a master in modern languages, and yet not be able to speak his own language as forcibly and impressively as a farmer from the next concession or a store keeper or a municipal man from the next village. (Oh, that we were allowed to give a few living illustrations on this point!)

We have not Mr. Houston's admirable article before us but if we rightly remember, what he insisted upon was such a knowledge of English as will enable a man not only to speak with correctness but with impressiveness. To express truth is one thing, to impress it is another and entirely different thing. Fifty men can express truth for every one that can impress it. There is no particular difficulty in standing up before an audience and by working the vocal apparatus give expression to truth on any subject one understands. A parrot can be taught expression. The problem in the ministry that must be solved sooner or later at somebody's expense is, not how to express truth, but how to impress it, how to make it strike and stick. This is the problem that Phelps wrestles with all through his admirable book, "English Style in Public Discourse." A month's grind on that book alone, or on the works on Rhetoric recently published by Genung would save an earnest student, not above studying his art, many a discouraging hour in the actual work of the ministry.

Some one may say the power that makes the impression is all in the truth not in the manner of stating it. Now let us test that statement. Say "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," with a good vigorous emphasis on great. Now say, "Diana of the Ephesians is great." Is that the same sentence? The words are the same though slightly transposed. The fact stated is exactly the same but will anybody say the sentences have the same force. The one if properly uttered, goes like a bullet, the other if uttered by the best elocutionist is as feeble as the

"Pierce, sir, pierce is the word, strike out penetrate and put in pierce," said Robert Hall to some one who was reading his manuscript. Penetrate is a good enough word but, Robert Hall being a thorough master of forcible English, knew the moment he heard it that it was no such working word as pierce?

But what is the use of dwelling on this point. Every sensible man in the country knows that the same facts or arguments may be put in the weakest or most forcible manner and that the difference is mainly in the man that puts them. Every little circle of choice spirits knows that three-fourths of the power of a story depends on the telling of it. We might put in a rare illustration here but we forbear because the man who furnished it is still alive. He tried to tell a story at a tea meeting and builded mu'h better than he knew.

One occasionally hears good people in our congregations say that certain students cannot preach but that they would make good professors of theology. Indeed there is a kind of student that is often voted to the professorial chair before he has finished his course. Theological professors have no idea of the number of students appointed by the popular vote to fill their shoes. And who are these favoured young gentlemen who get professorships before they finish their studies? Nine times out of ten they are students with a reputation for high scholarship, but who have not enough power of expression to make an impression. A young man has a brilliant course in his university; he takes high honours in his theological seminary; people see his name in the papers and send for him. He comes and feebleness is stamped on every part of the service and sermon. The good people are too kind to criticize unfavourably: they are too loyal to blame the college and they explain away all difficulties by saying that nature intended the young man for a college professor! Perhaps she did but the Church persistently refuses to appoint a new batch of professors, and therefore it might be better to avoid that doubtful qualification for a professorship which consists in speaking English feebly. As a general thing the men who have been appointed professors don't speak English in that way.

Students who take high honours are often mortified to find that fellow students who do fair work in college but have no academic honours are often far more popular with congregations than the men who have climbed to the very highest rungs of the academic ladder. It is a mystery to them why ordinary students should be so often asked for during the session and have congregations waiting them when their course is ended. The common expression of surprise is, "I don't understand what people see in him." Sometimes the surprise is slightly tinged with bitterness.

There need be no mystery about the matter. The standards that obtain in congregations and in colleges are radically

different. In colleges the standard is scholarship, or as some people would say, the power to cram for examinations. In congregations the standard is mainly the power to make an impression by the use of God's truth. The people judge a preacher by his preaching—not by the examinations he passed. We have heard of cases in which graduates of certain universities influenced congregations to call fellow-graduates by dwelling on the college course of the candidates but such cases must always be rare and a few more failures brought about in that way will make them rarer still. Earnest, sensible, God-fearing men want a pastor who can preach the Gospel and build up their congregations. One or two prigs in a congregation may spoil an occasional call for a man of that kind and bring in an inferior man for purely academic reasons, but that kind of thing cannot be done often among people who know their duty and have a reasonable amount of sense and self-respect.

Is there not room for one or two short courses on this subject? Call it Sacred Rhetoric; call it "The Art of putting things;" call it English, give it Spencer's title, "The Philosophy of Style," give it any name you please. A rose smells just as sweet under any other name. The thing wanted is a course or two that will give students some hints on the power of expression and fire them with ambition to study the subject for themselves.

Of course the right thing would be to appoint a professor to do the work in a regular way—but the Church is not in any humour just now for appointing professors. To expect the present professors to leave their own departments and teach this or any other side subject in a systematic way is about as reasonable as to ask them to go out and build a railroad on Saturdays. The very most that the professors can do is to criticize a student's power of expression as it appears in his class exercises. The burden of the criticism may be to tell him that he hasn't any. That may not mend matters much.

We could mention several other subjects which we think might be discussed in a short course by outside lecturers but we willingly give the floor to anybody who wants it and if nobody strikes on our subject we may suggest them at some future time.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S SABBATH SCHOOL COMMITTEE.

The Sabbath School Committee of the General Assembly held two meetings lately, at both of which the same items of business were considered. One, for the convenience of members residing in the Maritime Provinces, was held during the meeting of Synod at Pictou, October 4-9; the other in Toronto during the sessions of the Ontario Sabbath School Convention, October 23, 24. By this means a maximum of attendance with a minimum of expense was attained. Seeing that the Assembly has made no provision for payment of travelling expenses, and the members, at least until Assembly meets and sanctions their action, must bear their own charges, the latter consideration was a very important one. Both meetings were well attended, and the business received very careful consideration. The following is a brief summary of the decisions arrived at:

1. Forms for the usual statistics required by the General Assembly, and also for the necessary returns in connection with the scheme of higher religious instruction were received and adopted.

2. The appointment of local centres and presiding examiners was committed to their corresponding members in their several Presbyteries. That is, the Convener of the Presbytery's Sabbath School Committee will name the places at which examinations are to be held and the persons who are to preside at them. In making the appointments the convenience of candidates is chiefly to be considered.

No action can of course be taken until the names of intending candidates are sent in, after January 1, 1890.

Chief examiners were nominated for the biblical, doctrinal and historical departments. The duty of these is to set the question papers and forward them in manuscript, confidentially, to the Convener before the 1st of January next. They are to prepare eight questions for each class of candidates, or separate papers, and to assign a maximum value to each question. The total maximum marks for each paper to be 200. In preparing their questions the chief examiners are respectfully requested to have regard to the tentative nature of the scheme and the unfamiliarity of our Sabbath schools with written examinations.

Four sub-examiners were nominated for each question paper—twenty-eight in all. The duty of these is to value the answers, as mailed to them by the presiding examiners, and forward the results to the Convener. Each sub-examiner will receive all the answers to two questions. It was left to the convener to arrange details.

Three examiners of essays were nominated, and the Convener was authorized to add to their number if necessary, so that no one should be asked to read more than twenty essays. All names are withheld until the consent of appointees has been obtained.

3. It was decided that the examinations upon the Syllabus for 1889 should be held on Friday and Saturday, the 7th and 8th of March next, at the hours of from ten to twelve a.m. and from two till four p.m. If necessary an extra session from four to six p.m. on Friday may be added. The arrangement of details was left to the Convener.

4. The following sub-committee was appointed to select and purchase diplomas, prizes and medals, viz.: Rev. T. F.

Fotheringham, Convener; Messrs. D. Fotheringham and James Croil. They were instructed to confer with any others whose advice they deemed valuable.

5. The Syllabus for 1890 was so far completed as follows:

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA.

HIGHER RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION.

Examination Syllabus, 1890.

DEPARTMENT I.—BIBLICAL.

Junior and Intermediate.—The International Sabbath School Lessons for 1890.

Senior.—The same as for junior, but with somewhat more difficult questions. Also an additional paper on "The Life of Jesus Christ," by Rev. James Stalker, M.A.

DEPARTMENT II.—DOCTRINAL.

Junior and Intermediate.—"The Shorter Catechism," by Prof. Salmond, D.D. Part II. Sec. I. (Questions 39-81). Also be prepared to write out correctly the full answer to any question in the second part of the Catechism. (Questions 54-107 inclusive).

Senior.—"The Shorter Catechism," by Alex. Whyte, D.D., pp. 100-213. (Questions 39-107.) Also be prepared to write out correctly the full answer to any question in the Catechism.

DEPARTMENT III.—HISTORICAL.

Considering the importance of the period and the novelty of the subject in our Sabbath schools, it was decided to continue the same text books in this department for another year.

Junior and Intermediate.—"The History of the Reformation," by the Rev. Professor Withrow.

Senior.—"The Reformation," by Prof. Lindsay, D.D.

Candidates who present themselves in March, 1889, are not excluded from the examinations in 1890, but no second medal, prize or diploma will be given to any one, nor will a prize be given to a medallist of 1889. This means that any candidate may take the reward of a higher standing at the second examination, but not that of the same or a lower.

DEPARTMENT IV.—ESSAYS.

The selection of a subject was postponed meantime.

No change was made in the regulations and instructions governing the working of the scheme.

6. An outline of the duties which might be expected from a general superintendent of Sabbath school work, prepared by Mr. D. Fotheringham at the Convener's request, was read and approved. The Convener was instructed to prepare a circular letter, based upon it, for the information and guidance of Presbyteries in considering the remit of the General Assembly regarding the appointment of this officer. Copies to be sent to corresponding members for distribution at an early meeting of their respective Presbyteries.

7. The following sub-committee was appointed to prepare the handbook called for by the General Assembly in terms of recommendation of last year's report: Mr. D. Fotheringham, Convener; Revs. John Neil, Dr. McTavish and John McEwen. The committee was instructed to have their report ready by February 1, so that it might be circulated amongst the members of the Sabbath School Committee, and fully considered at the next meeting.

8. The Convener was instructed to inform the Committee referred to in recommendation 2 of last year's report, that the Sabbath School Committee would not undertake the responsibility of publishing the Sabbath school services prepared by them. This resolution was designed to correct an impression that might have been conveyed in correspondence with the Conveners.

9. The following sub-committee was appointed to prepare a concert exercise for next "Children's Day": Rev. John McEwen, Convener; Rev. T. C. Jack and Mr. T. W. Nisbet. To report at next meeting.

10. It was decided to hold the next meeting of the Committee on the Second Wednesday of June at half-past nine a.m. in Banks Street Church, Ottawa.

11. The following sub-committee was appointed to draft a recommendation to the General Assembly anent Sabbath school literature, and report to next meeting: Revs. R. P. McKay, Convener; T. C. Jack, Dr. M. Fraser, James Ballantyne and S. Houston. This subject was introduced by Mr. W. D. Russell, of Winnipeg, and was very fully discussed.

12. Mr. Murray, of Hamilton, drew attention to the defective character of the class register at present in use, in that no provision was made for quarterly and annual summaries, and Mr. D. Fotheringham was appointed to represent the matter to the publishers.

13. The Convener submitted a statement of receipts and expenditure, showing that \$172.64 had been contributed by sixty-six schools. The balance on hand after the discharge of all present liabilities was \$41.06.

Schools which have not yet responded are urgently requested to forward their contributions at an early date. Only a small number of our large city and town schools have yet been heard from, although the Committee are assured of their hearty sympathy and co-operation. The Committee go forward to the much larger outlay required by the Scheme of Higher Religious Instruction, confident that the means to carry it successfully through will be amply supplied by Him who has laid the work upon them, through the willing gifts of His people.

T. F. FOTHERINGHAM, Convener.