

Our Contributors.

DR. GREGG'S SHORT HISTORY OF PRESBYTERIANISM IN CANADA.

BY KNOXONIAN.

It has often been alleged that the Presbyterian ministers of Canada contribute little or nothing to literature. Publishers of magazines and of other kinds of fugitive literature tell us that it is very difficult to procure a sufficient amount of suitable matter with any degree of regularity. The inference is that Canadian ministers either cannot or will not use their pens.

Is this inference correct? Perhaps it is to a certain extent. The conditions under which the great majority of Canadian ministers work make writing difficult for all and impossible to many. Two sermons every week and a prayer-meeting address, pastoral visitation and visitation of the sick, society meetings innumerable and associations without end; Church courts and committees, anniversaries and funerals—these and other engagements that fall to the lot of every minister leave precious little time for writing. Good writing implies good reading, and good reading implies a good library, and a good library implies money. This is the rule in many a manse. It is all very well to say that a minister should have the "literary instinct," but when poverty comes in at the door the literary instinct is likely to go out at the window, or through the stovepipe, or any other opening it can find. That some men with small salaries preserve as much literary instinct as they have is a miracle equal in magnitude to the scandal that some other men with generous salaries and large libraries cannot speak or write decent English.

Perhaps there may be another reason why Canadian ministers do not contribute generously to literature. There are several reasons why even the best of writers write. One of these reasons is financial. Perhaps a marked cheque might stimulate production. Even a Presbyterian minister can hardly be expected to work for nothing and board himself.

Years ago a young Canadian minister who had just returned from Scotland said he noticed one marked point of difference between Scotch and Canadian ministers. Scotch ministers always talked about the last book, or the last great speech, or the last leading article, or the last great debate, while Canadian ministers generally indulged in some small talk about the last meeting of Presbytery or of some committee. Allowance should be made for the fact that our friend spent most of his time in Edinburgh. Perhaps if he had travelled a little he would have found that the clerical talk lost some of its literary flavour. It should also be remembered that the chances for obtaining and retaining the literary instinct in Scotland are a hundred to one as compared with Canada. Still there is enough in the comparison to make a Canadian minister think if he has the necessary apparatus for that kind of exercise.

Did you ever notice the fine literary taste in a certain line that old Irish ministers often have? Meet one of these old gentlemen, and his first enquiry is, "Did you read that article in So-and-So?" or "did you read So-and-So's speech?" Usually the speech or the article is in the controversial line, but let that pass. We have the honour to know two fine old Irish clerical gentlemen who invariably ask if you have seen something in current literature as soon as they have said good-day. It is a genuine pleasure to meet a minister of that variety.

Dr. Gregg has done his full share of literary work for the Presbyterianism of Canada. His last book is his best. Nothing more useful in the shape of a book has ever been offered to our people. We shall not say that though called "short" it contains all that is worth knowing about the Presbyterianism of Canada, but it may be safely said that it contains as much as most readers will care to know. The man who has the facts of this book at his finger ends may turn to some other kind of literature with the feeling that he knows all the leading events in the history of his own Church. He may also feel assured that he need never refuse his contribution to any of the Schemes of the Church because sufficient information has not been given, for the last forty pages of Dr. Gregg's book is a succinct but readable account of the different projects for which the Church asks money from her people.

Beginning with the first appearance of Presbyterians in the Maritime Provinces, Dr. Gregg traces up every branch of the Presbyterian family until all become merged in the union of 1875. The origin of each stream is found, and the stream carefully followed until they all flowed into one in the Victoria Hall in Montreal seventeen years ago. And we venture to say there are few Presbyterians in Canada who know how many Presbyterian Churches have existed, we shall not say flourished, in this country. The Presbyterian capacity for dividing and remaining divided must have been almost infinite in those early days. The only part of Dr. Gregg's book that requires anything like severe study is the part in which he treats of the different Presbyterian Churches in the Maritime Provinces. The fault is not Dr. Gregg's. Here, as everywhere, he writes with transparent clearness, but the Churches are so many and the names so much alike, each being the "Synod" of something, one can hardly help getting mixed. Perhaps Joe Howe had his eye on Maritime Presbyterianism when he said "the smaller the pit the fiercer the rats fight."

Along with the more general history of each Church, Dr. Gregg gives a sketch of the mission and other work each branch accomplished. The history of colleges is sketched, and the names of the professors given; the missions are described and the names of the missionaries duly honoured. Dates abound, but the sketches are anything but dry. Every scheme is traced from its origin to its present position if it still lives, and if it has passed away its funeral is duly recorded.

The last forty pages of the book would make a revolution in the Church if properly circulated. There we have the leading facts about the work in Honan, in Formosa, in India, in the New Hebrides, in Trinidad, in the North-West, and in every other place in which work is being done. The names of the missionaries are given, and all the other information that any reasonable man could desire. The present position of the six divinity halls is also described, the names of the professors given and the whole educational machinery of the Church put before the reader in a few paragraphs. The other schemes are also discussed, and when the reader lays down the volume he knows as much about the Church as it is necessary for him to know, unless he happens to be a specialist in some line.

Dr. Gregg's style is so well known that it is not necessary to say anything about the literary execution of this volume. There is not a foggy sentence or a superfluous word in it from beginning to end. Though a marvel of condensation, it is not by any means dry. Hand-books are usually hard reading, but this one certainly is not. The author has the rare faculty of saying things in the fewest possible words, and of arranging his matter in mathematical order without that stiffness of style which unskilled condensation so often brings.

We know of nothing that would help the Church more than a general circulation of this book. It is more than time that our young people knew their own Church has a history of which no man need be ashamed. It is also more than time that the mass of our people had the work of the Church placed before them in the form in which it may be found in the last forty pages of this history.

THE PREACHER FOR THE AGE.

The following are the principal portions of the inaugural address delivered by Professor Ross, B.D., at the opening of the present session in the Presbyterian College, Montreal: This is a theme closely connected with the department which has been so solemnly committed to my care and of some interest to every minister of the Gospel, every lover of the souls of men. When we use the term "preacher" we do not generally include the wide variety of the pastor's duties under it. We think of that single function of his ministry which he discharges when in the presence of the worshipping assembly he delivers his message. But we can hardly dissociate that act from all the mental and spiritual preparation which enables him to obtain and hold the attention of men and to wisely influence their hearts and consciences by the truth. By "this age" I mean not only to-day but to-morrow, so far as it is given to us short-sighted mortals to imagine what its character shall be.

It is no easy matter to apprehend aright the spirit of our own time. The features of modern life are so complex, the departments of knowledge so manifold, the fundamental ideas of the different schools of thought so radically different that it is almost impossible to understand and truly estimate them all. Moreover, our point of view is so close to the things of to-day that there is no room for the right perspective for fully measuring their tendencies and consequences. In the mighty seething world in which our lot is cast there are many who think that the trend of thought is going clean away from the Church and all her concerns, and that soon she will be left sitting on some moss covered rock, a mere archaeological curiosity. To many wielders of the editorial pen who feel their influence and magnify their office, the preacher seems a very small man indeed, utterly insignificant in the mighty social, industrial and political turmoil in which they bear so large a part. So they often introduce him with an apology and dismiss him with a sneer. To many abstract thinkers, Church services are a wearisome repetition, and the sermon an anachronism. They conceive of the preacher as "toiling through his narrow round of systematic dogmas, or creeping along some low level of school-boy morality, or addressing the initiated in mystic phraseology," but totally destitute of all originality or practical power. At best they regard him as marking a stage in the development of humanity as a pile of chips and rubbish indicates where the ebbing waters once stood. Even some defenders of the Christian faith speak with ill-disguised contempt of the feeble performances of the pulpit in the onward march of moral life and advanced thought to-day.

But the preacher does not really need to apologize for his appearance among men. He is vindicated by the call of the Eternal burned deep on his own soul; by the anguish of perishing humanity crying out for the gospel of truth from many a city slum, and darkened tribe, and distant isle; by the public iniquity and private vice of nominally Christian nations which loudly demand that the prophet's voice shall be lifted in stern denunciation of the wrong; by the truth itself, which urges within him like the pent-up fires of a smothered volcano, refusing to be confined.

It is not enough to feel that he has of good and substan-

tial right a place among the influences which are moulding men. To reach the full limit of his power he must believe that he holds the office which was ordained from all eternity, in the fulness of the Divine wisdom, that men thereby might be saved. He is an ambassador from the court of heaven to offer to his fellow children of clay the wealth of God's love and the riches of the eternal glory, and to expound to them the manner of life by which this happy consummation may be attained.

I. The Christian preacher for this age must be a man of wide acquaintance with truth. I pause not to speak of a deep personal trust on the Son of God and a growing likeness to him. Such an experience has been a fundamental requirement of the Gospel ministry since the day of Pentecost. After this, his pre-eminent qualification is a full and sympathetic knowledge of God's revealed will. He ought to have a deeper and more critical knowledge of the Scriptures than the average member of his congregation, for otherwise it will not be very inspiring for them to listen every Sabbath to what they have known by heart for years. The standard of Biblical knowledge is rising among the Christian workers of every congregation, and to maintain his position the preacher will need to work.

In addition to this he must needs lay all spheres of investigation under tribute to furnish him for his calling. Time was when he needed to know only the mysteries of scholastic theology, and he might move among his parishioners as ignorant as a babe unborn of their callings, their trials, their hopes and fears. He was often a man of another world than theirs. The average hearer among them might have used the language of Tennyson's "Northern Farmer" concerning his experience in Church. But to-day the barriers of ministerial caste have been broken down by the rising tide of general culture, and the preacher must hold his audience more by the power of truth and less by the force of traditional respect. No mere professional knowledge is sufficient to qualify him for his arduous tasks. Although he must still be the man of One Book he will not do it or his calling justice unless he is far more. He must grasp the conditions of life under which every one of his people lives and earns his bread; and he must know something of what is passing through the minds of all classes of men.

To be more specific, the philosophy of an age is too closely connected with its theology to allow the preacher to remain ignorant of its leading characteristics. Besides, the fundamental arguments of Christian apology lie to-day in the transcendental realm.

In the region of science a new world has been unfolded to this generation. I was glad to read the statement of a leading bookseller of the United States, that most of his copies of the new books of science were sold to clergymen. These books contain a mine as illustrations of spiritual truth; they are usually models of style, and their matter is most stimulating to thought. Especially does the preacher need to have a clear idea of all the ramifications of that giant off-spring of nineteenth century thinking, the mighty idea of development. It was a subject of much laughter twenty-five years ago, but to-day the merriment is rapidly dying away. Although in the realm in which it originated it is hardly more than a working hypothesis, it is now influencing philosophic, scientific and theologic thought much more than almost any single mind can understand. Many of its far-reaching conclusions are evidently destined to become part of the permanent mental possessions of mankind. The very men who argue most strongly against it think in its terms, use the speech it has framed, and have obtained a new conception of the universe by its means.

Its outcome in one direction appears in those critical theories of the origin of our Scriptures whose warp and woof every preacher of the Presbyterian Church ought to know, not that he might inflict them from the pulpit on a simple-minded people, but that he may satisfy his own mind and the minds of any intelligent enquirers, and, especially, lest at no distant day he may be constituted a judge of what is the true position in regard to them. In the department of social science many vexed questions emerge, most closely connected with public morals, and no pastor can rightly divide the Word of God to-day without occasionally touching on them. The young artisans of his congregation will come to him for advice about the attitude they should take towards certain labour organizations which are now found in almost every community, and he will need to be able rightly to estimate their code of morals, and their ultimate tendency. Perhaps it will sometimes be necessary for him to advise his people about the use of those extremely dangerous weapons which we call strikes. A grave responsibility rests on him amid the issues of to-day lest, on the one hand, he become a narrow demagogue, or, on the other, the mere watchdog of the monopolist against the inalienable rights of man.

As an antidote to the depressing effect which the widespread and able unbelief of to-day may have upon him, I would recommend the history of Christian Missions and Evangelistic effort. He will find it a most profitable and inspiring part of his equipment to follow the great movements of Christian activity all over the earth, and to observe how fully Jehovah hath implemented His promises to the faithful Church, in the power of the truth and the plentitude of the Spirit among the heathen abroad, and the lapsed and careless at home. And if the history of these present movements be instructive the narrative of the past is not less profitable. He who knows the mind of the Church Catholic from the begin-