

Our Contributors.

THE GAS AGE ABOUT OVER.

BY KNOXONIAN

There was a golden age and an age of iron and several other ages. On this side of the Atlantic we are just emerging from the age of gas. The financial depression is making some of us talk modestly. We were greatly in need of lessons of that kind. Modesty in talk has never been our forte.

Our neighbours across the line will have to delete the spread-eagle parts from their Fourth of July speeches this year. The times are too hard to allow of any references to the Bird that touches the Atlantic with one wing, the Pacific with another, that takes the North pole in her beak and Cuba in her talons. The times demand economy in rhetoric as well as in living. There is depression in every State and in two or three coal States, a condition scarcely distinguishable from civil war. The Democrats have not the courage and the statesmanship to carry out the mandate given them by the people. England's Grand Old Man, or, for that matter, England's Grand Young Man, Rosebery, would obey the national mandate or perish in the attempt, but the Democrat Senators instead of reforming the tariff, are arranging it with the Republicans to suit individual interests.

The Republics of South America have about gone to pieces. It is not by any means clear that Republicanism is a form of government that can succeed anywhere as well as on paper. Even Daniel Webster could hardly get up steam on this Fourth of July. Our neighbours are splendid people on the whole, but their talk used to be too tall and they will be all the better people when this financial squeeze is over.

THE DOMINION GAS WORKS.

are about closed. Twenty-seven years ago they ran night and day. The general election of 1867, the old Union and Progress contest, in which we were exhorted to "sink party differences and work for the good of the country," was run mainly on gas. A goodly number of the Thanksgiving sermons of that autumn were largely composed of the same material. Their congregations were urged to become grateful over the size of the Dominion and enthusiastic at the idea that our domain includes all the ice around the North Pole. While the Intercolonial and the Canadian Pacific Railways were being built, and millions of borrowed money were being spent, we had a great time. The national boom broke and along with it quite a number of local booms. We are now finding out that nation building is a serious business. Worse than that, thoughtful men are beginning to doubt whether the foundation of a nation can be laid with the material we have for foundation purposes. Racial and creed wars rage worse than they ever raged before Confederation. Demagogues and charlatans of the worst type find that the easiest way to get notoriety, or votes, or office is to incite one portion of the community to suspect and hate another, and they incite their neighbours accordingly. Preachers who never were heard of and never would have been heard of beyond their own concession, had they preached the gospel, get a much craved-for notoriety in the religious demagogue business. As ministers of the gospel of peace they were quite unknown, as political firebrands their names are in every newspaper. Questions that the Confederation fathers thought they had settled, have broken out worse than ever. We say worse than ever because for the most part the breaking out as a matter of business. George Brown fought for Upper Canada and against Romish aggression as a matter of principle. He was a man of principle. He fought bravely for his principles; suffered manfully for his convictions. Between George Brown and the modern professional agitator there is as much difference as there was between the Apostle Paul and Simon Magus.

Many British statesmen have steadily opposed Home Rule mainly because they believe that Irishmen are not capable of governing themselves. Taking Archbishop Cleary and a lot of Quebec people as samples

on one side, and a lot of Ontario people that need not be described as samples, on the other, is Canada in any better condition than Ireland has been in for years. We may be told that the professed differences are mere stage thunder, manufactured for election purposes. So much the worse. Hypocrisy does not redeem sectarian strife. A venal motive does not make racial hate lovely. A firebrand thrown by a professional agitator may be even more dangerous than a firebrand thrown by an honest man.

It is not by any means clear that a nation can be made out of the elements that are found in the Dominion, twenty-seven years after the attempt at nation building began. Of late years the prospects have darkened. The old statesmen on both sides in politics were builders. Their successors are sorely taxed to keep the edifice in repair. The only real original Ontario builder left is in danger of being driven from power this present month, not by his political opponents, but by men who professed to be his friends. If he goes under, it will be because he was knifed by former friends, who think cheese-paring about the daily allowance for a lunatic of more importance than saving one half the domain of the Province; and hating one's neighbour in the name of religion a more important duty than sustaining clean and capable government. The idea of making a nation out of people of that kind is too absurd for serious discussion.

THE PRESBYTERIAN

gas works are also closed down. They worked full time, or perhaps a little over time in 1875, but they were gradually shut down soon after. Some local activity may be displayed at several points, but the denomination as a whole is not in the gas business. We all know now that though the Union was a good thing, it was only one good thing and that an organic union cannot do half as much for people as union orators say it can. Many thoughtful people are beginning to wonder whether, after all it is quite clear, that because the Presbyterian form of government suits Scotland admirably it must necessarily suit Canada. Is not the fact that it works well among men noted for self-control, for intelligence, for ability in self government, for deliberation in movement and for undying love to their church, is not that fact of itself presumptive evidence that the system is not the best for an easily led, easily moved people, many of whom have little or no attachment to any church. Part of the system has hopelessly broken down in the States and things are not much better here.

THE METHODIST GAS WORKS

were in operation at high pressure night and day when the Union was formed. We cannot say whether they are closed or not. Perhaps they are working on half-time.

On the whole the gas age is passing over. Some allowance must be made for newly settled young ministers, for new religious papers, for Evangelists, for newly married people, and very young people of various kinds, but on the whole the look-out is favourable. If we get the gas age clean over in church and state, we may accomplish something useful.

DIRECTORY OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

BY REV. ROBERT HAMILTON, MOTHERWELL.

There is a complaint because the order of service in public worship is not the same in all our congregations, and a desire expressed that in this there should be uniformity so that the minister who supplies for a day may not have his mind distracted by thought of what should be next in the service. It is expected that an overture will be before the General Assembly, in St. John, on this subject. It has been under discussion these twelve years, before the Synod of the Presbyterian Church in England, and has recently been sent down for further discussion by the Presbyteries.

The subject affords room for a variety of thought, and will give an opportunity for profitable discussion. There are reasons why the variety which exists should continue; and there are reasons why uniformity should be adopted. In importance these seem to be nearly balanced: Against both

objections can be presented, so that no order has yet been found which has not been felt defective. When a minister is called to conduct service for a day, where he has not been before, he is unwilling to follow any other order than that which is generally followed there, lest the congregation be disturbed by the change, or his own mind be disconcerted by thinking of what should come next. Can a uniform order for the church be adopted so that both minister and people would readily anticipate the next thing to be done? Were the church to adopt a common order for all our congregations, the supposed distraction might be avoided, but there may follow an evil to be guarded against: Uniformity is apt to become monotonous and ritualistic, even in comparatively insignificant things, by exalting them into essentials. This easily may become an evil greater than the one we desire to escape. Monotony may detract more from mental stimulus, than would changes in the order of service followed for the day: and because we have more fear of the effect of uniformity than of slight changes in the order of service, we think the minister can, without distracting the mind of any congregation, follow the order which he judges best adapted for the edification of the people, or by a little enquiry discover the order commonly followed in any congregation, and follow it.

For the sake of conveying the impression that outward form is not essential to comfort in public worship, we have changed the order now and again, and have not found that this has distracted the worshippers. This experience has not tended to increase desire for uniform order of service. In those churches where a uniform order is followed, we have no evidence that the effect has been increase of devotional feeling, or of spirituality of worship. It may be that the charge of much formalism in these churches is not true, but there is a temptation to it, in the many repetitions which we have sometimes heard slipshodly expressed. In our freedom from uniformity there is a temptation to carelessness in preparing to lead in public worship, and it may be some fall before it, and have given cause for the complaint that public prayer is often slovenly constructed, and coldly expressed as if there were little desire that the things asked might be granted, while with others, there is, seemingly, a striving for words and finely constructed sentences, which seem not to arise from a deep conviction of need of the part of the leader, nor a perception of the common wants of the congregation. Would a uniform order do anything to avoid this, and stimulate devotional feeling in public worship? We have no hope that it would. That which is needful in order to avoid the evil complained of, is a deeper conviction of being in the presence of God, and a clearer perception of our own need.

An authorised order or a book of common prayer will not do much to correct the evil. Elegance of diction by an expert in composition or by a mental effort of men of ordinary talent can be of little use in intensifying the devotional feeling of a congregation. Elegance of diction may attract attention to itself, or to the man who utters it, rather than help to raise the devotional spirit of the congregation, and intensify desire for what is asked, as is often the case in hearing the poetic language of the popular preacher, a fact that has found expression in the saying: "The audience hung on his lips with rapt admiration." We knew a man who had a formula by which he introduced himself to strangers, thus: "My father was a minister, sir, he was a bully of a preacher. He made eloquent prayers." There is a possibility, while trying to avoid the simplicity of unlearned, and inelegant sentences in prayer, that we fall into admiration of eloquent prayers which may more attract to the form of words than to the requests expressed.

The felt inability of many of our Christian people to express their desires in elegant form is one of the chief reasons why it is so difficult to get them to lead in public prayer. There is a fear of criticism from those who are supposed better able to express themselves; from this they shrink, and refuse to take an active part in prayer-meeting. We are persuaded that this thought of faultlessly constructed

sentences is injurious to devotional feeling, and should be discouraged rather than cultivated, and effort made to have the mind directed more to what we should ask for, than to the form in which requests are made. In our prayers it surely is important that we cultivate the feeling that we are as little children in the presence of a loving Father who does not concern Himself about the form in which his children present requests, but is concerned about the honesty of spirit in which desires are uttered. No earthly father will reject the request of his child because of an improper word, or a grammatical mistake: The imperfect lisping of his child may be felt by him as an additional reason why he should grant the request. His child has not weakened the intensity of its wish by seeking after elegant sentences. Is it not so with our Father in heaven who will regard the request more than the form in which it is expressed. The Spirit helpeth our infirmities with groanings which cannot be uttered. Surely it is better that we keep before our mind what is pleasing to our Father in heaven, rather than what our fellowmen may think of the form in which our petitions are couched. It is well that the preacher who stands before men as the messenger of the Lord, see that he can carefully prepare so to present it as the message of the Great King should be delivered, so that they shall not find anything in his defects of presenting it which indicates carelessness on his part and give to them an occasion to think lightly of the message. The preacher's voice should be the voice of God to men, and his words should be well ordered so that the hearer may have the truth clearly set before him in the most perfect form the preacher can attain. But the leader in prayer is speaking from the children's platform. His voice is the voice of the children raised to an affectionate Father, who does not answer, or reject our requests because of the form of words in which they are presented. Were this thought habitually before our minds we would have more intense desire about the requests we make than the form in which they are made. We have frequently been deeply impressed with, and forcibly drawn to unite in the prayers of some uneducated but godly men, who expressed their desires with the simplicity of children pleading for favours from a father in whom they had full confidence, and without any evidence of effort in the formation of their sentences. Like the child pleading with the father, the intensity of their desire seemed to engross their whole soul, as they seemed to feel they were standing in the immediate presence of God. In some respects it was like the lisping of the little child who had not yet learned the art of speech, but had something before its mind it was resolved to have before leaving the throne. Elegance of words seemed not to be thought of, but only the thing sought for. We know that such forms of prayer would not have met the literary taste of Lord Macaulay who has so praised the composition of the prayers in the English Church prayer-book: but we may not be careful to follow him where the spirit is more important than the letter.

There have been forms of prayer composed for the churches at different periods, but they have not found favor in the free Protestant churches. The order selected about the year 1661 for the Presbyterian church has not held a prominent place in that church. We have not much hope that any order which may be issued by the sanction of our Assembly, for the regulation of public worship, will take a fast hold upon the church. The desire of freedom from any form, that is not essential, will stimulate men to get free from such fetters of the fathers, and, instead of presenting the petitions used by the good men in glory, the men of this, and coming ages, will desire to express their own prayers in their own words rather than in the words of the great grandfathers.

Statistical returns of the coloured Baptists of the United States show a membership of 1,483,533; baptisms during the past year, 74,677; churches, 12,199; ordained ministers, 10,971. The number of Sunday-schools is 7,865, with 466,738 scholars, and 34,271 teachers. The church property is valued at £1,640,000.