

Our Contributors.

THE DOGMATISM OF ONE IDEA.

BY KNOXIAN.

The man who has room in his head for only one idea at a time is always dogmatic. He cannot well be otherwise. Had he two ideas, the one might modify the other, but as he has only one, that one has everything its own way. The man with room for one idea only never can believe that there are two sides on any question. He sees only one side, or part of one side, and the narrowness of his mental vision makes him positive that there is only one side. A man of that kind is very likely to say that the people who can see both sides are not trustworthy. He thinks they are not sound.

Severe criticism and cheap wit in abundance are hurled at the doctors who differed as to the disease from which the late Emperor of Germany died. Sir Morell Mackenzie differed from the German doctors and the German doctors differed among themselves. Supposing all that to be so, what of it? When they made their diagnosis there was room for difference of opinion. A physician of the highest attainments and of undoubted integrity might honestly conclude that the growth was "benign," while another equally learned and equally good might believe the growth was malignant. Some of the symptoms pointed in one direction and some in the other. There was ample room for difference of opinion in the case. Of course everybody now knows that the Emperor died of cancer in the throat. It is always easy to be wise when the event is over. There is no longer any room for difference of opinion, but there was ample room when the treatment began.

A hundred writers remind us that medicine is not an exact science like mathematics. No reasonably intelligent man ever said that it was. Jurisprudence is not an exact science. Theology is not an exact science. There is no room for difference of opinion about the fact that things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another, but there is ample room for difference of opinion as to whether many a prisoner is guilty or not guilty. It is clear beyond all question that the whole is greater than its part, but it is not so clear that there is a distinct form of Church government taught in the New Testament. Dr. Mc Laren and Brother Dewart differ widely on the five points, although they have an infallible text book before them. Is it at all wonderful that two medical doctors should differ about a diseased organ they cannot see, or that two judges should differ about a case on which they have no authority at all to guide them.

It would save a good deal of trouble in this world if everybody would admit that there is ample room for difference of opinion on most questions. Life would be much sweeter if people who hold strong opinions would admit that there is even a remote possibility that all who differ from them may not be fools or knaves. The millennium will be near when the man who has but one idea admits that there is one chance in a hundred millions that he may be mistaken.

Free Trade vs Protection is the great question on this continent just now, and may be the leading issue for years to come. The man with room for only one idea in his upper story cannot understand what all the discussion is about. If he is an out and out Free Trader, he believes that not one valid argument can be offered in favour of Protection, or even in favour of a Revenue Tariff. If he is on the side of Protection and has had his own "infant industry" protected by a forty per cent. tariff for the last fifty years, he is absolutely certain that protection for fifty-year-old infants is the right thing. His one idea is that his own "infant" should be protected, and he takes precious good care that no other idea is allowed to jostle it.

People who have room for several ideas in their upper story are pretty well convinced that something can be said on both sides of this great trade question. Something is being said on both sides in the United States at the present time.

The Scott Act man with room for only one idea was very dogmatic three or four years ago. If a temperance man for revenue only, for popularity only, he was often worse than dogmatic—he was insulting and tyrannical. He injured the cause and brought down an avalanche of ill-will upon men who were

working on the same side from principle. The Scott Act man for revenue only is not heard from to any extent at the present time. The revenue has stopped and he stands from under. There is no room for two ideas about the evil effects of the liquor traffic. There is room, however, for several ideas in regard to the best method of dealing with the evil. It will be found in the end that the best temperance man is the Christian citizen who is not specially wedded to any one method—whose love to God and his fellow men is so great that he is willing to work by any and all methods to bring about this much needed reform. One idea in regard to the magnitude of the evil is all right, but no good man who really desires the welfare of his fellowmen will tie himself up to one method of exterminating the evil.

There was a discussion in Toronto the other day about deacons and managers. If the history of Presbyterianism in Canada proves anything, it proves that this question has two sides. Some prosperous congregations have deacons and some equally prosperous have not. Some have both deacons and managers. The fact that congregations prosper under two systems shows that neither is essential to prosperity. In some small congregations it would be impossible to elect deacons. Clearly the system would not suit people who cannot work it.

The pew-rent question is another on which there are two sides. In fact nearly every question that does not clearly involve principle, even the annexation of Parkdale, has two sides. A recognition of this elementary fact by everybody would save a world of trouble.

COUNSELS TO YOUNG MEN.

(Concluded.)

How often have I been told by young men, who wish to follow the right path, that, as to temptation, their position is perfectly unique. No one is assailed as they are or has such a desperate battle to fight. But the frequency of the complaint is its own contradiction.

The fact is, nearly every earnest man who is struggling heavenward thinks his own case peculiar and exceptional. Now, that this idea is depressing, no one can doubt. A sense of isolation in our spiritual conflict makes the ordeal more acute. So long as we can feel that others are tried just as we are, and are battling with the same fierce temptations, and are therefore in full sympathy with us, we keep up hope. There can be no sympathy, in the literal sense of the word, where there is not a community of experience. Now the apostles, knowing this, assure us that there is a brotherhood in temptation. St. Peter suggests this thought as an encouragement to us in our fight with the devil. "Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." And St. Paul says the same thing in our text, that there is no temptation come to us but such as is common to man. "Common to man."

One word in the original, "anthropinus," which simply means human, such as man is liable and accustomed to, such as the human will, strengthened by divine grace, may be able, and has proved itself able, to overcome. The temptations that meet us in this world are not such as to task angelic strength. They are what fallen humanity has always been subject to, and has often successfully conquered. But, as the coward soldier has been known secretly to wound his hand, that he might be pronounced unfit for the campaign, and so escape its danger and toil, so we are sometimes tempted to pronounce ourselves weaker than we are, that, beaten by the foe, we may excuse our failure. And therefore we should remember, that there is not a temptation that tries us, which has not often been overcome before, and that by persons no stronger than ourselves.

Do not imagine then, that you are disciplined as none else are. If any person could plead this excuse for discomfiture, assuredly it was the young men of Corinth. It was a sink of iniquity. It was proverbially dissolute. No city of the East surpassed it in shameful licentiousness. Metropolis of dissipation and debauchery. Vestibule of hell. London and Paris in one. Shrine of Venus and Bacchus, and every false god. It was no easy matter to be a Christian there. No wonder the young converts thought they had a moral struggle that was elsewhere unknown. It was a bold thing for Paul to say to

them right out, "You haven't a single temptation to battle with, but such as is common to man. It will be no excuse for you in the day of judgment that you lived in Corinth." I say the same to you. Human nature is much the same everywhere. The devil is just as busy in many a Highland hamlet as he is in London. We talk a deal of nonsense about the innocence of village life. I have lectured on "The Perils of the Great City" in one and another quiet little town in Scotland; and gentlemen have come to me at the close, and said, "We are just every bit as bad here, up to our measure." The sad fact is, these Arcadian pictures we sketch of rural life are pure fancy. In truth, the country is not a whit better than the town.

Young man I don't think it is any excuse for your indulgence in vice that you are located in this city, where your principles are put to so severe a test. And never imagine that your case is exceptional, or that you are framed differently from other men. Thousands have passed through the same ordeal, have fought the same battle as you.

The next thing that the text tells you is, that temptations are proportioned to your strength. Perhaps you say, "It is little to my comfort to be assured that others have the same conflict as myself, so long as I find these temptations as irresistible." But the Apostle replies: "They are not irresistible. God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." He stakes it, then, on the faithfulness of God, that your temptations will never exceed your strength.

Man has a certain ability to resist all the temptations which God permits to assail him; if he yields, he is answerable for it.

God suffers you to be tempted, up to a measure. When we are tempted to sin it is not because God tempts us. St. James says, "God tempts no man, but He permits it." And, as there is a certain extent to which we are able to resist temptation, so there is a point beyond which we are not able to resist. There is a limit to our power. God knows that limit and engages that we shall not be tempted beyond it. Were we tempted beyond that limit our fall would be unavoidable, and we might question our responsibility. But, as we are tempted only within that limit, if we fail, we are manifestly ourselves to blame. We have strength, either natural or gracious, to resist all the temptations that meet us; and God promises us that no temptation shall come which we shall not be able, if so resolved, to master.

Observe, however, there is such a thing as putting ourselves in the way of temptation, and in such a case God does not engage to extricate us. I fear we often tempt Satan to tempt us. The spark may be his, but the tinder is ours.

Sometimes a man sets bounds to himself in a course that is evil. He resolves he shall go so far into it, and then stop, but that man has no right to claim the divine help. If you allow yourself to take the first step into evil, you have no right to ask God to hold you back from the second. Every temptation yielded to leaves you weaker, every temptation overcome leaves you stronger than ever before. There is a legend among the South Sea Islanders that when a man slays an enemy the strength of that fallen enemy enters into him that slew him. This is true, at least, in the moral warfare. Every time you resist a temptation, the strength of that temptation, as it were, enters into you, making you doubly strong for the next attack. And every time you yield you are so much the weaker for the next encounter. This is true in regard to all sins, but especially in regard to sins of the flesh. Whatever your weak point is, whether it be temper, or greed of gain, or profanity, or drink, or impurity, or gambling, or anything else, your only security is to plant your foot firmly down, and say, this sin shall not get the better of me. Never say of any form of vice, it is unconquerable, for, so doing, you give the lie to Him who says, "My grace is sufficient for you." For years on years it was said that Gibraltar could not be taken. A huge rock, 1,000 feet high, looks down with proud contempt upon the ocean that roars and surges at its base. But through determinate energy it was taken, and has been held ever since. The stoutest fortress of sin may be captured through firm resolve, backed by the grace of God.

Get a good grip, my lad, of this truth—I speak to you who believe in Christ—"God will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able."