

## Our Contributors.

### INDIVIDUAL WORK THE MAIN THING.

BY KNOXONIAN.

Spurgeon is reported to have said that if the building of Noah's Ark had been left to a committee, the keel would not have been laid when the Deluge came on. Committees do sometimes work slowly, and, what is worse, sometimes they do not work at all. Just how long it would have taken a committee to build the Ark, it is impossible to say. Perhaps they never would have built it. Perhaps they would have wrangled about the shape of the vessel, or the size of the windows, or the places for the animals, until the Deluge began to come down. An Ark committee might have been a dismal failure, as many a committee has been since the days of Noah.

The fact is real work is always done by individuals. Committees may be useful for cutting out work, but in the end the work is done by individual men and women. Conferences, conventions and gatherings of that kind may throw some light on methods of working or may act as a mild tonic on workers who need toning up; but when the talk is over, and the resolutions are passed, the real work has to be done by individual exertion. Noah must go on and build the Ark himself, getting as much help as he may from Shem, Ham and Japheth.

When the Presbyterian Unions of '61 and '75 were being discussed, one would almost think that a union of all the Presbyterians of this Dominion would bring in the millennium. Listening to some of the union speeches, you would almost suppose that the moment the Churches were united all difficulties in doing the Lord's work would vanish into the air. It goes unsaid that Presbyterian Union is a good thing. Nobody doubts that now. But what practical difference does the Union make in carrying on the real work of the Church? Not very much. Preaching is the most important part of a minister's work. When a preacher sits down to make a sermon, does he find that the Union helps him to get at the exact meaning of the "original," or to divide his text, or to properly distribute his matter, or find good illustrations that will make truth strike the mind of the most obtuse hearer, and stick there? Does he ever say to himself: "The Union of '61 greatly helped me in dividing that text, and the Union of '75 suggested an application that sent the truth right home?" The Union may work in that way for some preachers, but those we happen to know have to hammer their divisions and applications out of their own brains just as they did before the Union took place.

Next in importance to preaching is pastoral visitation. How much does the Union help one in pastoral work? The miles in the country are not any shorter, and the mud is just as sticky as it was when there were a half a dozen Presbyterian Churches in the Dominion. The sidewalks are just as hard and just as level as ever, and the tramp, tramp in the afternoons, making pastoral calls, make clerical feet as sore as in ante-Union days. The Union makes little or no difference in the actual work.

Elders' and managers and deacons and Sabbath school teachers and officers, in fact everybody, have to work now, if the work is done, just as everybody had to work before the Union, if the work was done. The universal law is that the work is done when individuals do it, and never done unless individuals do it.

Now, if all this is true in regard to a great movement like the Union, it must certainly be true in conferences, conventions and gatherings of that kind. These modern institutions may serve a good purpose, but it should never be forgotten that in the end the real work must be done by individuals. It is not the thunder that refreshes the earth and revives the growing grain. It is the individual rain-drops, each one doing its share. Thunder never made anything grow. Conference thunder, be it ever so loud, is as unproductive as any other kind, if individual men do not work well in their own individual spheres.

What the precise value of a conference or convention is it is impossible to estimate. When you attend a good one you may think that its value is considerable. The next time you hear some active conference or convention man preach, you probably change your mind. You wonder how it is that one who lectures others so much can't do better himself. Something may be gained by hearing men describe their

methods of working. Still the gain in this direction is not great. There is no one best way of doing anything. The best method in one congregation may not be the best in another. The method best for one man may be the worst for another. Perhaps the real value of a Conference on the State of Religion depends almost entirely upon the stimulus it gives to those who attend. If it takes them out of a rut, brightens them up, refreshes them and sends them home nerved for the battle, and more determined than ever to fight bravely on until the Master calls, then it is a good thing.

The publicity given in these days by the press to conferences, conventions, Church events and special services by the Sam Joneses, has a powerful tendency to magnify them out of all proportion to their importance. The real work done by individuals is never advertised, and because never advertised people who read nothing but newspapers, and who never think, believe that the only work done is the work advertised.

Who ever saw a paragraph like this in a daily newspaper: "The Rev. Mr. Faithful went out last Monday afternoon, called upon ten families, read and prayed with six of them, spoke to several on the question of personal religion, visited three sick parishioners, prayed with one whose end is very near, and greatly helped him to meet the last enemy; called on two very poor families and gave them some help to keep the wolf from the door." That afternoon's work may tell for more on the great day than half a dozen conventions. And yet there are people calling themselves Christians who would say that was no work at all, because it made no noise, and they did not read about it in the papers. Shame!

Did anybody ever see anything of this kind in a newspaper. "Boanerges rose early on Tuesday morning, and tackled his text for next Sabbath; he examined the original carefully, blocked out his sermon, sketched his plan and arranged his matter; then he ransacked his library to see what other people thought about his text, modified his plan a little, and laid it over for a day. Thursday morning he began writing, and wrote till his brain was hot and his nerves tingled. Sabbath evening the sermon was preached, and made a most powerful impression?"

That sermon may have done more good than a hundred conventions, fifty conferences, with a dozen Presbyterian meetings thrown in, but even some good people did not think much of it, because there was nothing of it in the newspapers!

Moral. - Real work for the Master is generally done by individuals, and for the most part done quietly.

### A SCEPTICAL LECTURE REVIEWED.

MR. EDITOR.—Will you kindly grant me a little space in your well conducted religious journal, for a short review of a lecture, entitled the "Glory of Unbelief" delivered recently at Almonte, by a Mr. Watts, editor of a free thought paper? I have chosen your paper for publicity of these thoughts upon the opposite or Christian side of the question, as being a Church paper, therefore, more properly the vehicle for communication of such theses than a local paper. I deem many of his propositions and assumptions as being untenable, by reason of some misleading statements, as well as some (so put it mildly), wherein the truth was rather scantily adhered to. But, as I am but a common working man without a theological or even a high class education, I feel that I cannot do such justice to the refutation of the erroneous allegations as one possessed of higher scholastic attainments and more critical acumen might do, and as a subject of such vital importance demands. However, I wish to contribute my mite of disapproval and disbelief in Mr. Watts' exposition of his unbelief, and as brevity is more acceptable than prolixity to a journal devoted to so many different subdivisions of work, and all having a bearing upon the main features contemplated in its production as is THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN, therefore, these remarks will be kept within prescribed limits, trusting that they may induce some able mind or pen to give your readers some further condensed thoughts bearing upon the distinctive qualities of Christianity and the evils of scepticism respectively.

The lecturer at the outset stated that his confères did not take kindly to the name unbelievers as being exclusively applied to persons of that ilk. He contended that, as all men cannot believe everything,

that therefore they disbelieved some thing, hence, to that extent, they were unbelievers; that even among Christians, one branch or sect put forth some tenet which another sect disbelieved and in like manner throughout the whole of the denominations did we find the same disagreement.

Now the foregoing line of argument is quite misleading, and possibly with intent aforethought. Professor Drummond thus illustrates such a comparison by saying that, because there were certain quack doctors in medicine, hence there was no use of securing the services of a physician in a case of sickness, notwithstanding there were duly organized schools of medicine and accredited M. D.'s therefrom.

Christians claim the appellation of believers, distinctively, in that they believe in the existence of an Almighty Being, the Creator of all things, animate and inanimate, and that the book called the Bible contains the record thereof of man's fall by the sin of disobedience, and of the mind and will of the Deity for the guidance of the human race; likewise of the provision made for the redemption of fallen mankind to a future state of everlasting bliss, by believing upon and accepting of an anointed Saviour, as revealed and spoken of by the prophets and holy men of old, and as testified by the apostles as they were moved and inspired by the Holy Spirit. This is Christian belief as contradistinctive from atheistic unbelief. These fundamental truths, as set forth in the sacred Scriptures, are I believe, accepted by all professing Christians. And as for the subdivisions of the Church into the various sects and denominations, wherein they disagree, these may be accounted for as Professor Drummond shows in his book, "Natural Law in the Spiritual World" (a book by the way, well worthy of the careful study of all shades of sceptical free thinkers, notably the chapter upon parasitism). He says: "These creeds are but human renderings of divine truth," consequently, may, or may not be, in entire harmony with the teachings in the accredited law and the testimony. And as bearing upon unbelief, it may not be out of place to transcribe here an excerpt from Lord Bacon's essay upon "Atheism." He says: "I had rather believe all the fables in the legend and the Talmud and the Alcoran, than that this universal frame is without a mind; and therefore God never needs miracle to convince atheism, because his ordinary work convinceth. It is true that a little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion, for while the mind of man looketh upon second causes scattered, it may sometimes rest in them and go no further. But when it beholdeth the chain of them confederate and linked together, it must needs fly to providence and deity," etc.

We were next made aware that the men of greatest mental calibre in scientific lore, in the past and at the present time, were Germans and sceptics moreover. Now this may have been partially true, some forty or fifty years ago; but if we can credit reviews of these latter times, this state of things is now altered, and the greatest mental capacities are now firmly ranged upon the side of orthodox Christianity. A list of names of men of great scientific research and attainments, mostly British too I think, and a majority of them of our own time, was recited to us, and all of them were unbelievers. Admitted that the names given were in every sense such persons as they were cited to be, it does not follow that a very large list of names could not be made out of men of great proficiency in scientific studies and elucidation of the same by the contributions of their pens, and these persons, sound to the core as well upon the articles of our most holy faith, such as Bacon, Agassiz, Hugh Miller, Argyll, Sir William Dawson and many other names which doubtless are familiar to the general reader.

We were told that it was the forte or strong point in the unbelievers' creed to endeavour to place all men upon an equality with respect to the possession of this world's goods; that there was an abnegation of self, it would seem, for the upraising of degraded humanity. But what do the actual facts, as they have transpired within a few years past, in England and America, prove. Instead of the denying of self, we have found invariably exhibited the most grossly selfish natures, wherein the sacredness even of human life is not allowed to stand in the way, when the sacrifice of such lives is deemed desirable for the gratification of their grovelling, selfishly inclined hearts, as evidenced by Socialists and Nihilists wherever they