

Our Contributors.

STANDING ON ONE OF TIME'S WATER-SHEDS.

BY KNOXIAN.

The last day of the Old Year and the first of the New is one of Time's water-sheds. From this height we look back over the past, and try to peer into the dim and distant future. Some of us can see into the past for a considerable distance, but none can see any distance into the future. No hand can draw aside the veil that hides the events of 1886. Most of us can see quite vividly the events of the year that is past, and we glance over them with varying emotions. In many cases it might be as well to allow the emotions to die with the old year, and take a fresh start with 1886.

Standing on Time's water-shed, most of us can see some mistakes that were made in 1885. Well, what of it? Who does not make mistakes at one time or another. The only man who never makes a mistake is the man who never does anything, and his whole life is a mistake. A clam never makes a mistake. An oyster is always right. These useful animals never make mistakes, and if we could live like them we would not make mistakes either. But a man can hardly live as quiet and secure a life as a clam. He has to strike out in this busy, uncertain world and earn bread and butter for his family. He must take some risks every day, and in taking risks he is sure to make a few mistakes. What is the use in worrying over the mistakes of 1885? You may worry over them until you come to the age of Methuselah, and that may not put them right. Spoiling a good day's work in January, 1886, by worrying over a mistake made in June or July, 1885, won't mend matters. The only profitable way to use a mistake is to make it a beacon to guard us against similar mistakes in the future. That is the only way in which we can make a mistake pay. Sometimes there are millions in a mistake when it is used in that way.

But there are some mistakes that can be easily rectified. For instance, if a man finds that he made a mistake by not giving enough last year to the Schemes of the Church, he can put himself right in the simplest manner possible. All in the world that he need do is to hand some more money to the treasurer. Several thousand Presbyterians made a bad mistake last year by not paying as much into the Augmentation Fund as they should have paid. It is pleasant to think that this sad mistake can be so easily rectified. All they need do is to pay in a few dollars each before the end of next April. It is the simplest thing in the world. Similar mistakes may have been made in regard to the other funds. How thankful we should be that they can all be put right. If any good man thinks that the mistake of his life was made last year when he gave a cent for the support of missions, there is still plenty of time to double his contribution. If any of the mistakes of 1885 can be rectified, rectify them; if they can be utilized as beacons, use them; if they can be neither rectified nor utilized, bury them, and don't spend precious time whining over their graves.

Standing on Time's water-shed and looking back over the past, many a good man regrets bitterly that he has failed so often in the discharge of duty. Unless the failure can be made to contribute to future success, such regrets are worse than useless. They are worse because they unfit for present duty. A minister sits down, we shall say, to write a sermon in the first week of January, 1886. His text suggests a sermon in June or July of 1885 that was a miserable failure. He becomes so worried over the failure of six months ago that he unfits himself for good work, and spoils his present sermon! Is there any sort of sense in such conduct? If a past failure can be utilized and made to contribute to a present or future success, by all means work it in. If it cannot be used for any good purpose, bury it out of sight, and go right on. Whining over past failures is a poor business. If a man did his best at the time, he need have no useless regrets. The only man that never fails is the man that never tries anything. No one succeeds always. No clock strikes twelve every time.

There are failures in ministerial life that should be easily avoided. There is not the slightest doubt that many failures in preaching in our day arise from undue length in the treatment of subjects. Undue length generally arises from a long introduction, a prolix con-

clusion, or from bad arrangement of matter. Now, if a preacher has kept his people too long in the porch on every Sabbath of 1885, we cannot see why he might not take them through at a brisker pace in 1886. The *Globe* said the other day that a preacher on beginning his sermon should plunge *in medias res*. Some of the *Globe's* readers, not being as intelligent as the readers of THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN, might be inclined to ask where that is. And that reminds us, as the tea-meeting orator would say, of an incident which occurred during the Russian War. An old lady, whose son was serving in the Baltic fleet, on hearing somebody read that the fleet was *in statu quo*, asked how far that was from St. Petersburg! Literally understood, to plunge *in medias res* in preaching might mean to begin one's sermon in the middle. That would be too much of a good thing. But seriously, the introduction to many sermons is far too long, and if any good brother is sorry on New Year's Day that he kept his people so long in the porch all last year, all he need do is to take them through this year in less time.

There may be some preachers still alive who prolong the conclusion in this way. Somewhere near what should be the end, but what, in fact, may prove to be the middle, the good man says: "In conclusion." Then he goes on and, after a time, says: "But to hasten to a conclusion." Then he starts again and, after a while, says "lastly," and then "finally," and then "one word more." Now, though many a good sermon may have been drawn out in this way, it was not the drawing out that made it good. It was good, and did good, in spite of the prolix drawing out. If any brother, standing on Time's water-shed, regrets that he used to finish his sermon in this way, all he need do is to read up Phelps on "The Conclusion," and begin a new way with the new year.

Standing on Time's water-shed, a considerable number will feel rather depressed about the business of the past year. The balance does not come out as they hoped it would. Probably, it is on the wrong side. It is a matter of regret that good men are not always successful in business. The more money a good man makes the better for the Church, the poor, and every good cause. The talk about "filthy lucre" is often cant—miserable, mean cant. The man who says with a sanctimonious snivel that "money is the root of all evil," does not know his Bible. There is no such thing in the Bible. Would that all the good men and women in our Church had plenty of money and grace to use it properly! We need money for every good cause, and can get it only from the best of our people. Would that the generous, willing ones had more to give! But if the balance is not exactly right, as we examine it on Time's water-shed, murmuring won't make it any better. One thing is clear, we all have much more than we deserve.

There may be some burdens that we cannot leave behind as we enter upon the New Year. Let us, as we stand on Time's water-shed, seek grace to bear them. Time will make them lighter. It is well to know

That care and trial seem at last,
Through memory's sunset air,
Like mountain ranges overpast,
In purple distance fair.

THE IMMINENCE OF THE COMING OF THE LORD.

MR. EDITOR,—May the Lord come to-night? He is a bold man that would answer "no"; unless God has revealed His will in the matter. On the other hand, the answer, "Yes; He may come at any time," should also rest on the sure Word of God—not on the opinion of men. I purpose here to answer this question in the light of Scripture teaching. Some say: "The Holy Ghost has taught me this truth, and ever since I received it I have been looking for the Lord all the time, both day and night. This has given me unspeakable joy, and has quickened my spiritual life; nor would I part with this blessed hope." I heard to-day of an excellent man who held this hope, and had a conversation with a certain minister somewhat to this effect: "Mr. S., do you expect Christ to come again?" "Most certainly I do." "Do you expect Him any day?" "Well, He says: 'I come quickly.'" "But that has not prevented eighteen hundred years from elapsing since Christ so said. I cannot, therefore, say I expect Him to-day. Do you?" "Yes," was the reply, "I expect Him every

hour." "Do you think He may come within the next five minutes?" "Yes, He may." The minister then drew out his watch, and said: "Let us see." The five minutes elapsed. "Now, you see," said the minister, "You were mistaken. Do you think He may come in the next five minutes?" "Well, I cannot say I do," was the reply. "But you said that the Holy Ghost taught you that Christ might have come during the last five minutes?" "Yes, I said so," was the reply. "And, now, you see that that was a mistake. If the Holy Ghost, then, teaches you what is not fulfilled, how can you be sure of anything thus taught you?" "Well," the worthy man said, "I never thought of that." But this is just what we must ask: Is a man justified in saying that he has been taught by the Holy Ghost to expect something that does not come to pass? Would any one believe that Dr. Miller was taught by the Holy Ghost to expect the Lord in November, 1844? No; he was mistaken. The Holy Ghost did not teach him *that*. So, if any man expects the Lord to come before January 1, 1886, and the Lord should not come, every man of common-sense will say that *that* expectation was not the teaching of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost cannot raise in us false expectations whereby we deceive ourselves or others—whatever is their origin they come not from Him. Surely, then, we are justified in turning to the Bible *alone*, and disregarding the expectations of good men, even though they tell us that they are taught by the Holy Ghost, and plead their *experience* in support of their expectations.

"Imminence" means the state of hanging over as if ready to fall. The imminence of the coming, then, means, according to the term, that it is ready to take place. Has it been *ready* for eighteen hundred years and still it is unfulfilled? Why, then, may not another year elapse, or other ten years, before the Lord comes? I know the answer will be given: "It may be ten years distant. Still, I expect it this very hour." How, then, are we to understand a good, honest man when he says: "I expect every hour an event which may be distant one, ten, or a hundred years?" In the little volume lately published, which contains the papers read at the Niagara Conference in July last (p. 61), "imminence" is defined as meaning "liable to occur at any moment," or "without any intervening object that could destroy its power on the human heart as an object of hope." If a thing is liable to occur at any moment and does not occur, there must be some cause which prevents the occurrence. (2 Thess. ii. 6.) Now, we are told that it has been *liable to occur at any moment* for the last eighteen hundred years, but something hitherto has prevented it, and is still preventing. What is that something? Simply God's purpose is not fulfilled. The time is not fully come. Nor is the second advent "liable to occur" until God's set time has arrived. Then Christ shall come and shall not tarry; Christ *may not*, cannot come at any other time than that appointed by the Father.

But I will be told: "No man knows the day nor the hour." So say I. "Therefore," it is added, "He may come now!" Bad logic that. The proper inference is, therefore, "I do not know when He may come." But if the word "imminence" is merely intended to cover our ignorance, there is no room for discussion. None of us knows anything about the time. Thus Dr. Pitzer, as quoted in p. 65, says: "The time of His coming is so utterly *unknown and uncertain*, that for aught *any mortal* knows to the contrary it may occur at any moment." Agreed. But is the event or the time of the event unknown or uncertain to God? By no means. That is known and certain to Him. The ignorance is ours, not God's. The uncertainty is ours, not the events. And it is a strange confusion of thought to assert: "Because I am ignorant and uncertain, therefore the Word is not certain;" that is, to assert of an event what is true only of myself. The uncertainty is subjective, but "imminence" is intended to give the idea of objective uncertainty, and thus fallaciously attribute to a determined event an uncertainty which belongs solely to mortal short-sightedness and ignorance.

It is often asserted that the early Christians, and particularly the apostles, were looking for Christ's coming every day. Nay, in p. 61 we are told that Paul "is still watching and waiting for his crown of glory." But surely no one will say that *now* Paul holds that Christ might have come any day during his life? It is possible that a number of Christians fell into the error referred to in 2 Thess. ii. 23, and did think