

Our Contributors.

MINORITY RULE IN CONGREGATIONS.

BY KNOXONIAN

The theory is that Presbyterians are largely self-governed people. They elect their own elders, deacons, managers, and ministers, and control their own affairs generally, subject of course to the revision of the courts of the Church. The theory is a very fine one. It looks well on paper—a good deal better on paper than it sometimes does in practice. It is a good theory to make speeches about and expound at moderations, inductions and other places where the "true blue" most do congregate. A man who cannot make some good points when showing how beautifully the electing power vested in the people is balanced by the ordaining power of the next court above has no capacity for making points. A man who cannot wax eloquent when explaining our gradation of courts and showing how the injured innocent can prosecute his appeal from a Session up through the Presbytery, on through the Synod until, at last, he reaches the General Assembly—a man who cannot wax eloquent on such a theme has no true eloquence in him. He has no faculty for ecclesiastical flights. A true ecclesiastical orator should soar on this theme as a politician soars when he talks about laying something at the foot of the throne.

No doubt our system of government has worked fairly well. It has some defects, but what system is perfect? The fact that it breaks down occasionally is no argument against its general excellence. Examine its operations in many countries, and for a long period of time, and it will be found to have worked as well as, if not better than, any other system. This is the true test for any system. One of its most serious defects in practice is that—in spite of the theory that majorities should rule within certain limitations—minorities, as a matter of fact, do often rule congregations. Some congregations are ruled practically by one family. Some by one man, a few by one woman. It would be going too far to assert that in every such case the practical effect is bad, and only bad. Much depends on the character of the controlling parties. Many a struggling congregation has been kept in existence by one family, or by one man, and a few by one woman. Now if one or two persons have more zeal, more energy, more working power, more of the spirit of self-sacrifice than all the rest of the congregation, the few will rule in spite of any theory of church government. Other things being nearly equal, the man who does the most work, and makes the greatest sacrifices, will always have the most influence among Christian people. If any man in a congregation have more grace, more working ability, and makes more sacrifices than the whole session, that man will have more influence than the whole session. If any man have abilities equal, or nearly equal, to those of the minister, and have a more spiritual mind—and shows more devotedness and self-sacrifice in the work—than the minister, that man will have as much influence as the minister, probably more. Mere officialism goes for very little in this country. Earnest, persevering, self-sacrificing work always brings influence among Christian people. When these qualities are combined in one or two men they can usually control matters in spite of any theory. Against that kind of minority rule nobody protests much. Most men bow willingly to the power of goodness. May kind heaven send us more of such minority rule.

There is, however, another and very different kind. It is of the earth, earthly. Perhaps it would be better to say of the devil, devilish. A member of a congregation of more or less influence becomes dissatisfied, soured, and generally ugly. Perhaps he has some reason, and perhaps he has not. Quite likely he could easily put the matter right if he would try, but he doesn't try. He lets it simmer. He nurses his wrath to keep it warm. Perhaps he is a good man, but acting a long way below his average. Perhaps he is a good man constructed on unfortunate principles. Probably, he is an Ishmaelite whose hand has always been against every man's hand. Probably, he is a Diotrephes who wants the pre-eminence and the people refuse to give him any pre-eminence. Possibly he is a Crank. It is even possible that he may be a Judas, and the Lord is about to allow him to unmask himself. Whatever he may be, after becoming soured up to a

certain point, his next step is usually to form a party for some purpose, let us say, for example, to get rid of the minister. He is not always very scrupulous as to the means he uses in forming his party. Probably, he brings social influence to bear and tries to make some of his "set" disaffected. Probably, he is rich or controls money or business not his own, and brings his ledger influence to bear where it will do the most good. (Don't faint, gentle reader, such things have been done.) Perhaps he is a large employer of labour and in that case it would be almost a miracle if some of his dependents did not soon share his feelings. Probably, he poses as a martyr and tries to form a party on the basis of sympathy. This brings in the soft ones. Probably, he affects superior piety, and declares he is doing all for the glory of God and the good of the Church. This is intended to catch the gushing ones. On whatever basis the little party is formed, it soon goes to work. It attacks the minister, and perhaps his session, in indirect ways because it knows very well he cannot be dislodged by open, manly assaults. It whispers, insinuates, tattles, finds fault, tampers with persons that are known to be weak, talks—perhaps *lies*—about the prosperity of other congregations and the ability of other ministers, predicts evil, and then tries to fulfil its own predictions; it withdraws its subscriptions and then boasts that there is a decrease in the funds; it gives an evil report of its own congregation to the members of other congregations. It speaks disparagingly of its own minister whenever it dares to do so; belittles the work its own congregation is doing and, in a hundred different ways, schemes, wire-pulls and conspires to bring about the sought result.

One of two results nearly always follows. Either the minister quietly leaves, or the case in some form goes up to the Presbytery and, after a little beating about the bush, the pastoral relation is dissolved. In either case a small minority—composed probably of the very worst elements in the congregation—triumphs over the majority, over the Church Courts, and, worse than all, over *truth and righteousness*. Nine-tenths of the congregation were attached to their pastor, they profited by his ministrations and were prospering—spiritually and every other way under his ministry, but their rights and their feelings are trampled in the mire by a clique formed of two, or three, some of whom perhaps don't even profess to be Christians. While all this was taking place the Presbytery was looking on helpless as a lot of school boys; or, perhaps, holding a learned discussion on that excellent lady, the deceased wife's sister.

Who are chiefly to blame for such odious instances of minority rule? Two parties. The majority of Christian people, who allow themselves to be over ridden. They usually become quite valiant when the evil is done; but when it is in process they don't care to interfere. Sometimes they are outwitted by the schemers, who are often ward politicians, who bring all the dirty tactics of the ward bummer to bear on unsuspecting Christian people. Presbyteries are more to blame. The vast majority of the best people in any congregation would stand loyally by a Presbytery if it dared to do its duty. Quite often it does not dare. The minority triumphs, and the people that ought to have been protected by their Church Court are disgusted. Small wonder if they are. Sometimes the schemers even try to "get at" members of Presbytery before the case is heard. Of course, no member of Presbytery makes up his mind until he hears both sides.

CHURCH ENTERTAINMENTS AND THE LORD'S WORK.

BY REV. D. BICKELL, MOLESWORTH.

God's command to the Israelites for the erection of the tabernacle (Ex. xxv. 1-2; xxxv. 20-21) reveals the principle of giving for the Lord's work. An inquiry into the nature of the command and its requirements will establish the principle for which we contend. The work and the command contained in the passages referred to should be enough, without any additional words, to claim the attention of every Christian. The work was the building and furnishing of a house for the worship of God, or, in the Lord's own words: "Let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." Using the phraseology of our own day, we would say that Israel was about to build a church and dedicate it to the service of God. The Israelites were sure the tabernacle was built by divine

direction and for a divine purpose, and not one in the whole nation would regard it as anything else than most sacred work, and as a sacred work to be done in a sacred way—not the way Moses might think best nor the way Aaron might prefer, nor even the way the artificers Bezaleel and Aholiab might devise, but the way the Lord Himself ordered. The plans, to the minutest details, were specified by God, and the means for raising the funds were no less explicitly given. "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying: Speak unto the Children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering; of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart shall ye take My offering." Now, there is the work—building a house for the worship of God—and there is the God-appointed method of raising the money to build it—free-will offerings. About this there is no room for difference of opinion. Let us apply it to ourselves.

Is not the true religion of to-day identical with the true religion of Moses' time? Is not the God whom Christians worship in this nineteenth century the same just, holy, and jealous God that Israel adored? And if a Christian congregation undertake

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to-day and dedicate it to the service of the living God, is not that the Lord's work, and should not the building and everything belonging to it be regarded as strictly the Lord's as the tabernacle and its furniture? To these questions I believe most will give an affirmative answer. But if in the divine orders respecting the tabernacle we see a lesson for ourselves regarding places of worship, why should we grow heedless about the lesson as plainly given as to the means of paying for them? It was God who said: "Let them make Me a sanctuary," and it was God who said: "Of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart, ye shall take My offering." Any other way of giving would have been an abomination to the Lord. Moses was not to take so much as an onyx stone or drop of oil from any man or woman in Israel save those who gave it willingly with their hearts. So soon as any man began to grumble and say: "Moses, I don't think you should expect anything from me to help in building the tabernacle," or began to suggest some other way of raising the money, just so soon did he place himself outside the number that was to have the privilege and honour of assisting to build God's house. An offering from such a man would not have been a free-will offering at all, and, therefore, not acceptable to God. Now, I know you all believe that the God whom we worship changeth not, but is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, and therefore you must believe that the motives which made an offering acceptable to Him three thousand years ago are the only motives which can possibly make our giving pleasing in His sight to-day. You are sure that God did not appoint the second best means for building the tabernacle; then, never pronounce His way such by putting a church entertainment before it. "But," says some one, "we don't think God's way second best." Why, then, are you disobedient in refusing to adopt that way in meeting the expenses of every department of the Master's work? Men are glad to learn the best way of paying for their farms and increasing their business, and they will soon give it a trial. Then why should Christian men and women be less wise in building churches and in carrying on the Church's work? The work is God's, and so are the orders for raising means for its prosecution, and the sooner congregations become obedient to these orders the sooner will present burdens be gone, which now, in too many places, are being diminished bit by bit, by a means certainly not above second best.

There are two essential requirements in the divine injunctions given to Moses for the erection of the tabernacle:

(1) The offering for the building of the tabernacle was to be given *willingly*. This is made doubly emphatic. "Of every man that giveth it *willingly* with his heart, ye shall take My offering." It was not their gold and silver and brass, their blue and purple and scarlet, nor their onyx stones and oil and goat's hair, merely, that God wanted; but these were to be fruit from the tree called Willing heart. The nurseryman is more particular about the growth and health of the tree than about the fruit, for he knows if the tree be sound the fruit will be produced whether he wake or sleep; but if the sap be poisonous he does not want the apples. Now, what God looks for in all our service, whether it be giving or anything else, is willing hearts, and whatever we do in His vineyard in any