

Our Contributors.

CONCERNING ECCLESIASTICAL LEADERSHIP.

BY KNOXIAN

The ecclesiastical months—May in the Old Country and June in Canada—always bring up the old discussion about the propriety and utility of ecclesiastical leadership. The General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland nearly always pass Dr. Rainy's motions. The Doctor's admirers break out forthwith into expressions of gratitude for the wise counsel and able statesmanship of an ecclesiastical leader like Dr. Rainy. Those who do not admire the Doctor's leadership often murmur something about the pity it is that a great Church should be under the thumb of any one man.

President Patton gets the American Assembly to adopt his plan for revising the Confession, and a year or two after has an overwhelming majority in favour of his views on the Briggs' case. His friends extol his tact and ability as a leader, and bless the day he left Canada and began his life work under the stars and stripes. Some people do not take precisely that view of the situation. They doubt very much whether any one man should have so much power, and throw out ominous hints about worldly ambition and other unlovely things. If the one man happened to be on their side, perhaps their view of the situation would be slightly modified. We always admire the big battalions most when they are on our own side.

We have seen some startling statements in the religious press about the prominent parts acted by ecclesiastical leaders in heresy trials and in making divisions in the Church that it took many years to heal. Impartial history—if there is such a thing—will no doubt apportion the proper amount of credit or blame, but even now a minister who uses Barnes' Notes every day cannot help wondering why Albert Barnes was ever tried for heresy. About twenty years ago there was a tremendous Presbyterian demonstration in one of the American cities—Pittsburg, if we rightly remember—when the Old and New School Churches were united. The speeches—some of them at least—were very eloquent; but when one read eloquent paragraphs and still more eloquent perorations on brotherly love and the blue banner, the question would always come up, WHY DID YOU SPLIT? Some living writers whose opinions are entitled to considerable weight do not hesitate to say that the split was mainly caused by the ecclesiastical leaders of the time. No doubt these leaders got due credit for heroic fight for principle they made when they split the Church, and other leaders were lionized when thirty years afterwards they healed the split! It does look as if a screw were loose somewhere.

In June, 1875, our United Canadian Presbyterians held a union demonstration in the Victoria Rink, Montreal. Supposing some hard-headed elder had mounted the platform and said: "Gentlemen, this is all very nice. You have had long and anxious deliberations over this matter, and now, after two or three years spent in making a basis of union, you are united. You respect each other and love each other; in fact, your union sentiment is fairly bubbling over. Now, gentlemen, would you kindly say, WHY YOU, Ontario and Quebec men, EVER SPLIT?"

And supposing the elder came down to particulars and asked the old Free Church men and the United Presbyterians how it happened that they differed on vital principles up to '61, and told the people so, and then discovered in '01 that they could unite without any sacrifice of principle, what reply could be given?

Or supposing he should say, "Gentlemen, you remember '44. Some of you got much credit at that time for dividing the Church. Now we are giving you much credit for healing the division. Don't you think you are drawing just a little too heavily on our power of appreciation? We can stand a fairly heavy draft, but it might be just as well not to bring disruptions and reunions too near each other."

What would be the best reply to give to that elder? Perhaps it would be just as safe for some aspiring leader to wave his hand in a patronizing way and say: "That man from the country should not be allowed to interrupt the proceedings."

Our Methodist friends had a grand jubilation a few years ago when four or five Methodist bodies were united in one. It was a great occasion certainly, and the census returns show what the union did for Methodism. Supposing some practical man had risen in the middle of the jubilation and said: "Brethren, this is all very well, but why did you ever divide and fight each other on every concession from Quebec to Sarnia?"

No doubt the men of by-gone days who led in divisions that have since been happily healed thought they were doing their duty. Many of them—though perhaps not all—were no doubt as conscientious as any martyr that ever went to the stake. All this and much more may be cheerfully admitted, and still the history of the last fifty years shows very clearly that no ecclesiastical leader, however conscientious, however pure, should be blindly followed. We know who said that we should call no man master. The best of men are only men. There may easily be inordinate love of power in the Church as well as in the State. Vanity is generally conceded to be the besetting sin of clergymen, and nothing feeds vanity more readily than a growing sense of power. The love of power, or even the love of prominence without much power, may become a temptation just as certainly as the love of alcohol

The fact that divisions in the Church have sometimes been over-ruled for good proves nothing in their favour. Cholera has led to the cleaning up of many a city.

It is easy, of course, to look back over half a century and see divisions that might, as we now think, have been avoided. The influence of time, however, should always be taken into account. Events obscured by the dust they raise cannot be seen as clearly as they can when the dust has subsided. It is scarcely fair to blame ecclesiastical leaders for doing what seemed to them the best thing at the time. We are now doing many things that will seem foolish, and some that will seem wicked, to the men who follow us fifty years hence if they are men of conscience and common sense.

It is scarcely necessary to notice the "small talk" one hears and reads about leadership during the ecclesiastical months. Much of it is the offspring of envy and jealousy. If business is to be done somebody must do it. Somebody must move and second resolutions and read reports. If matters are to be discussed, somebody must discuss them. Making proper allowance for age and other claims on our respect, the rule should always be "the tools for the man who can best use 'em." Somebody might here urge that much of the quarrel with leadership arises from the fact that men often insist on using the tools who don't know how to use them. That is unfortunately true. The majority rarely quarrel with a man for leading if he can lead. The majority in the Free Church follow Rainy, and the majority in the American Church Patton, for exactly the same reason that the Tories followed Sir John Macdonald and the Liberals follow Mr. Mowat. They follow because the men who lead can lead.

DIOTREPHESES.

BY WARFLECK.

PART II.

In a former article the character of Diotrephe, as delineated in Holy Writ, was fully sketched. It was also shown that this man's evil spirit is rife everywhere, and, like a defiling leprosy, pollutes whoever and whatever it touches. And now the question arises, What are we going to do about it? There is a corrective of this evil spirit, a remedy for this moral disease. Our duty is not done by merely uttering diatribes or wailing out lamentations as to prevailing evils. We must proclaim the antidote for these things. It is not only true that

Earth hath no sorrow that heaven cannot heal;

but, thank God, it is equally true that earth has no moral maladies for which the Gospel does not provide an effective remedy. As I have hinted, we do not know whether Diotrephe was a genuine Christian or not. If he was, he greatly needed sanctification. If he was not, he was in even more need of conversion.

This brings us to the practical part of the subject, the very pith and marrow of it. As a preliminary to what yet remains to be said, let it be observed that

1. Love of pre-eminence is fatal to personal peace and to the general welfare. Diotrephe was necessarily unhappy, as well as a source of trouble to others. Man cannot be blest or a blessing if this desire to be first is uppermost. The reason may be found in a phrase which has become common of late and is highly expressive, though perhaps it borders on slang. He is not built that way. It is useless trying to fight and to force nature. The universe is constructed on such principles that the desire to be first on the part of any created being breaks up the moral order of the whole system, and throws it out of gear. Experience and history proclaim this with a thousand tongues. Let me cite two or three conspicuous examples. Solomon set out to be "first," and was landed in "vanity and vexation of spirit." Alexander the Great was resolved to be "first." Behold him weeping that there is not another world for him to conquer. How graphically the great English dramatist pictures all this out in the case of that ecclesiastical Diotrephe, Cardinal Wolsey:—

Cromwell! I charge thee fling away ambition,
By that sin fell the angels; how then can man
The image of his Maker hope to win by it?
Love thyself last; cherish those hearts that hate thee;
Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's,
Thy God's and truth, then, if thou fall'st,
Thou fall'st a blessed martyr!

"Love thyself last." I am quoting Shakespeare, not Bible, but how marvellously similar this teaching is to that of Jesus of Nazareth, who said: "He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for My sake shall keep it unto life eternal."

How pathetic are the closing words of this conscience-smitten Diotrephe:—

O, Cromwell! Cromwell!
Had I but served my God with half the zeal
I served my king, He would not in mine age
Have left me naked to mine enemies.

In the first of the extracts just given, Wolsey says "By that sin fell the angels." Here we have the genesis of Satan and the origin of hell. Milton puts this sentiment into the mouth of the fallen Lucifer. "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven;" and it is capable of demonstration that the Diotrephean spirit is the very essence of hell.

2. Next let us note that conversion mainly consists in the overthrow and dethronement of this spirit. Not to multiply proofs, it is only necessary to quote Christ's gracious words: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and

I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." As a matter of fact, all truly converted persons are conscious of just such a change as this. Self is humbled, pride abased and Christ becomes all in all. Language cannot describe the sweet rest and peace that result from this transition. The man becomes willing to fill his divinely-appointed niche. His language is "Not my will, but Thine be done." There is no denying that true religion is an unselfish thing. Disinterested love to God, to Christ, to universal being, is its first, best, everlasting fruit. We come to Christ impelled by a sense of need, and there is an element of self-love or selfishness in the motive that leads us to seek Him, but, having come to Him, all is changed, and love becomes the new inspiration of our being. The determination is formed no longer to live to ourselves, but to Him who died for us and rose again. We do things for Christ's sake out of grateful regard to Him. The glory of God, not the aggrandisement of self, is the end and object of all our actions. How beautifully and simply this is described in some of our hymns! There is that one which Sam Jones jokes about, "O to be nothing!" This, he says, is the crowning wish of many, and it is gratified. They desire to be nothing in religion, and they are nothing. But we must not let a pulpit humorist spoil a good hymn for us. The very gist of a Christian experience is in its original intent and meaning:—

O, to be nothing, nothing,
Only to lie at His feet,
A broken and empty vessel,
For the Master's use made meet.

And still more graphically in that other hymn:—

O, the bitter pain and anguish
That a time could ever be,
When I proudly said to Jesus,
"All of self and none of Thee!"

Yet He found me—I beheld Him
Bleeding on the accursed tree,
And my wistful heart said faintly,
"Some of self and some of Thee!"

Day by day His tender mercy
Healing, helping, full and free,
Brought me lower, while I whispered:
"Less of self and more of Thee!"

Higher than the highest heavens,
Deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord, Thy love at last has conquered,
"None of self and all of Thee!"

Yes; that is it. That is the true inwardness of a genuine religious experience.

3. Well; so long as that lasts there is none of the spirit of Diotrephe. But, somehow, we lose our grip of Christ, and glide back on to the old ground again. We become worldly. Talk about the worthiness of Christians in outward things; that is nothing to heart-worldliness. "Be not conformed to this world," in aim and motive. Do not let self get uppermost. It is no longer making the will of God supreme that is the worm at the root, and makes leaf, branch and fruit wither. Look at the Galatians. Paul asks them where is the blessedness they spake of when they were self-forgetful and self-sacrificing, and when they were ready to pluck out their own eyes for the sake of being and doing good. Ah! he says: You did run well, but you have stopped in the race. You began in the spirit, and now you are trying to be made perfect in the flesh. "Christ has become of no effect unto you," His power over your heart and life has vanished; you are working for self in religion; "you are fallen from grace." This is the trouble with the universal Church. This is what ails you and me. We have lost the Spirit of Christ, and are swayed by the same desire for selfish pre-eminence that cursed Diotrephe.

4. Let us close with some honest work of self-examination and self-application. It is very hard to get people to identify Diotrephe in themselves. They do it readily in regard to others. They say, "There he is," or "there she is." But come, now. While you are saying, "that's Diotrephe of some one else, that very party is, very likely, thinking the same of you.

O wad some power the giftie gie us
To see ourselves as others see us,
It wad frae mony a blunder free us
An' foolish notion!

There is a power that will bestow upon us the gift of the Holy Ghost if we ask for it, and then we shall be able to see the Diotrephe that lurks in our own bosoms.

It is easy to understand how this evil creeps into Christian Churches. When there is but a small membership, some active, earnest man or woman comes to take a leading, prominent part from the necessity of the case. It is done at first from the best of motives. As the Church increases, instead of pushing new comers forward, and getting young people to take an interest and part in Christian work, the reins of power are held in one pair of hands or monopolized by some little clique, and insensibly the spirit of Diotrephe comes in and mars all. There are those, perhaps, who are more capable than the ruling spirits, but they are elbowed off. It is often the case that people are able and willing to work, but they are denied the opportunity. They are like the day-labourers in the parable. The Master asks: "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" They answer: "Because no man hath hired us." There should be a constant effort in the Church to enlist people in every good work. If any show an interest, let them be encouraged. Give them something