

Our Contributors.

ON DOING THE BEST YOU CAN.

BY KNOXONIAN.

You say you didn't preach very well last Sabbath, brother. You prepared faithfully and thought you had a sermon that would do some good, but something or other went wrong at the last moment and you went home as much disappointed as the Grits were at the result of the bye elections. Perhaps the root of the failure—if you did fail—was physical. This is March, you know, brother. Liver a little torpid, circulation sluggish, voice too stiff to take the inflections properly, head a little prone to dizziness, and thinking apparatus seemed to have lost its grip. Too bad, brother, but don't worry over it. Perhaps some of the best Christians in your congregation were greatly helped by that sermon. Before the week is over somebody may tell you that sermon did him much good. Anyway, brother, you did the best you could. That is the point. Your Master is not a tyrant. He is not a soured, snarling, cynical critic. He is a kind, loving, sympathetic friend, and if you did the best you could He will never find fault with you.

Years ago we heard one of our ministers, in an admirable sermon, tell the believers present that God would be far less likely to find fault with them than some of their neighbours. The sentence fairly shocked some of the old Scotchmen present. They looked on the Almighty as a Being who delights in finding fault with His children, especially His younger children. That minister was right. Brother, do the best you can and the Master who said, "she hath done what she could," will be sure to treat you kindly, whatever his professed followers may do.

You did not exceed in your examinations, Mr. Youngblood, as well as you expected. Papers catchy. Dr. So and So always sets etc., etc. Never mind the Doctor. Possibly he does set papers that are intended to exhibit his vast stores of learning and his imaginary ability rather than fairly test the knowledge of a student, but let that pass. You did the best you could, and that is all anyone can do. Perhaps your health was not very good during the winter. May be you had the grippe. There is a remote possibility that you may have gone out on too many Friday evenings to spend a pleasant hour in the parlour of your intended mother-in-law. Such things have happened. College Senates are intensely conservative, and they persist in refusing to allow Friday evenings spent in that way to count in final examinations. Brother, it is all over. Let it go. If you did your best you need not worry. Go down to your intended mother-in-law's again and you may meet somebody there that will put you in good humour.

Mr. Cicero, your speech did not go off as well as you expected. You prepared for a great effort. You arranged your matter and hunted up your illustrations, and polished up your peroration and got everything into grand shape. You thought of everything you had ever heard or read about speech-making, dreamed about all the great speakers you had ever listened to, waited anxiously for the hour when you were to make the effort of your life. The hour came right enough, but the man did not come up to the mark half so successfully as the hour. Your speech did not cover you with glory, or make a great impression, or bring down the house, or anything of that kind. In fact it did nothing in particular. Your friends did not shout with delight, nor did your enemies turn green with envy. Never mind, Mr. Cicero. You did the best you could, and that is all anyone can do. Better luck next time. Don't you know, Mr. Cicero, that it is just by such comparative failures that men learn to speak well. Utilize your failures and work them into future successes. Had you succeeded in your first efforts you might have degenerated into one of these all-day talkers who dribble, dribble, dribble, like a tin spout on the north-east corner of a farm house on a rainy night in November.

Did not get on with my class to-day. Boys not attentive and attend irregularly. Don't learn their verses and their Catechism as they should. Feel rather discouraged. Afraid nature never intended me for a Sabbath school teacher. Now, dear teacher, don't get discouraged without reason. The boys are never all good and seldom all there in any class. Do the best you can and the Master will say "Well done."

Didn't sing well to-day. Voice husky and stiff. Couldn't take the high notes well and went home disgusted with myself and everybody else. Think I'll stop singing in public. Now, don't. The easterly winds of March and much work during winter have put your voice a little out of sorts. That is all. Nobody is in good voice in March. Do the best you can, and when spring comes in you'll sing like a lark.

Congregation not doing as well as I would like. Attendance on Sabbath sometimes not up to the mark. Prayer-meeting neglected by many. Not as much done for Missions and Colleges as should be done. Often feel much discouraged. Additions to the Church not so large as I could wish. Think I must look out for another field of labour and let somebody else try. Yes, brother, that is about how most of us feel at times. But don't you know that your Master neither asks nor expects you to do anything more than your best. Think of that inspiring little sentence again, "she hath done what she could." Congregations may, and often do, expect unreasonable, or even impossible, things; Church Courts may sometimes be tyrannical, or at least unreasonable. Conveners and committees may badger you for money when

you cannot raise a dollar. Conceited striplings, who imagine they have power to regenerate souls, may call you a failure if you don't convert men, but if you can look calmly up and with your eye fixed on the throne say, "Master, you know I am doing the best I can," you need have no fear of men.

The men who manage the finances of congregations often feel discouraged. If they do the best they can there is no need for discouragement. There is no one fact in finances more thoroughly established than that a Presbyterian congregation always pays its way. Banks may fail and monetary companies go under, but a good Presbyterian congregation always pays a hundred cents on the dollar. It may take a little time, but the money always comes in the end.

Elders sometimes complain about lack of success. All the Master expects an elder or any other man to do is

DO THE BEST HE CAN.

LETTER FROM HONAN.

In a letter to his brother, Rev. John MacGillivray, Montreal, Rev. Donald MacGillivray, B.D., writes under date, Hsin Chen, Dec. 24, 1891:—

This date is Christmas eve. A merry Christmas doubtless you have long since had, if those wicked telegrams about China have not disturbed your philosophic calm, telegrams or alarming reports notwithstanding. I propose, by the will and grace of God, to eat dinner to-morrow along with Dr. and Mrs. Smith, in much joy and peace. We often have prayed out here that false news regarding China should not reach your ears, and so needlessly cause you pain, and to judge by the entire absence of allusion to the past troubles in your letters, you seem, so far, to have been mercifully preserved from the tenter hooks upon which I fear many of our good, kind friends have many a time been tormented without due cause. Well, I arrived home to-day from the fair (four days) at Hua hsien safe and well, having had a peaceful and, I trust, successful season of work. But I must first give you some account of my work in the villages around here. I have been radiating out from this place as a centre, and now a map of my travels would show a goodly number of lines in all directions, east, west, north and south, all emanating from this destined to be the hub of our Gospel wheel in this part of Honan. The first two days of my travels I went on foot, accompanied by my faithful henchman, Chang Hsi Pin, he with cash bag containing some Christian books slung over his shoulder. I tried to get a donkey, but the price not being low enough I tried it for two days on foot, leaving early, going over several villages each day and returning at night to Hsin Chen. The chilliness of the weather makes walking very enjoyable, and now one does not need to hold up an umbrella for fear of sunstroke, although at noon, with your face directly south, the sun low down in the heavens (yesterday was winter solstice), still reminds you that he is the same old ball of fire that scorches you during the dog days.

As we walk along we meet villagers hastening into Hsin Chen to market. The ferry outside of the little water gate is quite crowded with rustics, many of whom carry poles with two baskets of cabbage for the consumption of Hsin Chenites. Of course very little notice is taken of your brother in Celestial costume. The children do not gather in beavies to scurry along behind my heels. What a wondrous comfort the native dress has been to me since I landed three years ago. Others whom we meet are going to see a theatrical show at some village not far away, admittance to which is always free in China, free as air, for it is always in the open air. Who list may look. The hat is passed around before the show, and the subscription list made up before the players will begin, mostly by merchants and others in the village or vicinity of the temple. Therefore outsiders who come may go scot free.

This is a slack season with the farmer, and therefore many take every opportunity to attend the plays. When we arrive at a village I stop at the first little knot of men I see, endeavour to gain their ear by politenesses current everywhere, and then explain why we have come to Hsin Chen, endeavouring to impart some idea of the truth to their darkened minds. In the villages, perhaps one per cent. read. The illiteracy is most deplorable and disheartening. Hence very few books are sold. The people are generally excessively poor, and many villages have no school at all because they cannot pay the small sum required to hire a teacher, say \$40 a year. If a few families were able to pay this sum only their children could go, no others could. With the exception of a few, very few, free schools in cities, education is all like private school education at home in Canada. We are often told to go to the schools to sell our books, for they imagine that the books we sell are not very different from the books sold by the itinerant vendors, who always make for the schools. These vendors are the sole suppliers of materials to these schools. The villagers frequently receive my advances coldly, or even sullenly. I am an object of fear, to be whispered about privately, but not to be openly countenanced. I am sorry that I have to wear glasses, for these are supposed to have powers of seeing into the earth and so detecting the presence of precious articles invisible to the unaided ken of men. One old man said in answer to an enquiry for the way to the next village: "In such a direction. You will find many heaps of earth in that direction, and there must be some precious thing to be found in them!" The heaps of dirt are in many cases unused kilns of antiquity, now the abode of rabbits and such other creatures as the weird-loving folk like to

people them with. These mounds are naturally objects of superstition. It is said that sorcery and witchcraft can at will educe from their bowels household utensils or precious metals. Report has it that foreigners have robbed, or are going to rob, these mounds of the untold wealth supposed to lie within their dark wombs. Hence the old man's remarks.

Happily the temples round about are small, poor, or in ruins. On the way out of Hsin Chen at West Gate, mud gods, all paintless and inglorious, sit under the blue heavens, with nothing but a few bricks left behind their backs to show that there was once a temple there. And, though these things are patent to all, they are yet mad upon their idols, and say the gods do not live there now. They removed upon the decay of the temple. If you worship the idol it becomes efficient; if the worshippers turn elsewhere efficiency follows their footsteps, or rather precedes. Such is the queer theory of this people, utter want of reverence, and yet thorough faith. In front of these temples I often find a little group of men, and at that point address the crowd. The stones in front are usually worn very smooth, because loungers frequent these places, and travellers often rest their legs on the temple threshold or portico. The latter find them very convenient, situated as they are, in many cases, on the roads at the outskirts of villages. If a little straw can be found it is lit in the temple, and the hands are warmed at the blaze, a custom which amply accounts for the begrimed aspect of the gods in every small roadside temple I have seen. The beggars, too, pass the night there, and robbers divide the spoils in lonely temples, with no resident priests, for there are myriads of temples which have no priests. The side rooms of one little temple were filled with manure, fit accompaniment for the gods whom rain could reduce to mud and straw, an excellent fertilizer. In some cases the villagers are very friendly, and with these one loves to linger. The difference in villages in this respect is very remarkable. One day a fight on the street caused the instantaneous stampede of all my hearers to the scene of combat. So it was at the Hua Hsien fair. After two days' walking, I took the donkey and made longer trips. In the small villages I fared ill for a noon-day meal. The only food sold in them is perhaps sweet potatoes by peripatetic baskets. The sweet potatoes are somewhat the same shape as our potatoes, but longer, not so oval. The substance cooked is sweeter, but more watery and less tempting than the foreign tuber. The vendor bellows: hot sweet potatoes! And so they are hot in the early part of the morning, and then, when he lifts off the dirty cloth which covers his basket, steam arises out of its depths; but long before noon-day his little stock in trade is cold. Hence you would not relish one or two taken up in the hand and eaten as you trudge along to the next village. But the larger places reached by donkey generally afford a more varied bill of fare. The old Yellow River used to flow along east of us hundreds of years ago. An old embankment can be seen for miles and miles. I have crossed it several times. The villages are strung along on the top of this bank. Once they had the river below their feet. Now he is very far away. In some places he has, however, left disagreeable tokens of his presence in the shape of sands utterly unproductive to the toils of the husbandman, and equally laborious for man and beast to pass over.

The city of Hua hsien, where I attended the fair, is on this same bank forty li north-east of here, and trade has largely deserted the town, along with the desertion of the river. One day I had a man to drive the donkey. He had the impression that he would only have a short walk to some of the near villages. So he gave me the reins and whip. I soon disappeared, making for an inn some five miles from Hsin Chen. Presently he caught sight of me and shouted. I paid no heed, thinking he desired to impede my progress. The road was easy to enquire. I got on famously. Occasionally I could hear bellowing behind me, but on I went. When I was entering the village aimed at the man met me, having taken a short cut. I expected to find him in a rage, but he was quite smiling. He said he was afraid that I was going on beyond this place, where there were no villages and nothing but sand, in which country I should be in a sore plight without my man. Only some villages have inns or foodshops, and these places should be reached by noon. The country north-east of here has a great many large plains, with villages only on the edges far distant from the main road. Some of these plains are covered with water at certain seasons, i.e., rain water, there being no drainage; hence absence of villages. These parts of Honan bear marks of the awful famine of fourteen years ago. Probably none of these villages but mourned the loss of many souls during that time. One day I met two men on the road, who, on enquiry, were found to be on the way to Hsin Chen for healing. The old man, whose eyes were bad, is being much helped by Dr. Smith, and appears, I hear, to be showing an interest in the Gospel. When I am out I do what I can to excite interest in our medical branch. Our books now bear a stamp: "The gracious doctrine of Jesus is preached in order to save the world from suffering and bestow eternal life. If anyone does not understand the doctrine of this book, or has any disease, he is invited to come, according to desire and time he pleases, to Hsin Chen, where he may hear explanations and receive healing." The Doctor has had an average of ten patients a day, a very fair average. One man produced for my inspection a copy of Matthew, literary style, date 1864, which he had purchased in Tientsin. He had taken good care of it, but complained that he could not understand it. We have