

Our Contributors.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

BY KNOXIAN

Viewed historically, or oratorically, or theologically, or scholastically, or socially, or from almost any other standpoint, the General Assembly is a body of men that no Canadian son of Calvin need be ashamed of. It may not have as much style as the Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, nor as much ecclesiastical starch as the Old Kirk Assembly; it certainly has not as much humour as the Irish Assembly, nor has it as many specialists in various lines as the Assembly of the American Presbyterian Church, but still, on the whole, it is a good, sensible, fair minded court, always willing to do the right thing, but not always able to decide unanimously what the right thing is.

To say that the Assembly might be improved is but to say that it is human. We venture to suggest a few improvements founded on experience and observation. We have not much hope that all, or perhaps any, of them will be adopted, but this is a free country and one may make a suggestion whether it is adopted or not. To begin, we think it would be a great improvement if the General Assembly would

UNLOAD ITSELF

of a large portion of its business. An ordinary Assembly lasts seven or eight days of about ten working hours each. The court opens on Wednesday evening and usually closes on the Thursday or Friday of the following week, but there is little business done on the first evening and none on the Saturday afternoon. An average Assembly sits about seventy working hours. Now, will any man who knows anything about Assembly dockets say that it is possible to do the business with deliberation in seventy hours? After the court had been sitting four or five days last year there were seventy items on the docket. And be it remembered that Home Missions, Foreign Missions, and some of the other great branches of our work, take, and very properly take, an evening each, so that, after all, there is little time left for the hundred and one other things that have to be done. The remedy seems to be to turn a lot of the business over to the Synods. There is statesmanship enough in the Church to transfer a portion of the work with very little friction, and the transfer should be made as soon as possible. Apart altogether from the fact that the business before the Assembly ought to be *done*—not laid over until next year—the tone of the court would be greatly improved and its influence increased by less hurry and more calm deliberation. Account for it as you may, human nature distrusts hurried decisions. A decision given by the Assembly when two-thirds of the court are shouting "Vote, vote, vote," and a dozen members are standing on their tip toes with their dental formation displayed and their index fingers pointed towards the chair as they call "Moderator," may be right, but the mode of giving it does not inspire one with confidence. A Church court is not a public meeting, and its business ought to be transacted with deliberation, dignity and decorum. It does seriously lessen one's confidence in the supreme court if the business is done in such a way that when the Moderator says "Carried," half a dozen members immediately ask, What is carried?

STANDING COMMITTEES

For many years there has been more or less criticism about the *personnel* of the standing committees. And truth to say, there is some ground for adverse criticism. There is no good reason why the same men should sit on Mission Committee and College Boards for decades. We know one College Board on which some of the members have grown grey. Good men they are no doubt, but they are not by any means the only men in the college constituency that could take a hand in its management. It is seldom best to have the work of the Church done by a few, especially the same few. The fact that certain men look upon a seat on some of the College Boards or Mission Boards as a vested right shows the system, or rather lack of system, is bad. The fact that a man gets angry if his name happens to be dropped shows he was on too long. When any man, however good, considers himself indispensable to the Church his usefulness is gone.

To change all the members of a Mission or College Board each year would be ecclesiastical insanity, and might end in ecclesiastical suicide. Substantial continuity is absolutely necessary to success. There should always be some men, and not a few men, on, who have the run of the business. But there should also be some new blood. How would it do to have one-third the members retire each year as a matter of course. Three points would be gained by this arrangement. Members dropping out would not feel hurt because their outness came as a matter of course; new blood would be brought in every year, and the continuity of the Board would never be broken because two thirds of the old members always remained.

It is easy to say that this committee grievance is a small matter. We have always noticed that the men who call it small are on one or two committees themselves, and we have also noticed that if at any time their names happen to be dropped they consider that a tremendously large matter. Small or large, nothing ought to be done that unnecessarily rasps any hard working minister or good elder in the Church. We need all the work and all the money we can get from everybody.

Another improvement of considerable importance would

be for the Assembly to pay more respect to the findings of its own committees. Can anything be more absurd than to appoint a committee to do a certain work and then treat them as natural enemies when they tell you they have done it? The committee works hard for hours, gets to the bottom of the business, gets the thing into shape, presents its reports and then some member of the court, assumed to be both sane and at least partly sanctified, who knows nothing whatever of the matter, indulges in a tirade about "committeeism," whatever that may mean, and denounces the finding. Why in the name of common sense appoint a committee to do work if their work is necessarily bad?

Would it not save precious time if the Assembly conferred its attention mainly to spiritual work and gave up the habit of endorsing things. How much good has ever come from endorsing? The Assembly endorsed the Dunkin Act. Where is it now? The Assembly endorsed the Scott Act more than once. The very year after the last endorsement the people repealed the Act and nobody kicked harder than the Presbyterians of Huron and Bruce. The people don't care a fig for such resolutions. Why spend time in passing them?

Thanks to the good management of Principal Grant and the moderation of Principal King, and a few others, the Church was saved from an explosion in 1889 that might have left scars. What practical good came from the declamation and resolutions against the politicians who would not declare the Jesuit Estates Bill unconstitutional when they thought it was constitutional. The climax was reached soon after when the Assembly concerned itself about the order of precedence in State processions.

SOME INNOVATIONS.

Would it not be an improvement if members of Assembly stopped talking with their backs to their fellow-members, came forward to the platform and allowed the Moderator to announce their names?

Would it not be an improvement if the Assembly met in the forenoon and heard the Moderator's sermon, constituted and put through a lot of routine in the afternoon, and then began business in real earnest in the evening? Is there any clerical member of Assembly who would care to see his parishioners come to Church in the same mental condition as members of Assembly rush from boat or train to the opening exercises?

Would it not be an improvement if the Assembly met in May? In climates not nearly as hot as ours all the supreme courts meet in May.

TEN THOUSAND UNEVANGELIZED FRENCH VILLAGES.

LETTER FROM DR. M'ALL, PARIS.

We often write respecting our work in great cities, and busy centres of France. For once I should like to transport our American friends with me, to remote and more rural places, to which our work has penetrated. I feel sure that, like myself, they would return from such a visit with an overwhelming impression of the immense work, which, so to speak, lies waiting for the heart and hand of Christian labourers throughout this country.

Let me begin with an excursion made this week along with my esteemed colleague, the Rev. Dr. Loba, to Saint Gemme, one of our village stations, distant some twenty miles from Paris, the latter part by a wild forest road. This remote hamlet has all the characteristics of the utmost rusticity, and in it until within a few years nothing but the grossest Romanism, side by side with total irreligion, had been known. It is a very small place, not counting, I suppose, more than two hundred inhabitants. Monsieur Paul Passy, one of our voluntary helpers, a young Frenchman, whose father has a country house in the vicinity, formed the desire of introducing the Gospel into this darkest of dark places. At his own cost he built a small wooden room, just on the summit of the hill, and on the roof of which a flag was hoisted at the hours of meeting, to gather in the neighbours. Here he commenced earnest work, aided by my late beloved colleague, the Rev. G. T. Dodds, the Rev. C. E. Greig, and others. The peasants soon began to attend, and also to send their children to the juvenile service held during the week, because we had no one to send to them on the Sunday. I well remember how strange all seemed on the occasion of my own first visit. The Rev. J. C. Bracq, then helping me in Paris, accompanied me. The men wore their blouses, and, following the custom of the country, kept on their hats throughout the meeting. They had, however, already learned to take them off during prayer. The work has gradually gained firm hold, so much so, that a little congregation and church has been gathered, and regular worship has been added to our evangelistic meetings, under the auspices of the French Central Society of Evangelization, with which we always rejoice to co-operate. The wooden chapel, through which the wind used often to blow fiercely, in that exposed situation, has been exchanged for a humble but neat structure of brick, surmounted by a little belfry instead of the old flag. It will contain about 100 persons, besides a class-room or vestry adjoining. The peasants did their utmost to aid in the construction by their personal labours.

Last Tuesday we went over to Saint Gemme, for the festival of the "Christmas Tree." The little place was filled to its utmost capacity, a few having come up the hill from another of our stations in the village at its foot. In the centre was the tree, on one hand the villagers, a group which

would have told well as a photograph of rusticity; on the other, were ranged the scholars, as orderly and pleasant looking as any village children in America or England. Some of the hymns were sung by them alone, the rest by the assembly. If the harmony was not faultless, the heartiness left nothing to desire. Mrs. McAll tried to accommodate the music of the harmonium to their somewhat uncertain notions of time and tune. There is now a daily infant school in the place, taught by one of the peasant girls, who have been brought to the Saviour.

The young Reformed Church missionary, pastor of the district, Monsieur Secretan, who is greatly beloved by the people, with Dr. Loba, Monsieur Paul Passy (the founder and a colporteur aided me in the service. I have no words to tell what I felt in being there, amidst that Christian throng, when I reflect how, until the young squire's happy thought of a few years back, all had been total darkness in that lone village on the hill.

Here are two other recent scenes, also from villages, a few miles distant from Paris. The one was at Nanterre, celebrated for its annual festival a "La Rosière" whither we went, some weeks ago, to open a larger mission room in place of the former one which had become too small. There were fully 120 persons present, including the mission school children. One of the boys repeated accurately the Fiftieth Psalm. As at Saint Gemme we found ourselves surrounded by a group of rustic people, who gave evidence of their gratitude and joy, that we had brought to them the precious truth of Christ. And shortly before this, I had the pleasure of going to another populous village, Rueil, also on occasion of opening a larger mission hall. There, too, we found a most sympathetic audience of 130, including the mission scholars, who sang their hymns. At Rueil, a little church has been already formed, associated with our Baptist friends.

Our very latest village effort is being put forth at Alfortville, an extremely neglected and demoralized place, some six or seven miles from Paris. Two of our voluntary workers, young Englishmen, have gone to work courageously, opening a weekly meeting in an unused shop, preceded by a short service for the children. There in the uncouth "banlieue" of the great city, the pioneering work involves some self-sacrifice; prejudice and ill-will have to be encountered; but already the young men are welcomed by a little band of persons, ready to hear, and for whom the Gospel has a freshness of interest almost unknown in America or England.

I have sketched these scenes in order to call the attention of American and British friends to the immense field which lies waiting for Christian effort in this country. Here is the actual state of the case. To speak only of the rural population of France, there are probably not less than ten thousand villages in which the pure Gospel is totally unknown, in very many of which, it has never at any time been preached. If these places were searched through, it would be found that, in not a few of them, not a single copy of the Bible exists, unless, indeed, in the house of the priest, who carefully hides it from the people. Think of a community whose members have never had addressed to them an appeal of Divine love, not one of whom has ever had God's Book in his hand!

Is the case of these villages hopeless? Is it impossible to break in upon this state of ignorance, with the attendant prejudices and errors which have accumulated through untold centuries? Nothing could be more incorrect than to allege that these people have rejected the Gospel, so that the day of grace is over. You cannot say that of a man to whom the Divine message has, literally, never come. No wonder that, in such cases, the obstacles are formidable, and the demand great on patience and perseverance. But the villages concerning which I have written, and others in which a similar blessing has been experienced, offered no more facilities and presented no more promise than do thousands of others, in which nothing is as yet attempted. Will not Christians in more favoured lands, by their generous gifts, enable us and others to go forth to hundreds of Saint Gemmes and Nanterres, and Ruels and Alfortvilles, seeking in our Master's Name, and by the power of His Spirit, to transform the desert into the garden of the Lord? And will not young men and Christian ladies freely give themselves to strengthen our small missionary bands, so that we may compass the "very much land which remains to be possessed"?

A LETTER FROM ROME.

BY REV. LOUIS H. JORDAN, B.D.

So many topics suggest themselves, as I undertake this morning to fulfil my long-neglected promise, that the difficulty of making selection proves embarrassing. Perhaps my purpose shall be served, and all my pains be spared, if I take my themes at hazard as I need them.

ECHOES OF EASTER-TIDE.

A month ago the city was the rendezvous of strangers from every quarter of the globe. To the unequalled attractions which it is able to present to all seasons of the year, it is a unique centre of interest on every Easter occasion; and 1892 is likely to be remembered for some time as a date when its churches were unusually crowded with the curious and the devout. The very elaborate ceremonial by which the days of Holy Week were distinguished, shorn though that ceremonial is of much of its original splendour, constituted a spectacle at