

Our Contributors.

AGREEMENT THAT MAKES DIS- AGREEMENT.

BY KNOXONIAN.

People sometimes complain about the amount of discussion that is constantly going on in free countries. Cynics say that self-government makes men all tongue. There is no doubt a tendency that way; but tongue is better than bayonets. There is no substitute for government by discussion except government by force; and men who have had a taste of freedom won't stand force. They think it is better to appoint citizens to govern the country than have it governed by a tyrant who never solicits the vote and influence of the free and independent. Paying taxes is not a very refreshing kind of amusement under the most favorable circumstances but it irritates one less to pay them to a civic official appointed by one's own representatives, than to a man in uniform who may prod you with his bayonet if you don't put down the speckle at a moment's notice.

There is a good deal of discussion in Presbyterian Church Courts. It can easily be avoided. Just appoint a Pope to tell the Church what it must do. Let Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, Assemblies and standing committees be abolished, and a vigorous Pope put over us all. There need be no trouble in getting a man to fill the place. Several men have been trying to get into it for years. In fact nearly every Presbytery has a man—some of them more than one—who has been trying the 'prentice hand' at the Pope business for a long time. Now if we want to get rid of discussion all we need do is get a Pope to tell us what must be done, and what must be left undone—what must be paid, and so on. How the elders would kick when the first commands came from the Pope telling them what they must do.

The point we want to illustrate, however, is that agreement with some people is more dangerous than disagreement and may sometimes lead to something much worse than discussion. In fact there are many cases in which it mightily pleases a man to contradict him flatly and in which you may probably make the man an enemy for life if you agree with him.

Brother Boanerges, for example, is fond of compliments about his preaching, so fond indeed that he fishes for them with a hook, rod, and line as clumsy as the fishing apparatus Talmage describes in his famous comparison of fishes. Boanerges comes down from the pulpit and before he has got his breath begins to tell you that he is ashamed he preached so miserably. He never did so poorly in his life he says, and on he goes running down his own sermon for no reason under heaven but to make you praise it.

Now, how would Boanerges feel if you chimed in with him and said, "Yes, Brother, that was a poor effort. I was ashamed of you. Your matter was commonplace, and thin and poorly arranged. Your logic limped and came to no conclusion. Your illustrations were crude and let in light on nothing. Your wind-up was prolix and weak. It was the poorest of poor hortation. Yes, Brother, you are right. You did poor work to-day." Boanerges would probably knock you down if you agreed with him; but he would say you were a very nice man and a good judge of sermons if you contradicted him flatly and said he preached well.

Young Mr. Softhead comes down from the platform after making what he thinks was a fine effort. He wants somebody to compliment him. If possible he would like to have some compliments from the ladies; but Softhead is not just the kind of young man ladies, whose opinions are worth anything, get enthusiastic over. Whatever clever ladies may desiderate about the quality of a man's heart they don't like his head to be soft. Volunteers being absent in the compliment line the young man has to do some fishing, and of course the bait he uses is self-depreciation. He says, "I did miserably

to-night." How would he like if all agreed with him and said, "Yes, Brother, you did miserably." Agreement in his case would certainly be much worse than disagreement.

What would some men think if you agreed with all they put into their prayers. They confess that they are "vile"—that they are "miserable, ungrateful, hell-deserving sinners"; and so on. One of the proudest men we ever knew used to begin every prayer with "Oh Lord, we are the vilest of the vile; we are worms of the dust." The man was six feet of solid self-righteousness and pride. "Vilest of the vile" forsooth! He didn't believe his equal for goodness could be found in ten townships. He could not find a minister within fifty miles good enough to preach to him; and yet that man would begin his prayer by saying he was the "vilest of the vile!" Supposing somebody had quietly said at the end of his prayer,—"Yes—you are the vilest of the vile," what a scene there would have been at that meeting. Supposing some one had begun a letter to him in this way—"Dear worm of the dust" the worm would probably have sued the writer for libel.

It is easy to say, Paul called himself the chief of sinners. True, but that man wasn't Paul. It is also easy to say that when a man prays he speaks to his Maker; and therefore he must be allowed to say things he would not allow his fellow men to say to him. True again, and if a man feels he is the vilest of the vile let him confess it in secret, but he should not confess when leading others in prayer what the others are reasonably certain he does not believe to be true. They know that he thinks he is about perfect. They know that he is so certain he is right about everything that he would rather destroy a congregation than yield even the smallest point and they are not put in a devotional form by hearing him say in prayer he is the vilest of the vile, while his daily life shows he is the proudest and most self-righteous man in the county. If men are not honest in their prayers where can we expect them to be honest?

There are dozens of men with whom it would be dangerous to agree. Ask a young lady to play for you and probably she says she cannot play anything worth listening to. How would she feel if you told her you had been of that opinion for some time. Ask her to sing and if she says she has no songs worth singing gently hint you believe that is so and see how she takes it.

Ask some self-conscious neighbour to speak at your meeting and when he plays mock-modest and says he cannot give anything worthy of the occasion, just say you scarcely thought he could and see how he takes it.

A good Methodist sister told the class meeting that she was a great sinner and so forth. The pastor, who must have been a very raw young man said, "yes, sister, I have often heard that since I came on this circuit." The sister waxed furious and shouted, "I am just as good as anybody on the circuit." That sister was a good representative of a large class of people. You please them most when you contradict them; and hurt them most when you seem to agree with them.

How far any man is honest in saying about himself and his performances what he would be angry at another for saying, is a nice question to decide. There is one safe rule. Never fish for compliments by making disparaging remarks about ourselves and what we do. If you want to know what anybody thinks about your work, ask him honestly. If you are a clergyman, and he is one, too, you may save yourself all trouble by coming to the conclusion that his criticism would be unfavourable. Only about one minister in twenty will give a favourable opinion of anything done by another; and if they are ministers nearly on the same plane, only about one in fifty.

"O sir," said a mother in China, who was telling the missionary of the happy death of her Christian daughter, "O sir, the grave has become a new place since Jesus came to our village."

Missionary World.

THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES.

We take the following information from a very able and interesting article on 'Missions to the Oriental Churches, by the Rev. Dr. Jessup, Beirut, Syria, which appeared in the New York Magazine of Christian Literature.

There are about ten millions of nominal Christians belonging to these Oriental Churches, and they are located in Western Asia and Egypt. They are mostly scattered among the one hundred and eighty millions of Mohammedans who to-day form one of the great factors in the religious condition of our race. They consist chiefly of members of the Greek Church, and Armenians, and Copts, and Nestorians, and Abyssinians, and Syrians. They have never felt the spring life of a Reformation. They are lying dead in the trammels of sacerdotalism and sacramentalism, except what life there is in and around the 175 Protestant churches among them, with their 20,000 members and 100,000 adherents, and their manifold evangelistic and educational activities.

The Greek Church is very much the Romish Church without pontifical head. The other Oriental Churches are similar.

The teaching and practice of the Greek Church in Western Asia are briefly sketched as follows:

1. The Greek Catechism says: 'It is one of the presumptuous sins against the Holy Spirit to hope for salvation without works to merit it.'

2. A sacrament is defined as a 'sacred performance whereby grace acts in a mysterious manner upon men. In other words, it is the power of God unto salvation.'

3. The benefits conferred by baptism are 'the remission of original sin, the remission of all past actual sins, and grace to sustain the believer in his conflict with the devil, the world, and the flesh.' The baptized, both infants and adults, are immersed thrice.

4. After baptism the priest administers holy Chrism.

5. Subsequent sins are pardoned by the sacrament of 'repentance,' with absolution pronounced by the priest.

6. Penances are imposed to cleanse the conscience and give peace of mind.

7. The communion is a sacrificial mass both a Eucharistic and a propitiatory sacrifice.

8. In a limbus the souls of the departed are kept till the day of judgment.

9. Images are prominently worshipped. 'As to the impious Infidels who are not willing to honour the holy images, we excommunicate and curse them.'

10. Mariolatry is exalted.

In consequence of these characteristics of the Greek Church, and similar errors in the other Oriental Churches, the power for advancing the kingdom of Christ is frustrated. Mohammedans and Jews look upon their images with horror. Scarcely a single convert is ever made from the heathen around.

The first American missionaries who came to Western Asia in 1819 to seek the conversion of Mohammedans expected assistance from the surrounding Christians. They soon found instead that they were the chief barriers to success. In 1832 the Greek bishops in Latakiah, Tripoli, Damascus, and other places gathered the Arabic Bibles (printed in London from the version of the Roman propaganda) and burned them in the courtyards of the churches.

In 1825 the Missionaries opened their doors to converts from the native Christian Churches, and since then the work has gone on. To-day it is a burning question between the two great parties in Church of England Missions, whether operations should be carried on apart from or in connection with, the 'legitimate hierarchy.' High Churchism says acknowledge and support the legitimate episcopate. Evangelicals say exalt truth and Christ to the salvation of the lost. 'The life is more than meat, the body is more than raiment.'

BELIEVERS DIE WELL.

The Rev. J. Lees, of the London Missionary Society, stationed at Tientsin, China, relates the following interesting incident:

As in other lands, so here, it is beginning to be noticed that believers die well. Several cases have made a deep impression but none more so than that of a young married woman who had only recently shown any interest in spiritual things. After two attacks of illness, in both of which she showed much alarm, but which were both checked, she seems to have fallen a victim to malignant fever, the disease running its course in a couple of days. It was noticed at once that she had lost all her fear, and, though frequently engaged in prayer, never shed a tear, or seemed to desire recovery. She said God had called her. Her one anxiety was to be baptized, but was content when reminded that salvation did not depend upon that, but upon the forsaking of sin and trust in the atonement of Christ. "Yes, I am sorry for my sin," she said, "and indeed, indeed, I trust in Jesus. My heart is at peace now. I only feared that I, perhaps, could not be saved without baptism. But it was her parting words to her relatives which made the deepest impression. To her blind old mother, she said: "When I die, do not cry, mother. I shall be with Jesus. Afterwards, when you die, and come to be with the Lord, we shall meet again. Calling her father-in-law, she took his hand, and said: "Father, you are sixty. Can you live another sixty years? I have something to rest upon now. Have you? Oh! be quick and repent of sin, and trust in the Lord. That's all I have to say." Her husband was next appealed to. Taking her hand, she said: "I am going to die. When I am gone, do not greatly grieve. There are no immortal men, nor is there any endless marriage" (lit., husband and wife cannot have 600 years' wedlock). "Begin now to think why missionaries and preachers take so much trouble to preach. Oh! you must repent and believe, and then some day we shall meet again." Turning then to the preacher, she thanked him for his kindness, and added: "Be diligent in leading men to the Lord. Do not fear to labour. Like the rest, Chang had to leave to recover his self-command. He had hardly done so, when the dying woman called again to her mother: "Mother, when I'm gone, do not cry. Come, pray for me." Then she began herself to pray, but could only say "My Lord," when the end came. Who can doubt that the sentence had another ending than it would have had on earth? Next day Mr. Chang conducted a simple service at the house. When he had prayed, the blind mother also prayed, and this was her prayer: "O Lord, my daughter was given to me by Thee; she has believed upon Thee; and Thou now, Lord, hast received her (to Thyself). I thank Thee, Lord."

And the blind eyes were tearless. But then you see she is only a poor uneducated Chinese peasant. The dead girl's husband has had a near escape from losing his reason, and he and his father are learning to pray.

DRINK AND THE NATIVES IN SOUTH AFRICA.

The testimony to the havoc wrought by strong drink among these natives is overwhelming and harrowing. On the other side the Bishop of Mashonaland spoke recently thus: Let me cite three countries in Africa where drink is prohibited. There is, first of all, the Orange Free State. During a residence of some three or four years in that country, owing to the laws which exist there, I never saw, to my knowledge, one single tipsy native; and so stringently were those laws carried out that on one occasion in Bloemfontein a trader who had been trapped into selling drink to a native, not having the money to pay the fine, which he knew would certainly be imposed, committed suicide to avoid the punishment that would follow his default. What are the consequences of these stringent laws? The towns at night are perfectly quiet, and servants are quite capable of being used.