

Our Contributors.

A SURE AND SHORT WAY TO POPULARITY

BY KNOXIAN.

The surest and shortest way to become popular with everybody is to die.

Next to this the best way is to retire and get out of everybody's way. The moment you cease to be a factor in human affairs and reduce yourself to zero you begin to win the admiration of all your fellow men. The nearer you come to nothing the more popular you become with your rivals.

Gladstone made an immense stride towards universal popularity the other day. A few weeks ago the Grand Old Man was the most abused man in the United Kingdom. It made one blush for his species to read some of the things that were written about him. In common with all public men who worship their Maker he was denounced as a hypocrite. Though the greatest of living Britons he was assailed as the worst enemy of the empire. A constitutional statesman for sixty years he was charged with trying to dismember the empire he had done so much to consolidate. Young blackguards insulted him in more than one public place. Tenth-rate lordlings hissed him. Disgruntled Radicals criticized him with venom. Home-Rulers threatened him. A portion of the press abused him viciously on every week day. State-paid clergymen abused him on Sabbath. He was the target of more abuse than was hurled at all the other prominent men in the empire put together.

The other day the old man began to get good with marvellous suddenness. The secret of his rapid rise in the estimation of his opponents and detractors was that he had gone to his sovereign and resigned the Premiership of England. Had he remained Premier he would have been as bad as ever. There is nothing that wins the admiration of some people like getting out of their way.

But Gladstone is not quite a saint yet. He is still a member of the House of Commons, and though his sight and hearing are not what they once were his mental powers are unimpaired. He has the finest voice in the Commons, and there is no reason why he might not go back there occasionally after he has had a rest and make things lively. Such being the case it is not safe to praise him too much. If the ex-Premier would only resign his seat and never stand for another constituency! Better still, if he would consent to leave the House of Commons and this planet at the same time he would suddenly become the greatest saint in England.

There is a terrible possibility that the Grand Old Man may yet fall into some of his old habits. A general election is near and nobody can be sure that he may not take the stump and set the heather on fire once more. Waiting to see whether a man should be canonized or cursed must be a rather unsatisfactory kind of business.

Sir John Macdonald, George Brown and Alexander Mackenzie are all good men and loyal Canadians now. If we rightly remember, everybody did not speak about them in that way when they were doing their utmost to make Canada a good country.

One of Sir Oliver Mowat's colleagues resigned the other day after giving Ontario the best twenty years of his life. There is a pretty general feeling that the Hon. C. F. Fraser is an honest man and that he has administered the great spending department of the Government with clean hands. The Opposition leader paid him some handsome compliments, but Mr. Fraser cannot have full canonization until he retires from public life, or, better still, leaves this world altogether. A few years ago he was suspected by some of having designs against Protestantism. One would almost have supposed from the amount of noise made that he was devastating our crown lands for timber out of which to make martyr's stakes, so that Presbyterians who impoverish themselves by giving too much to Augmentation and the Aged and Infirm Ministers' Fund might be properly punished. If the honored gentleman will now get out of the way and never re-appear in politics he will find no trouble in getting absolution even from Protestants.

Ministers of the gospel come under the same law in regard to popularity as Ministers of State come. Who has not seen a minister become suddenly popular by resigning his charge. The very people who cruelly nagged him into resigning are often the first and the loudest to praise him when he begins to pack his furniture.

A minister sometimes sets himself right up by getting a call. Some people think far more of their pastor if he spends his time starrng for calls than they would if he spent his time trying to save their souls or help their children to become good men and women. If he accepts the call and leaves, they think he is a much better man than they would if he remained.

There is nothing, however, that sets a minister, or any other man, right up in the community like leaving the world altogether. People never think so highly of a neighbor, or even of a relative as when they leave him in the cemetery.

Now we have no quarrel with the instinct that leads us to speak highly of people when they are gone. It is one of the good things left in our fallen nature. But why wait until people are gone. Would the world come suddenly to an end if we said a good word about our doctor, or our lawyer, or our merchant, or our member, or our minister, or our elder, or our neighbor while they are here and alive. An appreciative word even about an editor might not completely wreck the solar system.

Gladstone was just as good a man six months ago as he is now.

POPULAR APOLOGETICS.

BY JOHN BURTON, M.A., B.D.

There is a principle recognized in law which we know as the right of possession, or in common proverb, possession is nine-tenths of the law. If in peaceable possession of property, he who demands it from me must prove his right so to do. It is to be presumed that he who holds has the right, which, if contested, justly casts upon the contestant the task of proving his claim. The principle is generally acknowledged as just, any other would involve that "he should take who has the power, and he should keep who can." Peaceable possession is presumably righteous ownership.

May we not claim for Evangelical Christianity possession? When the Quaker-poet says:

"The healing of His seamless dress
Is by our beds of pain,
We touch Him in life's throng and press
And we are whole again;
Through Him the first fond prayers are said
Our lips of childhood frame,
The last low whispers of our dead
Are burdened with His name,"

does he not express a fact? No other name among us is so dear to burdened hearts as that of the Nazarene, no other hope so sweet as His. He has possession. Is there any good ground upon which another claim can be made to rest? Is there in reason to be found a just cause for driving Him out? Some way or other, His glad tidings have won the heart of that portion of humanity which confessedly is in the van of all that is enlightened, true and generous among the nations of the earth. The fact is there, is the possession an usurped one? or is it because in that gospel man finds the very thing he needs? Certainly, so far as Christ and His gospel is concerned, not by might of human aim or power of weapons forged in the human arsenal was possession other than peaceful gained; only the willing heart can truly be won to Him.

It is very easy to magnify the importance or exceptional character of the circumstances directly related to ourselves; every family has, or has had, some child specially clever, wise beyond its years, and still the world is full of commonplace people. We live in a wondrous age, yet the age that witnessed the temple at Karnak building was wondrous too. And as the records of that long past are unrolled we involuntarily echo, "Nothing new under the sun." Nevertheless the new is ever unfolding, and the wisdom of yesterday is the folly of to-day. This age has its novelties and specialties, at least for the living. We desire to speak of one of its spec-

ialties, and that in the region of religious thought. Whether the specialty of which we write is entirely new, or some old form in modern dress, is not to our present purpose. New or old, it is, and because it is, our concern is with it.

In a recent and rather severe criticism upon the life and correspondence of Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, the late Dean of Westminster, it is said of him:—His was a mind indifferent, almost hostile to affirmation, but touched to instant sympathy by denial. . . Loving all men as he did, he never loved a man so much as when he was in rebellion." True or not of Dean Stanley, we may readily see in the tracing a characteristic of our times. Our days are full of questionings, and uprisings against the traditions of the past. The poet of our day, if not by universal, by general consent is Tennyson, yet his great pieces, if not tragedies, are threnodies; his swan song, exquisitely beautiful, is a passing over to the boundless deep with a hope to see his Pilot face to face. Surely Whittier waiting the muffled oar with the undoubted trust that he cannot drift beyond His love and care, is more near to Christian faith, but it does not strike so truly the chord in harmony with the spirit of the age, which the rather is groping through the dimness up to God. Such conferences as have recently been held by our alumni both at Knox's and Queen's, are healthy signs, for earnest enquiry is infinitely better than traditional stagnation, bear testimony nevertheless to the fact that the religious atmosphere is full of questionings, and the press with its energetic search for news spreads far and wide those questionings, to which indeed greater emphasis is given than to the more positive aspect of these gatherings. The religious novel, too, chimes in with this love of denial and hostility to the affirmative, while our reviews even on the reading room tables of the Y. M. C. A.'s afford ample food for this negative appetite. Even the most conservative of these publications by their antagonistic attitude spread still wider the knowledge of theological unrest. More men read heresy when it is made the subject of censure than would even dream of it if, like Ephraim when joined to his idols, it were let alone; yes, and sympathize with it too, having such a penchant as that attributed by the reviewer to Dean Stanley to side with the recusant who blew bugles of defiance outside rather than to care for the brethren who dwell together in unity.

Yet the age is an earnest age; men do grope even though in the darkness, and the prayer of Philip is still the prayer of the human heart—Lord, show us the Father; moreover, the great majority of those who wait upon the ministry of the word, having neither time nor aptitude to consider these questionings, conscious of the unrest around, are either tremblingly enquiring what the end of all this is to be, or with set teeth and clenched hand are ready to smite even to the death those who seem to them to be invading the hallowed home of their faith. It is the humble endeavor of this essay to indicate the lines upon which the busy and the earnest may find rest without antagonism, and enjoy peace without anathematizing those who, in their way, are seeking sure foundations. The schools may have contended, ecclesiastical organizations have been intolerant, state institutions, prelatial and democratic, under the name Christian, have persecuted; but the religion of the Crucified One, in so far as it obtains sway over the hearts of men and of society, obtains it by its persuasive power, and ere it be dispossessed may righteously demand to be heard.

Certainly to this the reply is obvious, possession does not prove right. Buddhism has possession and Islamism; the latter we know gained it largely by the sword, but the other appears to parallel Christianity in its peaceful ascendancy over the consciences of men. I do not know that we in general are prepared, just now, for judging impartially of either of these systems, nor for practical purposes need we; they who are best fitted at present to compare, unhesitatingly say that under the most favourable comparisons Christianity embraces all the good found in either or in both. We should gain nothing by importing from the great Orient, nor does the effect of these systems upon both natural and social life, as we are enabled to view the same, warrant us in yielding to either a claim rival to our Chris-

tianity. They are not desirable rulers as against the gospel authority. The candid consideration of all religions by those who have leisure or are called thereto by such motives as urge to mission work, will broaden our human sympathies and deepen our devotion to the true and pure; but Edwin Arnold himself would never dream of substituting in our western realms the reign of the Buddha for that of the Christ. There is no counter claim to possession there; the most thoughtfully perplexed but world-busy men may rest assured of this; whatever of broader views the study of the Orient may have to give, it will not be in the direction of displacing Christianity. The gospel of Jesus will still stand forth as entitled to supreme sway over the hearts and consciousness of men.

I am not aware that even the thoughtful agnostic—nothing to be said in this is intended to meet the scoffer, the reckless destroyer of faith, the insane, religious iconoclast—desires to displace Christianity, he the rather feels unable to recognize the justice of the possession since the analogy we have drawn to him only partially holds, legal possession being statutory and to that extent arbitrary, while heart possession demands a willing surrender. "No force divine can love compel." We acknowledge the force of the anticipated criticism, but we press this rejoinder; the fact that where this moral possession has been acquiesced in, the kindest, truest, most blessed lives have been manifested is surely presumption that there is something in the claim that merits attention, even trial. This, at least, we may ask should be conceded.

The concession granted, what next? This article, already sufficiently long, only professes to indicate the line after which the writer believes a successful path for popular apologetics may be pursued; a very trite gospel text will direct the teachings. Mark the order followed in the simple invitation given by our Lord as recorded in Matthew xi, 28, 29: Come . . . I will give . . . take and learn. It is not first "learn," then receive and "I will give," but come . . . take . . . then learn. Or, as presented in one of the old Hebrew psalms: "O taste and see that the Lord is good." (xxxiv, 8.) Analysis may come after, taste first. Yes, replies my friend, that is what all your preachers say, Come and taste. Well, novelty is not always truth, nor the commonplace always false. Day unto day uttereth speech old as creation and fresh every morning. This very commonplace utterance of the gospel may, notwithstanding its triteness, present the key to the great mysteries; and if so, we may bless God for the commonplace which even the humblest may enjoy.

An almanac is indispensable to our present social life. You are not satisfied with the correctness of its figures, you must needs "prove all things" for yourselves. Good. You open a treatise and find a series of formulæ. They are very puzzling. What do they mean? There is but one means of mastering them for yourself, and that is to begin at the beginning. There is an *abc* which must be mastered on the way to reading. There is an *a+b+c* that stands at the very threshold of mathematical science which cannot be passed over by any who would be master of the same. You would fain understand the questions of inspiration, of doctrine, of criticism? There is no royal road thither, and the first step, if you desire more than a mere literary knowledge thereon, is to come to the Great Teacher and first take what He has to give. Listen to Him in those four histories which contain all the world can ever know of Him historically, and from what He has to give, learn and press on. "I have nothing to object to in the teachings of Jesus," said an agnostic to the writer when thus pressed; "but then—," the interruption was caused by my rejoinder—Then put His teachings into practice; you own them; just follow them, and I am content to leave you to your experiment for further progress in Christianity whether dogmatic or ecclesiastical.

The true apologetics for the busy, practical man, and the woman cumbered with much serving, is to first listen to the Teacher who by possession claims the authority to teach; put into practice what commends itself to the earnest soul. The events of life as they alternate with their light and shade will soon render those teachings more precious and real. There