

## Our Contributors.

### SOME NOTES ON THE AMERICAN ASSEMBLY.

BY KNOXIAN.

The principal difference between the American Presbyterian Church and ours is a difference in numbers. Our neighbours hold the same doctrines, adopt the same polity, administer the same discipline, preach the same Gospel. Their 6,000 ministers work among 65,000,000 of people, our 700 work among 5,000,000. The membership of the American Church is nearly 800,000, the membership of ours last year was 157,990. Their revenue for all purposes last year was nearly \$15,000,000; ours was \$2,054,951. Theirs is a bigger Church mainly because they work among a larger population. There are good men in both Churches, and they have more of them; middling men in both, and they have more of them; bad men in both, and they have more of them; cranks in both, and they have more of them; fools in both, and they have more of them. The difference between the two is mainly a difference in numbers.

Between the typical Canadian and the typical American minister there is not much difference except that the American brother may, perhaps, be a man of more resources. He is not a better Christian, or a better scholar, or a better preacher, but he has often to work a harder field, and stern necessity makes him resourceful and many-sided. An American minister, especially in the west, has to fight against all the ordinary evils and several special ones happily unknown in Canada. He has to contend against the Sabbath newspaper, against the open saloon and open store on Sabbath; against easy divorces and the deluge of evils that come in along with them; against the gross materialism that always comes with extraordinary prosperity, against the socialism, atheism, anarchism and a dozen other pestiferousisms that are dumped into the country from Europe, against the lawlessness and recklessness of the new territories and the vices of the old cities. A minister who has to contend against these special developments of the world, the flesh and the devil must have resources or die, that is, die ecclesiastically. Of course there are compensations. If in any community the bad are very bad, the good are likely to be extra good. The fence is so high in Chicago or New York that a man can hardly get on it. Nobody grudges the American brother his resources. He pays dearly enough for all he learns after he leaves college. In the school in which he takes his post-graduate course the fees are high and the discipline severe. Canadian ministers should be profoundly thankful that some of the difficulties mentioned are unknown in Canada, especially the difficulties arising from open, defiant Sabbath desecration. Let us stand up manfully always and everywhere for a quiet Sabbath.

The dead line of fifty is for the most part an imaginary line drawn through the newspapers and through the imaginations of ministers who allowed their minds to become old long before they saw fifty. There are more men in this Assembly with grey heads or heads with little on them to become grey than we ever saw in a Canadian Assembly. Congregations of a certain type may prefer very young ministers, but most of the pastors and professors who compose this great court are a long way from boyhood. The idea that the American people are lacking in respect for age is also pure fiction so far as this Assembly is concerned. The two oldest men in court are the Moderator and Dr. Smith, of Baltimore. The moment either rises the Assembly quiets down, no matter what is going on. The profound respect the Assembly has for Dr. Green's honoured life and noble Christian character does far more to preserve order during this long and exciting Briggs debate than any qualifications the Doctor has for presiding over six hundred excited Presbyters.

One of the strong points of this Assembly is its ability to put through routine business with neatness and despatch, especially despatch. The fact is, most of the real work is done down-stairs in committee-rooms, and the results made known and endorsed in the Assembly. No other way is possible. If an Assembly of nearly six hundred members, mostly good talkers, once began to discuss the *personnel* of thirty standing and many special committees, a large number of Boards and any number of other minor organizations, when would the discussion stop? For the first three days the routine went through in grand style. On Home Mission day the oratory broke loose and flowed on with increasing volume until the Briggs case was disposed of. The Assembly seemed to enjoy it, for the seats were always full, and no doubt the visitors did, for the galleries were nearly always crowded. The American Presbyterian, like his brother and sister the world over, does like a good discussion.

In the quality of the oratory a Canadian Assembly would compare favourably with this one. If our neighbours have a larger number of good speakers it is because they have a larger number of all kinds. Their oratory, however, has some marked characteristics well worthy of study. The typical speaker here usually begins without a single word of introduction and ends when he is really done. Sometimes he says "Moderator" as he sits in and sometimes he omits that duty. He rarely tells you that he cannot give a "silent

vote on this question," or says anything about how he thinks or how he feels. He seldom troubles you with any reasons why he is going to speak. He goes to work without any preliminaries whatever, says what he has to say, illustrates, makes points in a condensed way, and sits down as suddenly as he began. Cutting off commonplaces at the end of a speech and "preliminary remarks" at the beginning save a vast amount of precious time and make speeches much more lively and attractive. Of course there are exceptions. There are speakers here and everywhere who cannot condense, who cannot begin without preliminaries or stop when they are done, who have no idea of time when they themselves are talking, but certainly one characteristic of the best type of oratory in this Assembly is the ability to make points in a condensed way.

The Woman's Foreign Missionary Society is one of the most successful working institutions of this Church. Last year they came within about \$10,000 of raising as much money for Foreign Missions as all the congregations. The amount raised by the congregations was \$346,779; by the Woman's Board, \$336,244. The increase over the contributions of the former year was a thousand dollars more than the increase in the contributions of the congregations. In a short time the Woman's Board will be a greater concern than the Men's Board.

The Briggs case ended just as any man with open ears and eyes who had been in the Assembly a few days could see it would end. By a majority of nearly eight to one the Assembly vetoed his election as professor of Biblical Theology in Union Seminary. Dr. Briggs has himself and his friends to thank for all this trouble. The Church is greater than any professor in it, or than any theological seminary in it, and if a professor or any other man teaches doubtful doctrine and wantonly raps the best feelings of thousands of good men and women, he must just take his chances. Dr. Briggs took his, and neither he nor his friends have any right to complain. Perhaps they may be as brave and courageous in adversity as they were arrogant and dogmatic in prosperity. Two or three things are reasonably clear. Our neighbours have no use for theological professors who cannot make themselves understood on vital points. They have not the slightest intention of allowing any servant of the Church, however learned, to treat his brethren contemptuously, or wantonly wound the most sacred feelings of thousands of the best people in the Church. The glamour that is supposed to encircle a man who has "studied in Germany" has neither charms nor terrors for American Presbyterians whatever it may have for other people and in other places. The Church is not to be badgered with impunity by Dr. Briggs or any other man, and if he wants to leave, as Dr. Bartlett said, he "can go and take all his intimate friends with him."

## PRESENT-DAY PAPERS.

### QUALIFICATIONS FOR PLACES OF TRUST.

BY TITUS MUNSON COAN, M.D.

My friend, Mr. A. S. Hewitt, is reported to have said "If I had been a politer man than I am, I might have been President of the United States."

Whether the story is true or not, it raises an interesting point. Is politeness, then, a qualification for a place of public trust?—for public trust, I suppose, is what is meant by the question announced. For attaining a place it certainly is. If we change the word and call it tact, we shall have one of the most important qualifications for retaining public place; the point may be dismissed without further consideration as being incontrovertible. In every subject there are a number of evident or admitted truths which one need not spend long in discussing; they are old acquaintances whom we nod to familiarly as we pass, we speak their name and let them go. So in naming the qualifications for places of trust, it is enough to name honesty, ability and tact. Honesty as a matter of course, and with it as much tact as we can get. An honest man without ability, or an able man without principle, is equally misplaced and equally dangerous. And a man who has no tact will not win his place, or having got it, will not hold it long even if he be both honest and able.

So much for the commonplaces of the subject. My readers, I think, will agree with me so far. The real discussion begins when we come to consider the different kinds of ability that may be in question—the variety of intellectual qualifications for public duties. And the controversy turns mainly upon the question between the technically-educated man, and the man of practical experience; between the fair competition of those qualified by education for places of trust on the one hand, and on the other the rougher natural selection or example of the practical man in politics.

Some philosopher says "the fools are right in the long run." This is to say that in practice the rougher methods usually prevail in the domain of politics. But this is not very satisfactory doctrine. What does it mean? It means that things have their own way—general forces rather than individual ideas, and that any fine spun reforms are not viable. The average sense or nonsense—not the refined intelligence, is what rules our politics.

Well, this is undoubtedly true for the most part, and in the deep sense it is inevitable like everything else. It is especially true in a democracy like our own that things have their own way, and follow the will of the rough-shod. In politics at least genius is merely an affair of energy.

But is this a sufficient theory of fitness for public life? Need we drive at practice so utterly and exclusively as to leave all theory out of sight? From the dusty arena of the practical man cannot we recapture some breathing room for intelligence? Here we come to the parting of the way between those who debate the qualifications for places of trust—between those, in a word, who think that experience is all, and those who argue that general intelligence, even high culture, are desirable qualifications. It is the old debate between theory and practice.

From the time when sailors first went down to the sea to the twelfth century, the art of beating a ship to windward was unknown. One had to sail with the wind or not at all. Ships and fleets waited indefinitely for a favouring wind, the lack of it was one of the many causes that delayed that ruler of men, Ulysses, on his homeward way from Troy. By-and-by, we may suppose, came theorists who argued that it was possible to sail against the wind—men who were first laughed at and then persecuted; and when at last their invention was adopted, the old navigators unanimously said "We all knew it before." This, as we know, is the experience of every man or community who lets ideas run ahead of practice, as opposed to the plan of going ahead at any rate, and picking up such ideas as one can in going. Both methods have their advantages and their disadvantages, each one indeed completes the other. But in our time and civilization there is no danger that the practical will be neglected. The danger is that our public men will not be sufficiently prepared from the intellectual side to cope with the practical.

I would advocate, then, among the main qualifications for public office, not only the training by experience but also the intellectual training that comes of a good college course or from continued private study. The man who has these, is by no means under compulsion to turn out a Solon. What is so rare, under any regime, as a wise ruler? But the man who has studied and reflected is far likelier to direct wisely the flow of forces around him than if he comes among them blinded by the dust of passion, prejudice and controversy. The forces of politics exist for themselves; they dominate and absorb all but the men who have both natural power and wise training.

To a question stated in such general terms as the present, it is hard to give any specific and definite answer. It is not a question to be answered in a phrase. If a "theoretical" man in the ordinary sense is not the right man for a place of trust, neither is a merely "practical" man. Of good theory and of good practice we cannot have too much. Jefferson was a fine type of a public man: full of ideas, full of energy, he made himself instantly and permanently effective. A still better type was Marcus Aurelius, who brought the widest culture of the time and the highest power of thought to his great position, both by natural endowment and by education he had the highest gifts. We require both at the hands of our rulers. The more of natural force, the more fruitful experience the better. *Nihil humani a me alienum* should be the motto of the public man.

In honesty, energy, tact—in the highest education, both special and general, and in the widest experience, are the sufficient qualifications for places of public trust.

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## PRISON REFORM.

MR. EDITOR,—About two years ago the Prisoners' Association of Canada made their first appeal to the Church in behalf of prison reform, and, largely as a result of this appeal, a commission was appointed by the Ontario Government to enquire into our penal and reformatory institutions, and also as to the causes of crime in the Province. The report of this commission was presented to the Local House the last day of the session, but too late, unfortunately, to admit of its being dealt with this year.

All friends of prison reform in the Province will be gratified to learn that the practical recommendations of these commissioners are in full accord with the platform of prison reform principles adopted at the Prison Reform Conference held in Toronto in November, 1889, at which the different Churches of the Province were represented.

We find, however, that full effect cannot be given to these proposed reforms without the co-operation of the Dominion Government. The commissioners recommend, *inter alia*, the adoption of the indeterminate sentence system combined with conditional liberation or the parole system, especially in dealing with the young inmates of industrial schools and reformatories, believing this to be a *sine qua non* to the successful treatment of youthful offenders. This will require special legislation on the part of the Dominion Government.

Again, the commissioners strongly recommend the adoption of the Elmira Reformatory System in dealing with young men—first offenders—between the ages of seventeen and thirty. This also will require special legislation on the part of the Federal Government, and, moreover, the commissioners point out that the establishment and maintenance of such an institution is properly the work of the Dominion Government.