

Our Contributors.

DISCUSSION A NECESSITY OF FREE INSTITUTIONS.

BY KNOXONIAN.

There is not much sense in the growing clamour against reasonable speech-making. The Church and State must be governed in some way, and as long as we have government for the people by the people, we must have discussion. Discussion is essential to the existence of self-government. If the people are to manage their own affairs, there must be an interchange of ideas, and every man who utters his ideas, makes a speech either long or short. Indeed, some men can make speeches and long ones, too, who have no ideas to utter.

Perhaps our progenitors made a mistake when they secured for us liberty of speech, liberty of the press, liberty of public meeting, liberty of conscience, liberty to vote, and all the other liberties we enjoy. These liberties were wrung from unwilling tyrants and cost much blood and treasure. If the men who wrung them from the tyrants and wrung the necks of some of the tyrants at the same time, had known the poor use that many of us make of our privileges, perhaps they would not have troubled themselves about transmitting so many liberties to their children. Stalwart Covenanters and Puritans did not know that any of their descendants would degenerate into dudes.

To have allowed one man to rule just as he pleased, would have saved our fathers an immense amount of trouble and suffering. Perhaps they did a foolish thing when they spent blood and treasure in taking power from the hands of the one and putting it into the hands of the many. The worst feature of the business is that we cannot without much trouble get back to the old state of things.

The vote to be taken on the first day of January next to decide whether Ontario wants prohibition or not, will cost much of time and money, and involve a tremendous amount of speech-making. How delightfully cheap and easy it would be to allow some man to say whether any more licenses shall be issued. But then there would be a tremendous storm raised about appointing the man. The anti-prohibitionists would want an anti of course, and the prohibitionists would want a prohibitionist. On the whole, it would be just as easy for the people to vote on the question as appoint a man to give the decision.

One man could settle the question of tariff reform in a short time, but how could the man be appointed. The government would want one kind of a man and the McCarthy people another kind, and the Liberals a third kind. The people can settle the matter at the polls about as easily as appoint a man to settle it.

One man in each municipality might govern instead of a Council, and say just what the people must and must not do, but who would appoint him. One man might manage a large school as he pleased, engage and dismiss teachers, levy and collect taxes, but appointing the man would be more trouble than electing trustees.

The Senate and Board of Knox College might be dismissed and the institution put under the absolute control of one ecclesiastical magnate. That plan would save money and discussion, but it might not work. After a time there might be neither money to save nor students to educate.

The fact is, parliaments and church courts and deliberative bodies of all kinds, might be dispensed with and with them would go all the oratory about the length of which so many people complain. Courts of law might be dispensed with, and some man might name the people who should be sent to the penitentiary and the gallows. This sum-

mary method of administering justice would save jurors from the long addresses of counsel, about which they sometimes complain.

The trouble about going back to the one man system is, that appointing the man would perhaps involve as much discussion as self-government involves. Our fathers did not make any provision for a return to the one-man power. They imagined, perhaps foolishly, that we would be so grateful for the privilege of governing ourselves, that we would not complain about the amount of discussion involved.

Where did this clamour about discussion originate? So far as the Presbyterian Church is concerned, we think it originated on Canadian soil. It is a part of the nervous haste, which is unfortunately one of our national characteristics. It is closely related to the clamour some people make if a sermon goes five minutes over half an hour, and just because it is so related, preachers should give it a wide berth. The interesting young brother who makes a speciality of complaining about the length of ecclesiastical proceedings, can never be sure that some of his parishioners are not complaining about the length of his own sermons and prayers.

We never knew an Old Country minister who did not take an interest in the discussion of ecclesiastical questions. The Scotch and Irish ministers believe in free discussion. They know that many of the rights and privileges enjoyed by the Presbyterians at home were obtained and are retained by discussion, and they are too manly and thoughtful to belittle and disparage the means by which they and their fathers won their rights. They know, too, that many a hot wordy battle has to be fought yet in the Old Land before some of the Churches enjoy equal justice. Knowing these things, the typical Old Country divine sets a higher value upon free speech than is set upon it by those who think speech-making is chiefly useful for tea-meetings.

Is the growing clamour about speech-making, a good sign of the times? The facts give a sufficient reply, so far as the Presbyterian Church is concerned. The men who laid the foundations of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and the men who are building upon them anything that will last, are for the most part the men who attend Presbytery meetings most regularly, and who sit through Synod and Assembly meetings from the beginning to the last Amen. Many of them not only do this as a matter of duty; they thoroughly enjoy doing it. We have known a number of young men who thought it was evidence of superior culture and good form to denounce and ridicule the proceedings of church courts. Not one of them turned out well.

Parliamentarians of the first, and even of the second rank, rarely, if ever, complain about public discussion. Most of them thoroughly enjoy it.

There is, of course, a vast amount of public speaking not necessarily connected with the working of our free institutions. Some of it is good, some bad, and some middling. If you don't want to hear it just keep away from it. Time spent in listening, much of it is time worse than wasted.

Moral: Improve the quality of necessary speeches, and keep away from the poor ones that are not necessary.

BUSINESS INTEGRITY.

BY REV. W. S. M'TAVISH, B.D., ST. GEORGE.

Are men of business to-day more strongly tempted to be dishonest than their fathers were? We think so. Perhaps it would not be true to say that they yield more frequently to the temptation. The truth is that we have no means of ascertaining whether they do or not. This is one of the things which statistics do not reveal, nor can the information be gleaned in any other way.

The recorded data, however, are quite sufficient to show that men in every age have devised schemes for making money by dishonest practices.

But the conditions of modern life, and the present methods of conducting business place many new temptations in the way of those who are engaged in buying and selling. First among these may be mentioned the fact that competition is now very keen. Probably there never was a time when there was such close competition in all branches of business as there is at the present day. A father in trying to impress upon his little son the importance of truthfulness said, "You know, my son, that George Washington, the father of his country, never told a lie." "I know it," replied the boy, "but then you know, father, that he had not the competition that we boys have." And so, business men to-day, when guilty of sharp practice, try to shelter themselves behind a similar excuse. They admit the wrong, but attempt to justify themselves on the ground that competition is so keen.

The daily publication through the newspapers and by telegraph of the prices of commodities opens up the way for dishonesty on the part of those who are inclined to defraud. This is another condition of things peculiar to the present age. Fifty years ago the fluctuations in prices were not so sudden as now; and even if so they would not have been so promptly reported. To-day a buyer buys a given quantity of a certain commodity to be delivered within a week. But before the expiration of that time the report is flashed along the wire that the price has gone down. Is not the buyer tempted to devise some excuse for annulling the bargain? Or, perhaps the report is to the effect that the price has risen. Is not the seller then tempted to say that he cannot deliver the full quantity of goods agreed upon?

Another condition which sometimes tempts one man to defraud another is the fact that all kinds of goods are now almost universally sold by sample. This method of conducting business was denied to men fifty years ago. They then bought and sold on sight. But the development of railway and postal facilities enables buyers and sellers to take advantage of it now. Men who live hundreds of miles apart, and who, perhaps, have never seen each other, have business relations in this way. Now, suppose a flour merchant in the Maritime Provinces, having received a sample of flour from another dealer in Manitoba, contracts to take 1,000 barrels of it at a stipulated price. But before the consignment reaches its destination the price of that commodity may drop ten cents per barrel. If the buyer is dishonest he will try to manufacture some excuse for declining to implement his contract. He knows that the shipper has only three courses open to him, and that each will involve him in trouble and loss. First, he may dispose of the flour as best he can, but certainly at the reduced price; second, he may have it returned; but that also means additional expenditure; third, he may institute legal proceedings to prove that the flour was up to the sample, and that likewise is a costly proceeding.

There is a further temptation now to dishonest practices because machinery has been invented which can manufacture a shoddy article which looks like the real—indeed so close is the resemblance that only an expert can detect the difference. Besides, science has now reached such a point of perfection that imitations of almost everything can be made, and made so well that few can distinguish the spurious from the genuine. Cotton can now be so dexterously mixed with wool that its presence can scarcely be detected except by those whose business compels them to carefully examine such fabrics. Even the bindings of some pocket Bibles are so deceptive that a close inspection is necessary to ascertain whether they are leather or only a species of oil-cloth.

In addition to all this, there are methods of conducting business to-day to which the shrewdest men of the days gone by were strangers. What did they know about getting a "corner" in commodities, about "blind shares," about watered stock, about buying and selling on "margins," about gambling in "futures"? Even the Jew, with all his avarice and cunning, never conceived of anything so atrocious.

Since these things are so, how imperative the duty of the Christian minister to-day to cry aloud, to lift up his voice like a trumpet and show the people their danger! How necessary that he should exhort men to fear the Lord and depart from evil; to fret not themselves because of him who prospers in his evil way, and to remember that the wicked shall be snared in their own devices. How needful that he should urge men in business to seek what Dr. W. M. Taylor calls, "the rectifying influence of the sanctuary," and to rely more implicitly upon God's grace to help when temptations lie along their path! How important, too, that Christian teachers should try to impress upon the minds of the young the fact that he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and in the end shall be a fool.

OUR MISSIONS.

I referred in a previous letter to our starved mission stations in India. We have not been able to thoroughly equip even one, yet must needs undertake three. Why this was done I do not know. Some other stations are also worth investigating.

On the foreign mission wave that passed over the country in late years, we floated a staff to China. Now the question might in reason be asked, If our missionaries in India were crying out for help in workers and means, was it a wise act to go on dividing up our resources by opening a mission in China, when we were unable sufficiently to sustain what being committed to we could not desert? I have no hesitation in saying that our China mission, under the circumstances, was a most unwise act.

The question may be asked, Do the missionaries select the country they are to go to, or does the Missionary Committee of the Church send them? The Church through its General Assembly is understood to designate who and where missionaries are to be sent. This being the case, the wonder is, that so large a representative body should so err.

Our China mission was started with a splendid body of workers as a whole, not only had they the necessary ability, but carried with them that enthusiasm so necessary in this important work. What a magnificent contingent they would have been to our stations in India, whereas up to the present, they have experienced little but trial and persecution, with an absolute breakdown on the part of some of the workers, necessitating their return to this country. If China must be their mission, was it absolutely necessary that they should go to Honan, where they were not sure of being allowed to enter, when there were other parts of the great empire easy of access, and I assume as important. Naturally, one denomination does not want to enroach upon the work of another, but in this vast country there need not not have been any such danger. I think it would have been a prudent act to send our missionaries to that part of the empire where they would have been allowed to work with slight molestation. If successful at such a point, how easy it would have been to extend to fields green and pasture new.

To my mind, the proper course to follow in missions, is to try and form a stronghold at some station, and from this send out your workers as you have them, to the uncultivated fields—our Church has done the very opposite.

L. A. C.