

Our Contributors.

A FEW SLIGHT CHANGES THAT MIGHT NOT HURT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

BY KNOXIAN.

Spots are easily visible on the sun and little defects are easily seen in the working of a good ecclesiastical court like our General Assembly. If the defects are not seen by everybody they are heard of by not a few, for they are discussed in the lobbies, on the railway trains as the members return home, and, worse than that, in some of the manses after they return.

Let all due allowance be made for the fact that nothing or nobody pleases everybody. The Confession of Faith does not please all Presbyterians. There are a few people even in the Presbyterian Church who seem dissatisfied with the Bible, especially with the Old Testament. Any number of people have a quarrel with their Creator at the present time because He does not send dry weather.

Such being the case, no reasonable man expects that everybody will be pleased with a General Assembly. Still it would be a good thing for everybody to try to raise the satisfaction to the maximum and reduce the grumbling to a minimum. With this end in view we make a few suggestions.

Would it not be a good thing to have the business of the Court more generally distributed among the members? There was a good deal of talk about "concentration" last year and there is more or less every year. It is alleged that the same members are continually on the platform while others sit day after day in the pews and do nothing but vote. Is there not some ground for this complaint? Not long ago we heard a good brother—a man a long way above a chronic grumbler—say that the Assembly had ceased to be a deliberative body and had degenerated into a public meeting with a few speakers and an audience of two or three hundred.

Now, let it be assumed that conveners, college men, and a number of others in charge of special business have to present their reports every year. Let it also be assumed that there are men who have special gifts for business, and so long as Presbyterians have common sense their motto should be "the tools for the men who can use them." Let these things be assumed, and still the fact remains that a Presbyterian Church Court in which all the members have equal standing and equal rights should not too closely resemble a public meeting. The best of men are likely to become weary sitting these hot days listening to the same voices every year. A little variety is a pleasant thing even in a Presbyterian Church Court. Besides if a man goes year after year to the Supreme Court and is treated as if he were a mere spectator who can blame him if he considers himself a spectator when the hat is sent around for the schemes. And the hat goes around pretty often in some congregations.

Complaint is also made, and for many years has been made about the personnel of Committees. The Standing Committees have of late years had a good deal of new blood let into them and we do not hear so much about them now. Any man with sense enough to last him over night knows that a Standing Committee or Board should always have a number of men on it who have the run of the business and therefore should never be composed exclusively of new men. Still it is for many reasons a good thing to keep putting new men on every committee. It has often been urged that new men sometimes put on after a little fuss about the same names constantly appearing, etc., have never attended. True, undoubtedly, but new blood ought to be let into every committee, even though an occasional new man does neglect his duty. Some of the old ones don't attend any better than the new ones.

Temporary committees are always needed during meetings of Assembly, and it has been alleged that the composition of these committees shows quite clearly that there

is a strong tendency towards centralization in the business of the Church. Technically these committees are often struck by the Moderator, though it is generally understood that most Moderators get some one to do the work for them. Now, if there is anything to remedy, the remedy is as simple and easy as anything can be. Let the Moderator insist that when a member makes a motion referring anything to a committee the member making the motion name his committee. The Assembly can appoint them or not, and whatever happens the Assembly itself will be responsible. Any one man naming a lot of committees will necessarily put a considerable number of the same men on them because he knows only a limited number of men to put on. Let the old finishing words of many a resolution—"Committee to be named by the Moderator," be struck out and the names of the committee the mover wants be inserted in their place. As a general thing the man says "Committee to be named by the Moderator" simply because he does not want to take the trouble of striking the committee himself. Laziness has more to do with the business than respect for the chair.

The evening meetings, called by courtesy popular, should, as the Halifax Witness tersely put it, be mended or ended. There should be better singing, shorter speeches and more of them. There is ability enough in the Supreme Court to conduct a dozen good meetings on any evening. The thing needed is organization. Whose duty it is to organize we do not know, but somebody should attend to it.

It would be a decided improvement if members addressing the Court would speak from the platform and the Moderator might announce their names before they begin. A member speaking in the body of the House has his back turned to half or two-thirds his audience. That position does not remind one of his early training in good manners. It does not help a speaker to do his best work if he hears those around him whispering, "Who is that?" Nor does it help one to hear if one is guessing the name of the speaker all through the speech.

It would add a little to the dignity of the proceedings if the members rose when the Moderator comes in and remained standing until he took the chair. Lawyers always rise when the judge enters the court room. Any fear that rising to show respect to the Moderator might show some subtle and dangerous connection between Church and State should be allayed by the fact that the Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland always rises when the Moderator enters. The Presbyterianism of young Canada is not suffering from too much respect for constituted authorities.

Some wise man said that trifles make perfection, but perfection is no trifle.

The greatest improvement, however, that the General Assembly could make would be to spend less time over little items of business and more on vital and important matters. Using a trip-hammer to kill a mosquito is always an unnecessary expenditure of time and force.

SENEX, J. K. MACDONALD AND THE AGED AND INFIRM MINISTERS' FUND.

Mr. Editor: It is a matter for regret that as Senex's letter was evidently intended simply as a criticism of a late act of the General Assembly he did not avoid any remark which could be construed to be personal. It is also to be regretted that Mr. J. K. Macdonald did not overlook the offence and give your readers the benefit of his criticism.

Senex pointed out some of the hardships which retired ministers were liable to suffer from the working of the act. My own case was one in point. When my last payment was due, instead of \$75 I only received \$25. I was placed in an awkward position. My half yearly payment was reduced to \$50, and \$25 more was kept off on the ground that I had received \$75 last November when I was only entitled to receive \$50.

That is not the only hardship which I

have suffered. When my petition was before the Committee of the General Assembly for leave to retire, I presented receipts from Dr. Reid showing that I had paid into the Aged and Infirm Ministers' Fund all claims against me for eighteen years. I was only allowed credit for having served the Church ten years. I learned some time afterwards that a report had reached the Committee that for several years I had ceased to serve the Canada Presbyterian Church and had been in the employment of the American Presbyterian Church. Now, why was not the case thoroughly investigated, and if I was guilty of attempting to obtain money under false pretences, as would have been the case if the report had been true, why was I not dealt with? Instead of this I was condemned without a hearing and I was refused credit for eight years' service. Another plea for cutting down my term of service to ten years was that I was a part of the time employed in supplying vacancies and was not in a pastoral charge. In reply to this I would say that when I resigned my pastoral charge and engaged in the work of supplying vacancies—as I had no annual salary on which my rate of payment into the Fund could be computed—I explained my position to Dr. Reid and requested him to fix the sum he thought I should pay. He kindly did so, and I paid the sum he named up to the time I petitioned the General Assembly for leave to retire.

Now, if it was only pastoral work for which a minister was to receive credit, and the work of supplying vacancies counted for nothing, why did not Dr. Reid inform me when I laid the matter before him? If I had then been told what I was told a number of years afterwards, I would have withdrawn and gone back to the American Church where I came from; but on the strength of the arrangement I had made with Dr. Reid I continued to serve the Church till 1889, when I got leave from the General Assembly to retire.

If the regulation under which I served the Church and paid my money had been carried out I would have been in receipt of \$190 a year instead of \$100, as at present. I have not the least doubt but if I could have got my case fairly before the General Assembly I would have been dealt with both justly and generously; but from some cause, of which I am ignorant, the action of some of the Committee was not what might have been expected. Every annuitant on the Fund must have either produced a medical certificate, certifying that he was unfit for the work or be seventy years of age. As there is \$5 a year added for every year's service after ten, the minister who had served the Church forty years received \$300 a year; while the one who had served ten years only received \$150, hence the late act takes from those who had the smallest income and are the most needy to give to those who had the greatest.

But why a time limit of seventy years? If a man's health breaks down at forty, why should he not be put on the Fund, instead of being turned out to dig or beg or starve. And if his health and strength should be continued to him till he is 80 and he has the spirit of the Master he will be only too glad to labor as long as he has the opportunity. D. McNAUGHTON.

P.S.—As the reports brought before the Assembly's Committee to which I have referred above, impugn my character for common honesty and I stand in a false position before the Church, I have long felt it to be a duty which I owed to myself to give this plain statement of facts. However honest and well disposed the members of a Committee may be, if the party concerned is not informed of the complaints against him and is not permitted to appear before it, either in person or through an agent, we need not be surprised if mistakes are sometimes made.

D. McN.

"Behold, I make all things new." That is the aim and function and outcome of Christianity—to make all things new—to make hearts new, lives new, homes new, literature new, customs, laws, economies, institutions new, and having begun to carry on the process of renewal, to continue it until the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord.—Dr. F.A. Noble.

WYCLIFFE'S CAREER.

BY REV. PROFESSOR M'LAREN, D.D.

There are few men who had done such a work as Wycliffe, the morning star of the Reformation, of whose early career so little was certainly known. The date of his birth, and the college in which he studied were still matters of dispute, and his family history was almost a blank. All that could be said was that he was probably born about the year 1320 and that he most likely studied in Balliol College, Oxford, of which he afterwards became master. The fact that he seemed to have sprang from a family which at no period in its history appeared to have shown any leaning towards the views embraced by its distinguished scion, might in fact, account for the obscurity of his early life. It was certainly not creditable to the scholarship, or the Protestantism of England, that five centuries had passed since his death, and we were still without a complete edition of his works, large portions of which were still buried in manuscript form in the libraries of Europe. No one could familiarize himself with Wycliffe without being impressed with the fact that he was a man of great power. His was not an ordinary personality—he stood out as a man of rare gifts, of high character, and of indomitable resolve, such as would have made him a man of power in any age. He had not the strong emotional nature of Luther, but in cleverness and penetrations, and in the ability to grasp the truths of Scripture, he deserved to rank as in every way the peer of the great German reformer. An eminent writer had said that the great truths of Scripture received their first treatment in England at Wycliffe's hands, and it was no small praise to render to his work to say that it was even as he laid them, line upon line, stone upon stone, that they were relaid by the master workers of the Church.

It was given to Wycliffe to sow the seed, and to Luther to reap the harvest. It was a testimony to his unblemished private life that while Romish writers had sought to vilify every prominent reformer of the early times, they had scarcely ever attempted to attack the memory of this great man. This was owing not so much to his superior intellectual ability as to the undoubted fact that his heart was deeply touched by the power of Divine grace. In the absence of any record left by him as to his growth in spiritual life, the fruits of his work proved that he was eminently a man of God. A life such as his could only have been sustained by a deep conviction of the truth, an earnest love to Christ, and a burning desire for the salvation of men. It was evident also that Wycliffe was eminently prepared for his work by his training. Whatever might be said of the value of scholastic philosophy, in general, there was no doubt that in the hands of Wycliffe it was a power. As a dialectician he was unsurpassed. His careful study of the foundation of all government, civil and ecclesiastical, gave him special aptitude for dealing with the questions of that age and first called him forth to resist the claims of the papacy. The brilliant military triumphs of Edward III. and the Black Prince made Englishmen conscious of their strength, and kindled their patriotic feelings to a flame. Growing up under these influences, Wycliffe did not allow his patriotism to be sundered in the ecclesiastical, and the result was seen in the warm interest he took in all matters pertaining to the State.

Another impression derived from a study of his career was that the world was prepared for his work. The Crusades had shortly before run their course and while they had failed in their original design they had done a grand work in awakening the western nations for the reception of new ideas. At the commencement of the 14th century, religion was at a low ebb; sensuality and corruption pervaded all classes, and the harvest seemed ripe for God's judgment. In the terrible pestilence and earthquakes which visited Europe in 1348 the more serving and earnest thinkers recognized a Divine visita-