

Our Contributors.

RUNNING TO MOUTH.

BY KNOXIAN.

The Interior is of the opinion that public speaking is overdone in the United States. Orators of a certain class have become a nuisance, and are doing a public injury. The platform has lost its influence. The people are weary of it and flee from it when they can. Our contemporary says:

"Not the peril, but the infliction in this country, is blatherskite, the interminable pawing of the air in endless speech-making. That the people are weary of it, that it no longer exerts influence, that people avoid it and on occasion flee from it, makes no difference to the speech-makers. It is not the pleasure of others, but of themselves, which they are seeking. Where these eloquent dealers in fanorade can have full swing, they are not only a nuisance, but a source of public injury. Look at our Congress, and especially at the Senate. The remedy can only be gotten at through those Houses by electing men of silence and sense until a majority is secured, and then by giving the people an opportunity to vote on an amendment to the constitution outlawing all windbags."

Men of silence are not necessarily men of sense. The only reason why some men seem wise, is because they are silent. If they spoke occasionally people would see that they are not any wiser than their neighbours. The philosopher Billings made a good proverb when he said, "There is no substitute for wisdom, but silence comes nearer it than anything else." Sir John Macdonald was credited with saying that no politician could be half as honest as one of his colleagues looked. No man can be half as wise as some silent men look. They have little of the genuine article of wisdom, but they have a great stock of the substitute; and many unthinking people take the substitute for the genuine article.

Although silence in itself may not be a much better thing than "blatherskite," the Interior is distinctly right in saying there is too much pawing of the air and endless speech-making. We in Canada have perhaps as much to the inhabited acre as our neighbours have. There has been a great deal of worse than senseless speech-making in the British House of Commons of late, but John Bull and his press will soon snuff that out. Public opinion in Britain is easily moved and comes down like lightning on anything that John Bull does not wish to tolerate. We think we are a clever people on this side of the Atlantic, and so we are in some things; but we are very easily gulled with platform and pulpit humbug. They have one or two fellows in the penitentiary in England that some of our people used to leave their own churches and run after on Sunday evenings. Several orators are operating on this side of the Atlantic now who had better give London a wide berth if they do not wish to have their oratory shut off rather suddenly. English judges are awfully matter-of-fact men.

Assuming that there is altogether too much speaking of the poor kind in this country, the old question comes up, "What are you going to do about it?" That question, like many another, is much more easily asked than answered. Self-government in Church and State makes discussion necessary, and every man who takes part in a discussion necessarily speaks more or less. Stop discussion and you stop self-government. You stop the whole judicial machinery of the country, for judges and lawyers cannot try cases in silence. You also stop the Church courts and the parliaments, and the municipal councils, and the school boards, and every kind of meeting in which men discuss and deliberate.

There is one delightfully simple way by which most of the speech-making in this country can be stopped in an hour. Let some one man take the reins of government in his hands and do everything

according to his own sweet will. Let him declare war, make laws, execute them, levy taxes, and lash the citizens if they do not pay them, as is done in Russia. If half a dozen citizens were tied up to a triangle and flogged because they were behind with their taxes, they would probably smart so that they would want to hold a public meeting to express their pent-up feelings. Every man that expresses his feelings would of course make a speech, so you see the speech-making will come in no matter what you do.

There is a short and easy way of putting an end to the forensic oratory in the country. Let some one man settle all disputes without hearing argument or evidence, let him send anybody to prison that he pleases, without trial, and hang any of his neighbours quietly if he thinks they should be removed in that way. That style of administering justice would dry up the eloquence of the courts, but it might prove inconvenient to well-meaning citizens. The system was tried many years ago in several countries and it did not work well for the general public. Britons abolished the system and established trial by jury in its place. After a long and bitter fight, the right of being defended by counsel was secured for unfortunate fellows on trial for their lives. At this time of day it seems rather hard to go back to the old system and hang a citizen without hearing what can be said in his defence. The people are scarcely prepared for that reform, even if some of them do think that speech-making is a trifle overdone.

There is a delightfully simple way of putting an end to speech-making in the Presbyterian Church. Just abolish assemblies, synods, presbyteries, sessions, deacons' courts, managers' meetings, congregational meetings, and meetings of every other kind that give one man power to govern the whole concern. A man can easily be found who would take the job. Let him say how much money must be paid; let him say who are to be admitted to the Church, and who are to be excluded; let him order the people to do anything he thinks proper, without giving any reason, and punish them if they do not obey his orders. Nothing in this world simpler than to govern this Church without any speeches at all, if the people are ready for that kind of government. Give one man all the power, put a padlock on the mouths of all the other men and on the mouths of the women, too, and the thing is done. Delightfully simple if the people are ready for the reform.

The fact is, popular government in Church or State necessarily involves a vast amount of speech-making. The quantity necessary in these two departments, cannot be very much lessened, but the quality may be greatly improved. Outside of the Church and the State, there is a large amount that ought to shut off. This branch of the subject will stand some discussion.

PHILOSOPHIC SUICIDE.

BY REV. GEORGE SEXTON, LL.D.

Just now one of the great daily papers of London is engaged in discussing the pros and cons of suicide. One would have thought it rather late in the world's history—after nearly nineteen centuries of Christian teaching—or anyone to be found defending self-murder. Yet the apologists for, and defenders of, this crime are clearly not all extinct. Recently a young man twenty-two years of age, died by his own hand in one of the railway stations in England. He sent a bullet through his head—and a vain and silly head it must have been, judging by the writing that he left behind him. His mind—such as it was—had been for six months dwelling morbidly upon the dark side of human life. Its mysteries had perplexed him, and its sufferings disgusted him, and he, as a consequence, deliberately planned a sudden leap into the eternal world. Before the final rash act, however, he sat down and penned a letter to the editor of a London daily newspaper, stating his intention and endeavouring to justify the course he was about

to pursue. He was clearly a lad who had read a few books, and possessed a moderately good education. He had evidently high-strung nerves vibrating with false sentiment, and the shallow pessimistic philosophy of the day, and his moral fibre was of that weak nature which shrank from the rough touch of the little world in which he moved.

Human life, he argued, was a sham, permeated through and through by villainess, so unendurable in fact that men had been compelled to invent imaginary and impossible utopias in this world, and a heaven in another, as a sort of compensation for tolerating it at all. For high and lofty ideals there was no room whatever; hard, stern actualities bore them down and ruthlessly crushed them till not the fittest but the unfittest and the most worthless survived. Nowhere was life worth having, and he was sick of it all, and would have no more of it. In some verses that he wrote, much the same kind of hyper-sensitiveness comes out.

Crude musings they are, of a limited and one-sided experience, the bathos of a warped and crooked mind, and an immature judgment. Thus they run:

"The colour and the fragrance of the flowers
Exist but to deceive and use the bee.
The beauty and the glamour which we see
In what we call the fair sex, are the powers
Of this old world to keep man here. The dowers
That cover faults innumerable. If we
Could choose a friend, whose powers of sympathy
We could depend on, we would give her ours."

Can anything be more silly or more awkward than this? Bees are not deceived by the fragrance of the flowers, and if men are kept here by the glamour of the other sex, the glamour is not all illusion, but often accompanied by much that affords one the highest and most perfect enjoyments of earthly life. And unfortunate indeed must he be who was unable to find a friend on whom dependence could be placed. A little more experience would have taught this melancholy boy that there were thousands of such friends to be had, if only sought for in a proper manner. But we have no intention of discussing either the poetry or the philosophy of this poor, half-crazed youth. The one significant fact in connection with the case is that he has come to enjoy a posthumous notoriety, and to pose as a sort of modern martyr to the evils of society. In his death he seems to have sought to win the applause of the gallery, and in that he succeeded.

A whole flood of letters poured in upon the editor of the paper, to whom the suicide addressed himself, and the question of self-destruction has come to the front in the public mind. The ethics and philosophy of suicide is being discussed on all hands. The fate of Ernest Clark—for that is the lad's name—is deplored, his "bitter cry" rings in the air, the sufferings of human life were too much for him, and he "with rainy eyes, writes sorrow on the bosom of the earth," and blows out his brains.

Just as might have been expected, more than one of the correspondents of the newspaper in the controversy, endeavours to justify suicide. Where, say they, life is a burden and the back too weak to bear it, then the only remedy is to quit existence. In fact, the proposition has been made that the State should set up a Lethal chamber, in which all who desired to end their earthly career could be accommodated on easy terms, and with no fear of interruption. The question is life worth living, has been answered in the negative by a score of modern pessimists, and why should they not be allowed to put their philosophy into practice in the most comfortable and expeditious manner. The philosophy is not new. We have come across it before. Seneca endeavoured to justify suicide. Cicero advocated it, and Brutus and Cassius both defended it, and practised it. Plutarch praises Cato for having put an end

to his life by his own hand, and even Marcus Aurelius recommended "retiring from life," under certain circumstances. But this was in days when much else was practised and defended that would excite in men's mind to-day nothing but disgust and loathing.

As far as I remember, no one but pessimists and skeptics—and they are generally the same—have dared to defend suicide in these days. Hume wrote two essays upon it, although he did not quite explicitly defend it. Schopenhauer tells us that "it is a misery to have been born," but even he does not advise the taking of one's own life. In the leading infidel paper in England, some years ago, its most brilliant contributor wrote: "Though the garden of thy life be wholly waste, the sweet flowers withered, the fruit trees barren, over its wall hang the rich, dark clusters of the Vine of Death, within easy reach of thy hand, which may pluck them when it will." Such views fortunately, however, are not very common in these days of Christian teaching.

It is, of course, an easy thing to take one's own life. The rubicon of earthly existence can be crossed without much difficulty. But the act of the suicide is not one of courage—as these small philosophers would have it appear—but one of cowardice, the most contemptible. Despair is not a necessity of human life in any of its phases. On the contrary, in the direst distress, and the most torturing suffering, physical or mental, there is always room for hope. The man who gives up the fight of fight against wrong, of ideal good against actual evil, and retires voluntarily from the battle field, is a coward, and nothing else. He is a traitor to the noble army who, in the words of Browning, are but "battered to fight better," and who at every defeat, gird up anew their loins to wield against the sword, until victory comes, as come it will in the end. And the man who shouts his small philosophy of falsehood into the ears of a lachrymose multitude of fools, and forthwith commits self-murder, may often be a hypocrite, but is always a coward. Men of such a mood and cast in such a mould, give up the effort to attain to their own ideals, because the way is too rough for their tender feet to tread. They may see the City of Righteousness in the distance, but the road is too thorny to be trod, and hence they sit idly down and complain of the worthlessness of human life.

The arguments employed to justify suicide are as fallacious as they are pernicious. It is a very trite proverb, but true, notwithstanding, that, "while there's life, there's hope," and in the presence of hope, the ethics of suicide must be false. Self-murder is sin, and a very terrible one against divine law. Well has Shakespeare said:

"Against self-slaughter
There is a prohibition so divine,
That cravens my weak hand."

It is to destroy one of the threads which the Great Designer weaves into His cloth of time, and its destruction involves other threads and breaks the continuity and maybe spoils the pattern. The single life is one of the threads which go to make up the whole. The act is murder, not less so because it is self-murder. And this is the good old strong Saxon name for the crime, which we, in modern days, have toned down with Latinity and called suicide.

But it is argued, a man's life is his own, and he can do as he pleases with it, and is surely not bound to retain it against his will. Nothing more false has ever been vomited from the jaws of the infernal regions than this statement. No man's life is his own. Even were there not a God to whom a responsibility is due, still each one forms a part of the whole and owes something to the mass. When the suicide "slits the thin-spun life," and shirks his burden, part of it will fall upon other shoulders, and he but adds to the loads that he leaves them to carry. Those who are nearest and dearest to him, what of them? Father, mother, husband, wife, sister, brother, lover, friend, all disregarded in this one selfish