

## Our Contributors.

### FOREIGN MISSION FAILURES.

BY KNOXONIAN.

How it does surprise and pain many good people to think that a foreign missionary should prove unfit for his or her work. Why should it? Foreign missionaries are human flesh. They are flesh and blood like the rest of us. They have exceedingly difficult duties to perform and nothing in this world is more natural than that an occasional missionary should prove unable to carry the responsibilities and do the work of the Foreign Mission field.

What are the facts about foreign missionaries, taking the world as the field? The facts are that a few are pre-eminently adapted for the work, have been conspicuously successful, and have a world-wide reputation. These are, of course, in the foreground and their praise is in all the Churches, but immediately after them comes an army of noble workers, not so well known, who do noble work for the Master. These constitute a large majority of the world's foreign missionaries. Then there is a third class not quite so good, and a few who are useless. Candour requires the admission that a very small percentage prove worse than useless—they are positively bad. Now is there anything remarkable about these facts? Are they not just the facts that meet us in every department of Christian work? Why judge foreign missionaries by a standard different from that which we apply to all other Christian workers? Why expect every foreign missionary to be a W. C. Burns, or a Dr. Duff, or a George Leslie McKay. There is no sense in such expectations.

Home missionaries, in the matter of work, are exactly like foreign missionaries. A few, owing to their special aptitude for the work, or to special consecration, or, what is just as likely, to the fact that they came upon their field at a favourable time, are conspicuously successful. They get new churches built, double the membership of their stations in a short time, raise liberal sums of money, and leave their mark upon the community. A few do these things. A very large majority do honest, faithful work, but do not make themselves in any way conspicuous. Under the ministrations of a few—very few—the stations run down more or less. A very small percentage manage to leave the impression on the pious people of the stations that they are not the right kind of material out of which a minister of the Gospel can be made. As regards success in work there is little difference between home and foreign missionaries. A few in both classes become conspicuous; a large majority do good, honest work; a few are comparative failures, and a small percentage are, for some reason or another, positively unfit.

Might we go a step farther and say that pastors, college professors, elders, deacons, managers, choir leaders, Sabbath school superintendents and teachers, in fact Church workers of every kind may be classified in exactly the same way. A few are conspicuously successful; the large majority do fairly good work, some are failures, and a few are useless, or worse than useless.

Why expect foreign missionaries to be unlike all other Christian workers? Why expect them to be so much better than the people who send them? Going to China, or India, or Africa, or Japan never puts sense in one's head nor grace in one's heart. There is nothing in the climate of a foreign country to increase consecration. The Saskatchewan does not help a missionary to preach to the natives, nor does the Nile or the Ganges seem to help him to manage his mission. Too many people seem to think that a foreign missionary must necessarily be unlike any other Christian worker, and that there is a kind of inspiration about his work that should keep him continually elevated in the heavens. If these good people had to teach a class of little Indians in the North-West, or preach to a small congregation of heathen, probably they would modify their opinions.

Nothing in this paper has any special reference to the foreign mission work of our own Church. We know little or nothing about the inside work of the Foreign Mission Committee, or for that matter, of any other committee. No doubt those who manage the Foreign Mission work do their best and that is all anyone can do. Our aim is to address the common sense of the people and ask them not to expect

too much from foreign missions and foreign missionaries. Consideration of the following points may help to bring our expectations to a common sense basis:

It is often difficult to do the Lord's work when the work is right under our eye: How much more difficult must it be when the work is on the other side of the globe, and those who direct it are on this side. Let any man try to cultivate a farm or run a branch business on the other side of the globe!

It is often difficult enough to do the Lord's work among Christian people; how much more difficult must it be to do it among heathen.

Foreign missionaries are human like other mortals, and if some of them should fail in their work they do nothing more than is done by hundreds of Christian workers in much more favourable circumstances.

It is always easy to stand aside and do nothing but find fault with those who are trying to do something.

### CLERICAL GLEANINGS.

BY REV. JAMES HASTIE, CORNWALL.

#### DISSOLUTIONS.

John Ploughman says, "I never knew a good horse which had not some odd habit or other; and I never yet saw a minister worth his salt who had not some crotchet or oddity. Now, these are the bits of cheese that cavillers smell out and nibble at; this man is too slow, and another too fast; the first is too flowery, and the second too dull. Dear me! if all God's creatures were judged in this way, we should wring the dove's neck for being too tame; shoot the robins for eating spiders; kill the cows for swinging their tails, and the hens for not giving us milk. When a man wants to beat a dog he can soon find a stick, and at this rate any fool may have something to say against the best minister in England."

Now, if both parties would remember, what they thoroughly know, that while in this mortal life they will certainly have a call to bear and forbear, that though they change the place they will still keep the pain, they would often agree to overlook little frictions and unpleasantness, and in a grand harmony of spirit work together. Suppose the conjugal compact could be lightly set aside, what a perpetual rush would there be of uneasy husbands and wives seeking to make new experiments!

In the primitive mode of settlement for life, the very permanence of the relation led the parties to accommodate themselves to it. But the grace of forbearance seems to have gone largely out of date. Nowadays many a parish soon grows weary of its pastor, and it is not long in making it known. Sometimes the people starve him away, cutting down his salary, or withholding it more and more till he is driven to leave for the lack of bread. Sometimes the whispering spirit creeps through the parish. In a private, entirely confidential way, this is commented upon, that is taken exception to, and the other is strongly found fault with, though secretly, of course. Thus a feeling of dissatisfaction, slight in the beginning, is whispered into general circulation.

A little breeze, originated by three or four, possibly by one, is fanned into a great parish wind which sweeps the person clean away. Sometimes one or two leading men leave the society because the minister's views are too radical, and one or two because they are not radical enough; and losing this support, the society concludes that the minister had better leave.

Says a venerable pastor: "After the outbreak of the late rebellion, I was deserted by two of my wealthy parishioners, one on the pretence that I did not discourse on politics, the other on the pretence that I did discourse on politics."

Now, whether it is more merciful to starve or to worry a man out of his parish, it might be difficult even for himself to decide.

This question was discussed largely in the press some time ago, and produced some very suggestive reading.

One writer speaks thus: "Why is it that getting rid of a minister oftentimes works such mischief in a Church, and usually wounds a minister's feelings so deeply? Because almost invariably the congregation, from real delicacy of feeling—from a natural dislike to say disagreeable things to a person's face—do the very things that should not be done."

Now, what is usually done? The people try to

crowd him out by making his position so uncomfortable that he will not want to stay. The minister soon learns that something is wrong. What it is he does not know and cannot discover—the very uncertainty and mystery adding to his distress. He hears of wars and rumours of wars.

He learns that certain persons whom he thought his best friends, and who are so in his presence, have "said something." He is made more and more uncomfortable, till at last he leaves—wounded, hurt, feeling that his people have been cruel and false hearted, while the probability is that they have been neither, but merely lacked the moral courage and common sense to tenderly explain the situation to the minister himself.

True, this is a difficult thing to do, and few are willing, and fewer have the rare qualifications to perform such a task aright. But surely there must be in the congregation some really pious man, with common sense, who has the welfare of both Church and minister at heart. Let that man acquaint himself with the true condition of affairs. Let him be able to represent the mind of the people; and then, with all tenderness, but with perfect plainness of speech, let him tell the minister the whole story.

Under the circumstances, a minister would be thankful that so straightforward a course has been pursued. To be sure it would occasion some pain but by no means would it equal the pain caused by the usual "crowding out" process.

"But," says one, "we should hate to do this. Why, we couldn't tell the minister right to his face that we wanted him to leave, or that we didn't think him smart enough. It would hurt his feelings too much; better let him find it out gradually."

This objection a facetious writer disposes of by a parable: Once upon a time there was a very kind-hearted little boy who owned a dog. He was deeply attached to the animal, and yet, notwithstanding his love, our little friend became convinced—such are the strange contradictions in human nature—that the dog's tail needed shortening. To be sure the operation would cause a deal of pain; and so, because he shrank from unnecessarily hurting the feelings of the dog, he concluded to cut it off an inch a day till the desired length was "gradually" attained. Now I fearlessly affirm that if that dog's tail had to come off, it would have been far less exasperating to have it off at once, and not at the rate of an inch a day. *Verbum sap.*

#### THE OTHER SIDE.

But there are two sides to every question. Dealing with the other side of that complex question of pastoral dissolutions, one says: "I have read the letter of your correspondent with much interest. It is a pity that he had not written his prescription many years ago, for it might have aided a party in a Church with which I have some acquaintance, who earnestly desired to get rid of their minister, and they did exactly as your correspondent has prescribed. The minister did not come up to their expectations, and a few took it into their heads to get him removed. They hinted their doubts to others that they had made a mistake in calling this man, and ere long a number were started to talk, and watch, and as the band increased, courage and a sense of duty increased too, and after a solemn conclave, a leader undertook to approach the pastor and let him know what these faithful guardians felt, and what was expected of him. He did so. 'So you think I don't answer the Church?' 'Yes, we are fully satisfied, and after trial, we see that we can no longer work with you.' 'Oh!' said the minister, 'that is your judgment. How many think with you in your estimate?' 'Oh! a large number,' said the deputy, 'and I have come to say that I and all these people desire a change.' 'Well,' said the pastor, 'that is plain, and I shall be equally plain. Now get you about your business. Leave the Church or I'll turn you out and I'll turn out or discipline every man and woman in the Church that dares to interfere with me in my ministry. Go at once, or you will repent it.' The minister forthwith cleared out some forty or fifty who had been permitted to have their own way a long time under a timorous, weak pastor. But now he wished them to know that they had a man to deal with. What was the result? For twenty years this minister has sustained that Church, and brought it up to a condition of intelligence, numbers, liberality and piety that places it in the front rank of the Churches of his Presbytery.