

Our Contributors.

UNLOAD THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

BY KNOXONIAN.

In a former paper we stated that an average General Assembly devotes about sixty hours to the actual business of the Church. Counting closely, there are not sixty working hours if the Assembly meets on Wednesday evening and adjourns on Thursday of the following week. Let the time, however, be put at sixty hours. Comparing the amount of work to be done in these hours with the amount done in Parliament in sixty hours, in the law courts in the same length of time, and remembering that four hundred men have a right to take part in the proceedings, will any man with a head on him say that sixty hours are enough?

Four hundred men trying to do the Assembly work of a Church like this one in sixty hours, is like trying to drive a number ten foot into a number five boot with a pile driver. The thing cannot be done without friction.

The seeming length or shortness of time depends entirely on what you are doing or suffering as the time passes. Sixty hours without food or without sleep would seem almost a century. Sixty hours waiting at a railway station in winter, during which you are compelled to sit at the big stove with a lot of fellows who use bad language and smoke bad tobacco, would seem like a life time. If a dentist operated on your mouth for sixty hours the time would seem quite long. Sixty hours spent in the company of your best friend after the affair was settled and the old gentleman had given his consent passed quickly enough. Whether that length of time is long or short depends entirely on how you are engaged and what you have to do. Now the point is that sixty hours are entirely too short for four hundred men to do the work of our General Assembly, and do it with a reasonable amount of dignity and deliberation.

On the morning of the day before adjournment there were seventy items of business to dispose of. A General Assembly day has eight and one-half hours, without including the time spent in reading minutes and in devotional exercises. Seventy items of business in seventeen hours or an item for each fourteen minutes! And be it remembered that among these seventy items were the Report on Sabbath Schools, the Reports of the Committee on Summer Sessions, the Statistical and Financial Report, the Report on the Widows' and Orphans' Fund, the Report on Systematic Beneficence, an overture on term inductions, an overture on reduction of representation in the Assembly, a number of other most important matters, and that estimable lady the deceased wife's sister. The idea of putting business like this through at the rate of an item every fourteen minutes is so absurd that the absurdity stands out clearly without any comments.

If any reasonable man thinks that the Assembly is not congested with business let him take up the docket as printed and divide the number of items into sixty.

SOME BAD EFFECTS.

This congestion produces some bad effects. One of these is *disorder*. A large number of people trying to do more than there is time to do always produces more or less disorder. Hurry necessarily makes confusion. Haste is not always speed. Four hundred ministers and elders cannot try to do things quickly and do them in an orderly way. It was amusing to watch the Assembly put on a spurt and try to get on quickly. The more it hurried the less it did. Four or five men trying to speak or move resolutions at once rarely do anything but make a noise.

There can be no reasonable doubt that the *influence* of the Supreme Court is considerably lessened by the mode in which it is sometimes compelled to do business. A body of men acting in a hurried, excitable way never can have the same influence as a body acting in a calm, dignified, judicial way. There should be a marked difference between a supreme ecclesiastical court and a public meeting. That difference is not always so apparent in the Assembly as some people not chronic sticklers for dignity would like to see it.

There is also a painful *uncertainty* about results when they are arrived at without due deliberation. A "snap verdict" is easily got even in a General Assembly if the members are impatient. Four hundred men trying to do too much make mistakes much more readily than one cool-headed man working in a leisurely way.

There is such a thing as Presbyterian *dignity*. Presbyterians the world over have been noted for their love of order. Neither order nor dignity are possible if you try to do important business at the rate of an item every fourteen minutes.

One of the worst effects of the congestion is the impossibility of giving sufficient time and attention to

NEW BUSINESS.

We are fast coming to a transition period when the working of the great mission schemes of the Church will have to pass into the hands of men who can give their whole time and labour to the mission work of the Church. New machinery is needed for various purposes and some of the old needs to be adjusted to meet new conditions. The wisdom and life of a Church are shown by the manner in which it can grapple with emergent problems, and adjust its machinery to the new conditions that are constantly arising in a new country. It would be the easiest thing in the world to mention half a

dozen reforms or adjustments that are needed. Men, we believe, are ready to lay plans of working before the Church, for the Church has never lacked men to do any kind of work the Master required, but who would care to bring any new legislation before the Assembly in its present condition. The most important work may be put on or under the table in five minutes and the man who worked at it for a year may fail to get a hearing. There is so much to do that little is done, and in the confusion caused so often by doing the little, the Assembly sometimes fails to distinguish between the less important and the vital, or between a worker like Dr. Robertson and a chronic General Assembly bore. How many times have changes been made in the Ontario Municipal System since Robert Baldwin devised it? Baldwin would scarcely know his municipal offspring if he rose from the grave. How many times have the school laws of Ontario been changed since Dr. Ryerson framed them? They are being improved every year. Our Church machinery should be improved every year, but there is not much chance to improve it at the rate of an important item of business for each fourteen minutes.

SUGGESTIONS.

Various remedies are suggested by which the Assembly may be in part unloaded.

1. Is there any reason why a considerable amount of the business that now comes before the Assembly should not be transferred to the Synods? These intermediate courts are not congested with business. Why not give them more to do and relieve the pressure on the Supreme Court. There may be constitutional reasons why much relief cannot be found in this direction but we never heard anybody say exactly what it is. Anyway many questions if not finally disposed of in the Synods could be so threshed out there that little time need be spent over them in the Assembly.

2. Let Presbyteries stop sending up overtures on every conceivable kind of subject. Some Presbyteries have little to do and can easily give themselves to the incubation of overtures. Time spent in devotional exercises and in conference on vital matters might be more useful than time devoted to hatching overtures that must be put under or on the table.

3. Let the work done by special committees stand unless there is some very good reason for over-hauling it. Where is the sense of appointing a committee to investigate and report on some matter and then spending the time of the Assembly in tearing their report to pieces. If the matter was not one that should be referred to a committee, don't refer it. Presumably the members of the committee were capable men; if not why were they appointed? Presumably they did their work well and knew more about the matter they had in charge than men who never gave it a moment's examination. Then why not accept their work and be done with it. Is it business like, is it rational to appoint men to do work in order to save time and then spend time in undoing what they have done? The insane suspicion many members have of committees of their own choosing leads to much waste of time.

4. Let the Moderator if not an expert in procedure have an expert beside him whose duty it will be to decide points of order and let the Moderator rule with *firmness* as well as with good natured politeness.

5. Let *digression* as well as length be a reason why a speaker should be "pulled up" politely, not by an impatient court kicking but in an orderly way by the Moderator. To speak miles away from a question is just as bad as to speak too long.

6. In questions that require sustained debate let the parties interested arrange informally the speeches and replies and let men who are in the arrangement thoroughly prepare themselves. Of course some members of Assembly would kick at any arrangement, but the arrangement could be made quietly and the "kickers" could have their say at the close of the debate.

7. Let every member of Assembly educate himself into making a distinction between a little matter of routine and great questions that involve the progress, perhaps the very life of the Church. A world of trouble and much precious time might be saved in this way. The length of time taken at some small matters is almost enough to make a man an infidel.

8. Let every member cultivate the feeling that it is his special business to help to conduct the proceedings with despatch, decorum and dignity. Do these things and strike out about half the items of business and we may have a model meeting of Assembly.

THE INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY UNION.

The Eighth Annual Meeting of this Union was held at Clifton Springs, N. Y., from June 10 to 17, and was judged by those who have often attended to have been the most successful meeting yet held. The number present of foreign missionaries returned or on furlough was about one hundred, the largest ever enrolled; and most of the leading denominations of Christians in the United States and Canada were represented. The Convention was entertained chiefly by Dr. Foster, of the Clifton Springs Sanitarium, with some assistance from the good people of the town. To the Doctor's large-hearted hospitality not even the entertaining of sixty or seventy missionaries seems to be a great thing. The meeting this year was marked by the formal making over for the use of the Union

of a tabernacle just built by the Doctor on the grounds of the Sanitarium, a beautiful building, seating several hundred people. The proceedings opened by a recognition meeting, in which each representative spoke briefly, by way of introducing the person and his or her work on the foreign field. A remarkable number of men—and we must add of women—of exceptional ability were present. One naturally makes mention first of that veteran missionary college president, and, one might add, statesman as well, the Rev. Dr. Cyrus Hamlin, late President of Roberts College, Constantinople, who, when many years ago required by the American Board to give up the educational work on which he had set his heart, resigned his connection with them, went to work and earned the money to establish and carry on Roberts College, by running a Government bakery for the supply of the Sultan's troops, and after some years not only succeeded in making that college one of the first institutions in the East, but in making money out of his work, over and above expenses, to the amount of \$30,000, which he then presented as a token of good-will to the Board from which, through difference of opinion as to mission policy, he had separated himself. The Doctor is now eighty years old, but might pass for sixty-five, and spoke with a power that many a younger man might envy.

Dr. Samuel Jessup, of Beyrout, Syria, gave us a very vivid and impressive account of the work of the American Presbyterian Church in Syria, especially through the medium of the Arabic press of the mission, from which go forth annually millions of pages of the Scriptures not only to the occupied mission fields, but also in response to a steady demand into the unoccupied interior of the Soudan and the Sahara desert. The Rev. Mr. Roberts, of the American Baptist Mission to Burmah, gave us a thrilling account of his labours and sufferings in establishing a mission to the wild robber Shans to the north of British Burmah; while the woman's side of that work was nobly represented by Mrs. Mix, of the same mission, who is at present in this country carrying through the press the first translation of the Scriptures into Shan, as made by her husband, a missionary's wife who may well be instanced for the benefit of those who imagine that only an unmarried woman can be of much use on the mission field.

But to go through an account of the many meetings of the Union and refer to every one who well merited mention, would be to fill a considerable part of this paper. I will close with a story told us by the Rev. Mr. Richards, founder of a young mission to Mushongo land on the Upper Zambesi. He presented his case and his object as a teacher of the Christian religion to the barbarian king, who asked him: "Is this a religion which will make people better, and bad people good?" "Yes." "Is this a religion which is good for the other world too?" "Yes." "And is it certain that I will go to that other world of happiness if I obey this book?" "Yes." "And will I be a king there?" "Into that land all who go are crowned!" The king was satisfied and gave him full permission to teach him and his people, only asking last of all the question so often asked by the heathen: "If all these things are as you say, what is the reason that none of you people who had this book told us of these things before?" And the Church of Christ has that question before her to-day! Can she give an excuse if she fail in this present generation to tell every tribe and tongue upon the earth these things?

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JERUSALEM REVIVING.

PART VI.—CONTINUED.

CONSULTATION WITH A RABBI.

On the 6th, Rabbi Joseph, who is a frequent visitor, called, and I spoke to him of the intended visit to the chief rabbis. He approved of it, but thought it wisest to defer asking them to offer up the special prayer till I could announce to them positively that the Christian Churches had set apart that day for special prayer for the Jews.

ISAAC THE STUDENT.

Isaac, the Jaffa Gospel student, was present at this consultation. He has been here nearly a week. His father has set him up in business, but he declares he is ready to throw up business and worldly prospects that he may follow Christ, only he would prefer confessing the Lord Jesus in baptism in some distant land, away from the dreaded violence of his father, and still longs to enter some Christian college to be trained for the Master's service. I have had very serious conversations with him to enforce the duty of taking up the cross where God calls us, quoting Jonah's experience. He was deeply moved, and I think I saw tears trickling down, and he remained silent till I took up another line of exhortation. It is no light cross he must take up, but the severance of the dearest human ties—the giving up of beloved father, mother, brothers, sisters and dear relations, as well as good temporal anticipations. I commend him to the prayers of my readers. He, however, showed considerable courage by offering to accompany me on the visit to the chief rabbis, and has done so.

VISIT TO THE CHIEF RABBIS.

On the 7th I started to visit the chief rabbis accompanied by Isaac. We called first on the Sephardi (Spanish), whose house stands on the declivities of Moriah—the temple mount. He is the only chief rabbi officially recognized by the Turkish Government as the judicial and ecclesiastical head of the