

Our Contributors.

A NEW START IN THE NEW YEAR.

BY KNOXIAN.

In a well-known essay Macaulay says, "We know no spectacle so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodical fits of morality." We thrust that quotation at Principal Grant once when discussing a public question in a private friendly way and he parried the thrust by saying that a periodical fit of morality is a good thing. Undoubtedly it is a good thing compared with no morality at all. It is a great pity that morality should make itself appear ridiculous but even a ridiculous appearance may do some good. The periodical fit shows that the public conscience is not so dead that it cannot put on a spurt. A spurt is a poor thing in either morals or religion, but it is many times better than chronic deadness.

Probably Macaulay would have said that few things are more ridiculous than New Year resolutions. Had he used his marvellous powers in showing how easily and how quickly New Year resolutions are broken, he might have shamed his admirers out of making resolutions on New Year's day. And yet New Year resolutions are good things even if they are sometimes quickly broken. They show that desire for improvement still lives in the breast of the man who makes them. The man who thinks he cannot be improved has no business down here. Earth is not his sphere. Just where he ought to go, or be sent, we cannot say but this world has no further use for him.

How would it do for all the preachers in the Presbyterian church in Canada to take a new start in this new year and try to preach better sermons than they ever preached before.

Brother Perfect stand aside, please. We have no word for you. Paul could not do you any good and a man that Paul failed on need not be tried by anybody else.

Brother Know-it-all, please keep company with Brother Perfect. A minister who knows it all need not discuss improvement in preaching or in anything else. You two brethren have nothing to do but look down patronisingly on the rest of us.

The New Year is a good time for an ordinary preacher to ask how he can improve his sermons and increase his pulpit power. It is a pity that so many sermons should come so near being first-class and for the want of a certain something just fail to get into that class. Perhaps a little more work would have put them into first place. Not long ago we heard of a theological professor, himself an excellent preacher, who advised a friend to put "just another hour" on his sermons. The friend was an able, scholarly man and the professor thought he might by another hour's work make sermons already good considerably better. That professor knew his business. An hour of earnest work spent after a sermon is finished in striking out redundant words and sentences, in lighting up dull paragraphs, in adding apt illustrations or allusions, in mercilessly shortening arguments that prove things nobody present denies, and in drawing the pen through such fundamental facts as that a shepherd is a man who takes care of sheep. An hour of vigorous work of this kind would redeem many a sermon from mediocrity and lengthen and strengthen many a pastorate.

Dr. Guthrie urged Donald Fraser to prepare only one sermon a week and lay out all his strength on it. Dr. Fraser did not take the advice because he tells us he "could never bear to elaborate the materials of a sermon or address," and that he had a constitutional dislike to taking pains. That may have been all very well for a man like Donald Fraser, but we are not all Donald Frasers. Taking pains must be the indispensable conditions of success for most of us.

We have no sympathy with the cry that the pulpit is doomed to lose its power. It is the fault will lie mainly with the church and with the men who occupy the pulpit. The outside rivals are not worth discussing simply because they are not rivals. The press is usually considered the greatest rival, but as a matter of fact it might be and sometimes is

one of the pulpit's best helpers. The danger comes from unreasonable demands by the church for work outside of the pulpit; from organizations that think, or seem to think, they can do the work of the pulpit better than it is done by the pulpit; from the pinching of poverty in the manse, a pinching that is sure, sooner or later, to cripple the pulpit; and from a reliance on ecclesiastical machinery that cannot be moved without pulpit power.

Congregations might contribute greatly to this new start of their ministers by taking a new start themselves. The new start might show itself in more regular attendance on Sabbath; in contributing more liberally towards the congregational revenue; in better attendance at the prayer meeting; in living better lives, and in a hundred different ways. Adding two or three hundred dollars to a minister's salary helps mightily to give him a new start.

There is some rather weak preaching, no doubt, but the weakest of it is quite as good as a great deal of the hearing. The standing curse of the church is that so many people think the minister should be and do everything about perfect while they may be anything they please or do anything they choose.

Supposing we conclude that we are all, minister and people, a rather poor lot and take a fresh start for the New Year. There is no reason why we might not be and do better.

POINTS OF VALUE IN DOING EFFECTIVE CHURCH WORK.*

Among the first and most essential requisites of doing effective church work is that the worker be clothed with the spirit of resignation and animated by the virtue of thankfulness. As an example of graceful resignation and sincere thanks I stand before you to-night. Against my strongly expressed wish you have done me the distinguished honor of electing me to the Presidency of this Council. I have in this deferred my own opinion to yours, thinking that perhaps the man you saw might be better than the man or the ego that I myself saw, and thus I have striven to exhibit the virtue of resignation, and not like that of a martyr, but rather as one desirous of doing to the utmost of his powers whatever he could for the furtherance and advancement of the cause that created and has carried on the work of this Council.

Let me too, not only cherish, but express my hearty thanks for the distinction you have placed upon me. It is one that I had no hope of reaching, but it is one which, having reached, I prize as a most honorable distinction, for this amongst other reasons good and sufficient, that it has been filled for some years back by one of our most learned and distinguished presbyters, Mr. William Mortimer Clark. Plutarch tells us of Timotheus the Athenian, who had been a particular favorite of fortune, as the old worshippers of Jupiter put it, that upon recounting his victories among his friends, he added at the end of several great actions, "And in this Fortune had no share;" after which, it is observed in history, that he never prospered in anything that he undertook. The Presbyterian who speaks of Providence as the Greek did of fortune is not likely to prosper in anything that he undertakes, and, that we may prosper, let your present chief officer humbly acknowledge his sense of gratitude to Him whom the men of ancient time dimly recognized as Fortune.

We are, however, met to-night to take counsel together upon some "points of value in doing effective Church work." The meetings of this Presbyterian Council should be made practical. We meet here in a quasi-parliament; we have equal voices in discussion: we are all eligible to be heard; we are in what may be called in distinction to other church meetings, an ecclesiastical committee of the whole. At the Sabbath day meeting all the elders but one are silent; the one active, the many passive; the one moving and the others being moved; but only so if the preacher and the worshippers have their trolley on the wire that leads to the great Heavenly Dynamo, and that God's Holy

*Paper read before the Presbyterian Council at Knox Church, Toronto, by the President, John A. Paterson, M.A., on 4th December, 1893.

Spirit thrills the circuit between earth and heaven. And this, of course, is right, for the pulpit message is the very apex of church work, and that occasion is not one of debate nor of discussion. At the Presbytery meetings the elder (naming him thus in the ordinary sense) is there only once in as many years as there are members of session, supposing the ordinary system of rotation is kept up, so that in fact an elder may attend meetings of Presbytery for one year in fifteen, and then, when he is just about becoming acquainted with the methods of business and the details of the questions that come before the court, he is gently beckoned aside to make way for his successor, and the cycle of his Ecclesiastical Court life is run. Verily the elders have their "exits and their entrances." But in this council these conditions do not exist; all here have an equal status, and, although it has no legislative functions or operative powers, yet it presents opportunities of many an interesting and profitable discussion, which, *mirabile dictu*, is not, however, very frequently taken advantage of.

Many practical questions relative to church work and church government present themselves to the mind, the discussion of which would give us much knowledge and our church work here in Toronto a greater impetus. Many of the subjects I would venture to suggest are doubtless old; they have not in them the bloom of perpetual youth; they are a trifle decrepit and they go halting along in a vague, uncertain way as if not very well knowing where they should be going, or whether they should, in fact, be abroad at all. Others of them have been, in the minds of some, settled long ago, and have been filed away and so labelled, but like the majesty of buried Denmark, they will not stay settled; they will not lie buried, but continually bursts their cerements and revisit the glimpses of the moon, and although "Rest, rest, perturbed spirit" may be solemnly addressed to them, yet they still haunt the realms of life, and still trouble the fears of many thoughtful Presbyterians.

The order of Church Service is a question which should invite much useful discussion. On what principles should it be based? Would uniformity be advantageous? Of what should it be comprised? All these open up a field of inquiry. I remember hearing of one congregation in which the minister, who was advanced enough not to be a slavish follower of mere custom, ventured to ask his people to audibly repeat with him the Lord's prayer, and a large number did so, very much to their own edification. But it was reported to the session that a man who sat in the back end of the gallery (that sort of man always sits in the back end of the gallery protested vigorously that the practice was a dangerous innovation, and that the air had a strong Jesuit fragrance. He wanted to know whether William of Orange had fought and won the Battle of the Boyne in vain, and darkly surmised that it was a design of the devil and a veiled attack on Protestant supremacy; and then he ended by talking eloquently of the "small end of the wedge." Of course that settled it—the "small end of the wedge" always does—no advancement was ever inaugurated but the world heard at once about the "small end of the wedge" until we feel inclined to smite the objector with the large end of a large wedge, and to wish that the man who invented the expression had been before his invention buried under Olympus with Pelion and Ossa on the top. Thereupon the offensive Lord's prayer disappeared from that Church Service, although the saying of it was merely invited, and although a large majority of that congregation expressed their earnest desire for its continuance.

And that opens up another question—What should a congregation do in regard to any course or practice which involves choice and is not a matter of principle, and which is opposed by a small minority of the people? The children of the world often decide many important questions, involving mayhap the destiny of the nation, by a narrow majority; but in congregational economy how often does it occur that a small minority, with a maximum of pugilism and a minimum of Christian grace, governs a large majority, filled with a

Christian forbearance which shines through them as a light from a heaven—and thus growth and improvement are often checked. It may readily be conceded that no mere majority should necessarily govern, but where is the limit where the minority must be told "let us alone and let our will be done?" Perverse minorities must cease from comparing themselves to Elijah at Mount Carmel or to Galileo in his dungeon cell; the immortal words "Nectamen illa movet" have no counterpart with them. "Vox populi, vox Dei" has lost its signification when applied to many questions of congregational government, and has become merely a classical phrase. But I must not diverge too much. I mentioned the "order of church service." I have not ventured to discuss it, because I have the promise of the distinguished past President, Mr. W. M. Clark, to contribute a paper upon that subject at an early meeting of this council.

What should be done as to a periodic revision of the communion roll? Upon what principles should it be purged? It certainly cannot stand with its accumulation of many names of members who have absented themselves not only from communion but even from ordinary church services, have lapsed into indifference, and mayhap merely joined the church to secure the baptism of their infant children—a form of superstition, which testifies how strongly and naturally the uneducated and unregenerated heart gravitates to mere Romanism. Much advantage will be gained from a regular and uniform system of revision. Bear in mind that Presbyteries assess congregations for the schemes of the church based upon the number of communicants reported, and as long as communion rolls are revised upon different principles, or not revised at all, their returns to the Missionary and other Funds will not be uniformly proportional to the number of communicants reported.

The question of time service or life service of the elder has been already much discussed. Has it yet received its quietus? or is it only in the cocoon-like state waiting for the democratic tendency of the day to force it yet again on public attention?

Associated with this comes another question of even a greater revolutionary tendency—the time service or the life service of ministers. In the CANADA PRESBYTERIAN, discussion as to this important matter is now alive—Could church work be more effectively done if the tie that unites pastor and people could be more easily set free? I do not say "rent." As it stands now, unless by a direct attack on the life or doctrine before the church courts, the only constitutional means to sever the connection is to stop the supplies; the same dire remedy whereby our forefathers, in the days when every man carried his sword on his thigh, and sometimes in his hand, were wont to bring haughty monarchs to their senses, and awe even "the divinity that doth hedge a king." The Acts of the Apostles, as continued in the nineteenth century, follow the practice as laid down in the 1st and 6th chapters of the Acts of the Apostles of the first century, and the rights of the people in the election of ministers have been by Presbyterians held sacred and inviolable. We have heard of some grievous results from the difficulties to put an end to the engagement, if, in fact, the relationship comes under the category of a mutual contract with all its legal incidents. On the one hand, the pastor may say, I wish to terminate this relationship, and says to the Presbytery, "I wish to go; release me," and what Presbytery would decline? The reverse action is not, however, so easy, and I have heard of such difficulties occasioned by the wish of the people for a change of pastorate, that they culminated in a petition being quietly carried round and largely signed, and then the pastor, to the dismay of the petitioners, got back at them the following Sabbath by preaching from the text—"And Joab said to Amasa, art thou in health my brother! And Joab took Amasa by the beard with the right hand to kiss him. But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand, so he smote him therewith in the fifth rib and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again, and he died." The philippic was so strong that the leading members had to leave before the end of session. They had come to hear the gospel; they heard a gospel; the