

Our Contributors.

WHY SHOULD CANADIAN POLITICS BE UNCLE TOM?

BY KNONONIAN.

Some years ago a worthy citizen of one of our Canadian cities was asked by his fellow-citizens to take a seat in the city council. Being a man of much public spirit and anxious to promote the interests of his city, he partly consented, but asked for a little time before giving his final answer, that he might consult his wife. The good lady became alarmed. She greatly feared that aldermanic honours might demoralize her husband. Her pastor was consulted, and the united influence of wife and pastor proved sufficiently potent to prevent the good man from soiling himself with municipal politics.

This is not by any means an isolated case. It is notorious that the families and more intimate friends of many good citizens are strongly opposed to their taking part in politics. The family circle hear with alarm that the head of the household is a municipal candidate or that he intends running for a seat in parliament. A good man is often placed in this position. A convention is on one side of him urging him to enter public life; his family and other near friends are on the other urging him not to have anything to do with politics. Surely public life in Canada must be considered a hurtful kind of service when one's best friends urge him not to enter upon it.

Nor is this all. The best people in our congregations often view with great anxiety the entrance of a good member or office-bearer of the Church into public life. There is a feeling that he cannot be worth much to the Church after he has "gone into politics." Unfortunately this feeling is often justified by facts. How often do we hear it said of a man that he was a consistent member of the Church, a regular attendant at the Sabbath services and prayer meeting, a useful office-bearer and a good man all round before he went into politics. But he was not long in politics until everybody could see a marked difference in him for the worse. "He was a good man some years ago, but politics ruined him," is one of the things that we too often hear sorrowfully said of men who once were active in every good work.

Now, why should politics have a degrading influence on a good man? Political life, *per se*, has nothing degrading in it. The science of government is as pure and morally wholesome in its influence as any other science. No one is demoralized by the science of an omy or chemistry or botany or mathematics. Mill may be as safely read as Hodge or Hull. Burke is as pure as Butler or Paley. Fiscal questions are as clean as the questions Prof. Drummond discusses in his famous new book. The science of government is a noble one and well worthy of the study of the best minds in any free country. Questions of politics are at bottom questions of ethics. Webster defines politics to be "that part of ethics which consists in the regulation and government of a nation or state for the preservation of its safety, peace and prosperity, comprehending the defence of its existence and rights against foreign control or conquest, the augmentation of its strength and resources, and the protection of its citizens in their rights, with the preservation and improvement of their morals." The preservation and improvement of the morals of the people being one of the principal duties of a politician, it may well be asked, how can a man injure his own morals by preserving and improving the morals of his neighbours? There must be something radically wrong about our public life if it necessarily lowers the tone of any considerable number of our public men. Sitting in a municipal council should not be more injurious than sitting in the director's room of a bank, or in a board of trade room or for that matter in a Presbytery. Parliament might be quite as pleasant and wholesome a place to deliberate in as a Synod or General Assembly. So far as as the morality of the science of government is concerned there is no reason why Dr. Reid or Principal Caven should not stand for the County of Lennox. The bare suggestion of such a thing would send a cold chill through the Church. Why should it?

Does some moralist say that electioneering is the thing that degrades men? Electioneering, so far as the candidate is concerned, consists mainly in addressing the electors of this country on the political questions of the day. Why should speech-making on the

science of government, as applied to Canada, degrade anybody? Speaking on the Scott Act does not injure any one; speaking at the bar does not demoralize the lawyers; the lecturer on political economy in a college would feel insulted if you hinted that this vocation is demoralizing. Why should speaking on the art or science of government to the people have a bad effect on the speaker? Are the people of this country so degraded that contact with them at public meetings must necessarily lower the tone of public men? Not by any means. If the right kind of people went to public meetings, contact with them would tone up a public man morally. This is one of the places where the shoe pinches. Good citizens, especially in towns and cities, who plume themselves on the fact that politics are too dirty for them to touch, remain at home, and the party hacks and heelers, ward bumpers and general scalawags, crowd the hall. The candidate too often feels that it would be throwing pearls before swine to discuss political questions seriously before them. He is tempted to play the role of the demagogue—a role which is probably a rather easy and natural one for him—and he plays it accordingly. Ten or fifteen years of experience with such audiences go a long way in convincing a public man that all the people of this country are of the kind that he sees at public meetings. If the best citizens made their presence felt at such gatherings the most blatant demagogue in the country would be forced to speak like a statesman or retire—he would soon retire.

Disguise the fact as we may the real reason why Canadian politics have a lowering effect upon many public men is that good citizens take too little interest in the government of their country, and many of them none at all in the government of their municipalities. They too often put the reins in the dirtiest hands in the community and then say "Politics are dirty." What could you expect? Party may have something to do with it, but party is not by any means responsible for all the uncleanness of Canadian public life. Party feeling is strong in England, and for generations, to attain to the place of an English statesman has been the highest ambition of the noblest Englishmen.

There is another cause. We have in our Canadian society a low, mongrel, envious herd, who make a business of throwing dirt at every public man. The fact that a man is a school trustee, or an alderman, or a member of parliament, is to them quite a sufficient reason why they should call him a thief or a jobber or some equally pleasant name. To their jaundiced eye a public servant of any kind is an object of envy. These delightful people have their counterpart in the Church. The fact that a man holds an office in the Church—to which the people have elected him—and is trying to do the work well, is to them a sufficient reason why they should abuse him and hinder him in his work.

Three things are absolutely necessary if political life in this country is to be made anything like what it ought to be the best men in the country must take an active interest in public affairs; the best men must be willing to serve their fellow-citizens, and good public men serving their fellow-citizens must be treated more generously.

NOTES OF A WESTERN RAMBLE.—III.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

My last ramble had taken me as far west as the pleasant village of Acton. How far my present one may take me depends to some extent on the patience of the readers of THE PRESBYTERIAN, of which the editor sets an accurate gauge, and very wisely says "thus far and no further." It may lead me as far as that metropolis of the west, the Forest City, or, like Grandfather's Clock, it may "stop short never to go again." I suppose it greatly depends upon whether I get over the ground fast enough, and use the senses a gracious Providence has granted me with sufficient zest to make my own observations interesting to readers of this paper; and to make as sure as possible of not offending at the start, I shall at once make a beginning. Leaving Acton on a beautiful fall morning, a brief ride on the cars brings me to the rather obscure village of

ROCKWOOD.

If extreme brevity was very desirable I should leave all further description of this place with its name to the imagination of the reader; but that might be erring in the opposite extreme, and not be at all character-

istic of a ramble. Well, the village is all that its name implies. It struggles along from the station at one end, up hill and down dale, for fully a mile to the Presbyterian church and manse at the other. A branch of the River Speed divides the monotony of the single street, and provides the most romantic of rural retreats. The valley through which it meanders occasionally becomes almost a ravine, and here and there a natural obstruction causes the rivulet to become a miniature lake, while the rocks and the forests at once proclaim where the residents found their appropriate name. The Presbyterian church occupies a snug position in a hollow, and is substantial and plain, like the people who worship there. The manse has a more commanding aspect on the brow of the hill. Of the people of the church I had no opportunity of forming an opinion. They seem to have preferred the activities of farm life to the somewhat dead and alive existence which evidently prevails in the village. I had perforce to spend about five hours of reflective idleness here, and only reached the royal city of

GUELPH

too late on a Saturday afternoon to do any business. Were I to devote as much space to this truly royal young city as I have done to more rural scenes, my readers might begin to fear that my rambles were never to come to an end. But they need not fear. Suburban scenes are the rambler's delight, and he departs with what haste he may from the hurry and bustle wherever found. And Guelph is without a doubt a busy, thrifty and progressive place. It is the centre of one of the fairest of Ontario's counties, and the scene of much industrial enterprise. Built on a number of hills, and surrounded on every side by others, it presents a splendid appearance. Its streets are broad and clean, its drainage excellent. Its private and public buildings are of the handsomest kind. Most conspicuous among them at present are the Public Schools, but they are being overshadowed by the erection of a Roman Catholic Church of almost regal dimensions, and on the loftiest eminence of the city, generally known as Catholic Hill. The Presbyterian churches are not pretentious edifices. They are three in number—only a short time ago there were four—and are all ably presided over by the venerable Rev. Dr. Wardrope, Rev. J. C. Smith and Rev. R. J. Beattie. They are all well attended, but it was not so satisfactory to learn that none of them are free of that *bete noir* of most churches—a financial encumbrance. With their present judicious management, and excellent pastors, it is to be hoped that the liberality of the denomination will soon show itself in churches free from debt.

While in the city I had the pleasure of listening to an address by Mr. Henry Knox, now doing important evangelical work in the wilds of Muskoka. Mr. Knox had been brought under the power of the Spirit only a few short years himself, but immediately felt impelled to carry the "glad tidings" to others. He is wonderfully suited to make friends among the rough lumbermen and navvies along the C. P. R. in that wild region, and much good may confidently be anticipated from his earnest, self-sacrificing labours. The Presbytery of Guelph did themselves credit by putting Mr. Knox in a sphere for which he is so well fitted.

Conspicuous among the varied industries of the Royal City is the magnificent works of the organ companies, sewing machine manufactories, the several woolen mills, carpet looms, iron foundries, carriage works, etc. Although dull times were generally anticipated, there was little sign of them in these hives of labour and skill. Among the many attractions which lend importance to Guelph is the proximity of the Agricultural College, and Practical Training Farm. So often, however, has this novel Government enterprise been sketched, and by readier pens than mine, that I presume I will be pardoned if I leave it and Guelph behind, which I did when it lay under the first snowy mantle of the year, and struck out for that essentially Scotch town,

GALT.

Naturally enough one of the first features of this place which presents itself is a prevailing Scotch type of physiognomy, and a decidedly "braid" accent in the speech of those one meets. Another feature, which is only learned by residence for a short time at least, is that it is a "thrifty" and a thriving place. Everywhere I had heard complaints of depression; in Galt there was nothing but quiet con-