

Our Contributors.

A LOGICAL DIVISION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

BY KNOXIAN.

The clerical members of the General Assembly might be classified in a number of ways. One division would be those who preach Gaelic and those who don't. Another division would be those who have been honoured with a D.D. and those who have escaped. A third division would put theological professors on one side and *mere pastors*—as a distinguished authority used to call them—on the other. The pastors would probably have a majority. Then again, the brethren might be divided into those who want a call to a larger sphere of usefulness and those who are satisfied to remain where they are and let the sphere look after them. In fact many divisions might be made. Classified according to their work in the Assembly, the brethren might be arranged in three divisions—the *useful*, the *ornamental*, and the *obstructive*.

THE USEFUL.

The great majority of the brethren are useful. If they don't speak they vote, and voting is the main business. Many of those who never speak listen powerfully. If a man is a good listener and does not learn anything the fault is not his. The fault in that case lies with the men who speak, and if they do not speak in such a way as to edify good listeners the responsibility falls upon them. Some members of Assembly have laid up a good deal of responsibility in that way. Their surplus is larger than Mr. Mowat's.

Some of the useful members of Assembly deserve a separate classification. Prominent among the most useful is the *good committee man*. The real work of the Assembly is always done in committee and done there by a few men. They work before hours and after hours, work between sederunts, work at meal time, and often work when those who find fault with their work are in bed or ought to be. They lick the business into shape and bring it before the Assembly in an orderly and condensed form. If all the work of an Assembly were done in open court the Assembly might sit three months and then not be done. All deliberative bodies do the main part of their work by committees. Parliaments would have to sit all the year round if they did no work by committees. County councils do the most of their work by committees. So do all deliberative bodies. It has become somewhat fashionable in certain quarters lately to rail at committees and say the Church is *committee-ridden*. Some matters perhaps are at times referred to committees that should not be, but the fact remains that without good committee men the business of the Church would soon come to a dead-lock. One good committee man is worth more to the Church than a thousand snarling critics.

The brother who can make a good practical suggestion is a useful member. Difficulties arise at times when the wisest members don't know what is best to be done. The man who comes in at this crisis with a good practical suggestion is one of the very best kind of men. He is worth more to the Church than a conference on the millennium. If we were asked to make a new beatitude it would be: "Blessed is the man that has a good suggestion."

The brother who can unravel a knot in a sentence or two is one of the most useful of members. Sometimes the business gets in a tangle. A score of men try to straighten it out. Each man generally makes it worse. Every member who raises his index finger, looks troubled, and shouts, "Mr. Moderator," adds to the confusion. There is one man in every Assembly who can put any matter of order right in a sentence. His name is Dr. Reid.

The brother who can make a first-class speech at the popular evening meetings is a useful member. The city people come out to these meetings in large numbers. They expect a treat. Sometimes they get it and sometimes they don't. The people suppose that the best speakers in the Church are in the Assembly. No doubt the Assembly thinks so too. Such being the case, it is a great pity that a meeting on Home or Foreign Missions under the auspices of the General Assembly should be anything less than a splendid demonstration. Sometimes it is a good deal less, and the people go home wondering if that is all the best men in the Church can do. The brother who can lift a meeting like that out of its dulness and send the

people home proud of their Church is a useful member. The blame for the failures that sometimes take place rests mainly on the members who arrange for the meeting—they select speakers who cannot speak for reasons which no doubt are satisfactory to themselves.

The member who can make his motion, or present his report, or support his overture, or speak on any matter, in such a manner as to put the Assembly in real good humour is a useful member. Amidst much that is dull, a great deal that is tedious, not a little that is irritating, and a little that is positively stupid, some pleasantry is a great relief. A good hearty laugh does not hurt even a Doctor of Divinity. Even a college Principal might occasionally relax a little without utterly ruining his institution.

THE ORNAMENTAL MEMBERS.

These brethren are few in number. The ornamental member is generally a nice young man who has lately finished his college course and has a seat in the Assembly for the first time. He is always well-dressed. He has no taste for church business and does nothing but vote. If the Assembly is convened in the city in which the ornamental member attended college, he spends most of the afternoons in the gallery talking with the ladies. He used to visit these ladies in his student days, and some of the elder ones may yet visit his in-laws in the capacity of mother-in-law. Such things have happened.

Every Assembly has three or four brides. The "Assembly bride" is as much a feature of the Assembly as the Moderator. In fact she is usually a much more attractive feature. A row of Assembly brides in a front seat in the gallery is a delightful spectacle to gaze upon. It is a finer sight than a whole college of Moderators. The gentlemen who take care of these brides are all, for the time being, ornamental members. Of course they cannot get down to business, especially such repulsive business as discussing the status of that excellent lady the deceased wife's sister.

Ornamental members are generally very excellent young men. An occasional clerical dude may be found among them, but the great majority are earnest, hard-working young ministers in their own spheres. They have not become accustomed to Assembly work yet, and as there are so many in the Assembly who want a hearing, they modestly wait their turn. They are right. Ecclesiastical legislation is a very small part of a Gospel minister's work. When a minister takes more delight in practising in Church courts than in making and preaching sermons he is in a bad way.

THE OBSTRUCTIVE MEMBERS.

These brethren are not as few in number as one could wish. Two or three of them are a great many. They have marvellous powers. Their methods are various, but the variety is not pleasing. One suddenly stops the ecclesiastical machine by "rising to a point of order." Quite often there isn't any point of order, but he rises and the time is wasted all the same. The most provoking kind of obstructionist is the man who spends more time arguing about the best way to do something than would be necessary to do it ten times over. The brother who puts a long introduction to his speeches and winds up with most provoking prolixity is not a very useful member of Assembly. He is not ornamental either. He is almost as bad as his neighbour who rises with becoming dignity and opens by declaring he has nothing to say, and then spends half-an-hour in proving the truth of his opening statement. He might know that the Assembly would most willingly take his bare word on that point. The member who speaks on every question is an obstructionist. No one man *can* have a special knowledge of every question. The member who speaks long is an obstructionist. The man who cannot give his views on any little matter in ten minutes should conclude he never was constructed for doing business in deliberative bodies. The ecclesiastical pettifogger who looks upon a Church court as a place to practise in without costs, who is always nibbling points of procedure, who tries to apply all the rules of procedure in civil courts to ecclesiastical processes, and who enjoys a Church court just in proportion as it resembles one of Caesar's courts, is the worst kind of an obstructionist, and generally the most useless kind of minister. Happily the number of such is small. One is one too many.

TRUST not so much to the comforts of God as to the God of comforts.

A MONTH IN ITALY.

DECIDED PROGRESS IN CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS.

For a change we spent the month of February in what is usually called the "sunny South," but which this year merits rather the name of the "snowy South." It has been one of the severest winters in Italy for many years. Snow has fallen in prodigious quantities south of the Alps, producing great suffering, destitution and many deaths. Whole hamlets have been overwhelmed by avalanches, cattle, and in many cases the inhabitants, being buried in the ruins. My friend, Pastor Bonnet, of Angrogna, one of the most beautiful of the Vaudois valleys, writes that the torrent of Angrogna is so heaped with snow that its bed is no longer visible. At Pra del Tor he saw six dead bodies laid in a row, father, mother and four children, who had been members of his Church, their house and some others having been buried by an avalanche. He adds that these disasters are bringing out the best qualities of the people, Vaudois and Catholics working side by side in rescuing cattle and property, all showing self-sacrifice, union and good will. In this time of trial, too, minds are opened to the truth, hearts are softened, eyes are filled with tears, and prayers escape from the lips of many who are not in the habit of thinking of sacred things.

In Lombardy, which we visited, we were told that the Gospel does not make rapid progress, the great majority of the people being kept on the verge of starvation by

TAXATION AND POOR WAGES,

a remark which is applicable to many other portions of Italy. The mode of distributing property is exceedingly bad which is one factor in causing much wretchedness. In a manifesto, replying to a recent ministerial circular to the peasants of Lombardy, intended to deter them from emigrating, the following passage occurs which vividly describes the situation: "What do you mean, sir, by the nation? A crowd of unhappy people? Yes. Then we are indeed the nation! Look at our pale and emaciated countenances; our bodies exhausted by excessive labour and insufficient food. We sow and reap wheat and we never get white bread. We cultivate the vine, and we drink no wine. We rear cattle, and we eat no meat. We are dressed in rags, and we inhabit infected holes; suffering from cold in the winter and from hunger in the summer. Our sole nourishment in the land of Italy is a little maize, made dearer by taxes. It follows that in parched districts we are devoured by violent fever, and in moist regions by marsh fever. The end is premature death in the hospital or in our miserable huts. And in spite of all this you advise us, sir, not to expatriate ourselves. But the land in which we cannot find a livelihood by labour—is that a country?" I was surprised to find that

THE ANNUAL EMIGRATION

from Italy amounts to about 100,000 souls, 20,000 of whom go to South America. The peasants in European countries, as a rule, never think of leaving their homes until they are compelled by starvation. Still, notwithstanding this, so far as I could learn, Italy in many respects is making great progress. Its administrative unification has been accomplished at a rapid rate. There is an increase in the population. Its commercial activity is manifested by the rise in amount both of imports and exports. Its railways are yearly extending. The post-offices and telegraph lines are constantly growing in number, and the public works now in process of execution, both by the state and by municipalities, are more in number and greater in magnitude than for a long period. Turning to another subject, I find that the past year has been an important one in the work of

ITALIAN EVANGELIZATION.

The following are the statistics of the principal Italian Evangelical churches: The Waldensian Church in the Valleys has 38 agents, 13,267 communicants, 3,466 Sabbath school scholars, its contributions amounting to 62,324 lire or francs. The Waldensian Mission has 118 agents, 3,616 communicants, 2,044 Sabbath school scholars, contributions, 51,462 lire; Free Italian Church 33 agents, 1,680 communicants, 731 Sabbath school scholars, contributions, 17,089 lire; Wesleyan Methodist, 53 agents, 1,340 communicants, 632 Sabbath school scholars; Episcopal Methodists, 36 agents, 878 communicants, 384 Sabbath school scholars; American Baptists, 12 agents, 240 communicants, con-