

Our Contributors.

NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS.

BY KNOXONIAN.

Would you say to-morrow *is* or to-morrow *will be* New Year's Day? This would not be a bad question for a juvenile examination paper. Well, to-morrow *is* or *will be* the first day of 1889, and different people will be differently engaged when the day comes round. A goodly number will be deeply immersed in the resolution business. They will work the resolution factory for all that it is worth. In fact, there is always some danger of over production in the resolution line on New Year's Day. The danger, however, does not last long. A surplus stock of resolutions is easily disposed of. It does not take the manufacturer as long to get rid of them as it does to get rid of a surplus stock of cotton, or woollen goods, or hardware, or anything of that kind. We have known an enterprising maker of resolutions to get rid of most of them the day after they were made.

There has been a good deal of sneering lately at New Year resolutions, "swearing off," and other exercises of that kind. The ease with which many people break their resolutions, tempts people to ridicule the whole resolution business. Such ridicule is not wise. The fact that a man makes a good resolution is a hopeful thing even if he breaks it next day. The making of it clearly shows that the maker *thinks*, and that alone is something in his favour. The trouble with too many people is that they do not *think*. The making of a good resolution also shows that, for the time being, at all events, the maker desires to be or do better. It proves that the better part of his nature is not dead. Anything that brings the better part of our nature into play, even for one day, is good as far as it goes.

Resolutions may be divided into positive and negative. Somebody with a fine trim for criticism, may say this is not a logical division. We don't care whether it is or not. It is logical enough for the holidays.

A positive resolution binds the maker to do something—if it binds him at all.

A negative resolution binds him *not* to do something—not to smoke for example.

The success of a negative resolution depends very much on whether it is stronger than the habit it is supposed to break up. If the habit is stronger than the resolution, the resolution suffers. The weaker goes to the wall. That is pretty much the way in all contests in this world. A weak resolution has little chance against a strong habit. The habit is a gnarled old giant that has been gathering strength for a quarter of a century; the resolution is a puny, delicate baby that came into the world yesterday. What chance has the baby against the giant? As well might you ask an average deputy reeve to checkmate Sir John Macdonald, in a matter of political strategy. As well might you expect a law student to down the Ontario Premier on a point of constitutional law. To make any headway against a confirmed habit, a baby resolution must be backed up by supernatural power. That is the point that people don't consider when they expect drunkards to reform by their own strength. It is doubtful if the thing was ever done in more cases than would form exceptions to the rule which says it cannot be done. To be of any use against a confirmed bad habit, a resolution must usually be buttressed by a power greater than the power of the man who makes it.

One of the weak points about individual resolutions is that they are under the exclusive management of the man who passes them. He moves and seconds and carries the resolution himself. He may reconsider it any time he likes. He may rescind it by a unanimous vote whenever he pleases. The resolution to stop smoking, let us suppose, is considered and passed. After a time, we shall not say how long, the good man who passed it begins to hanker after something. He feels a trifle uneasy and restless. He has a watery kind of sensation in his mouth. He wonders whether after all a good deal that is said and written against smoking may not be downright rot. The restlessness increases and the good man becomes a trifle crusty. It is a bad time for his wife to hint anything about a new bonnet. A woman who says anything about bonnets in that crisis doesn't know her business. By and by the good man moves the reconsideration of that resolution and reconsideration is carried by a two-thirds vote. Then he moves that it be rescinded. The motion is carried *unanimously*. Then he—well he takes a good smoke. The weak point about the whole business was that the carrying and rescinding of the resolution was exclusively in the hands of one man and he was a deeply interested party.

Gentle reader, do you say that resolutions of that kind are not of much use? Well, perhaps not. The best thing you can do is help to pass some resolutions about the beginning of this new year that will be of some use. Good resolutions passed by bodies of good men nearly always hold. The Federation resolutions of the General Conference of the Methodist Church may prove an exception, but the exceptions are rare. As a rule anything reasonable that a body of Christian men resolve shall be done is done. There is a wide field for resolutions that *can* be carried out. Here is a pastor pinched and crippled for want of another hundred or two to his salary. All on this earth that is needed is for the people to resolve to raise the additional sum, and with a very slight effort it would come just as easily as the smaller sum.

Here is another congregation that does almost nothing for the Schemes of the Church. A resolution to do something would bring a few hundred dollars to the Schemes and help the congregation immensely besides.

Yes, there are many good resolutions that might be passed and carried into effect if a small number of resolute, earnest men just took the trouble to start them. Individual resolutions often count for little, but good resolutions considered, passed, and carried into effect by earnest practical men help mightily to bring in the millennium.

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY MISSIONARY HEARD FROM.

A lengthy letter in the *Perth Star* from Dr. J. F. Smith, the Chinese missionary sent out by Queen's University, describes his journeying to his field of labour in Honan. The following extracts will be read with interest.

On the evening of October 7 we came to the outer bank of the Yellow River and put up for the night at a small inn built on the embankment. We found that we were still about four miles from the river. The Chinese build the outer embankment at quite a distance from the river so that when it overflows it will have a large district to flood before reaching the wall and will thus have expended a great amount of its force and will not be so likely to wash away the embankment. The poor people living on this district of course have to suffer, but as a rule very few live on these plains of sand. We arrived at the break in the river about noon of the 10th October. You will remember that it broke out after dark September 21, 1887. For several days the people knew there was danger, the water was very high and the embankment was crumbling. The officials were there waving their caps at the waters, but to no avail. At last the alarm was given, a gun was fired, the signal fixed upon, and, in less than an hour over a mile and a half of the embankment was washed away, and the mad torrents rushed hither and thither carrying everything before it. The river even at low water runs very swiftly so you may imagine how terrible it must have been. Those living near the embankment tried to reach it before the water became too deep. The embankment is about twenty feet wide at the top and many were enabled to save themselves by getting on the embankment. Village after village was deluged, and they tell of one large town where not a soul was known to have escaped. Soon a lake was formed over 100 miles wide and perhaps over 200 miles in length and twenty feet deep. Several lakes in the southern part of the province were filled to overflowing and then an entrance was made into the Yangtsi, and there is danger of that river breaking out and flooding the most populous district in Southern China.

The Government very promptly voted a large sum of money for the repairing of the embankment and work was commenced. About the end of December there was another outbreak, and still another last June, of which very conflicting accounts are given. We found the break to be 400 feet wide and the water 100 feet deep, and running at least at the rate of ten miles an hour. So you can see how difficult it will be to change the course of such a volume of water. They commenced to repair the embankment from both sides leaving the most difficult part to the last. The new part of the embankment is over 100 feet wide and eighty feet deep, and is made up of kaoliang stalks, sticks, sand, and a few bricks without anything to cement them together. They have long hemp ropes twisted hither and thither throughout the mass, which helps to bind it together, but as it is built on the sand it is easily washed away. The Chinese do not appear to have any idea of the power of such a volume of water, and they are like so many children playing with the stream. The week previous to our visit a French engineer was there, who had been sent down by the Chinese Government. The officials in charge laughingly told us that the Frenchman said, that it was impossible to close the breach if the water was over sixty feet deep, but said they, we will show how little foreigners know compared with the Chinese, we will close it all right. This engineer told them that they would require a great amount of stone and as stone is rather scarce a happy thought struck them to make brick with a hole over one inch in diameter through the centre. They intend to string the brick on these hemp ropes and drop them down into the whirlpool while one end of the rope will be fastened to the embankment. They have seventy large brickyards with over 10,000 men busily engaged. I would like to be there when the first string is lowered. The old bed of the river is from two to five miles wide and there is a small stream of water about forty yards wide and from three to ten feet deep still keeping its old course. But even if the breach were closed the water would never take the old course as the old bed is at least ten feet above the level of the present bed and also above the level of the surrounding country, so they will be forced to make the river run up hill. You can form no idea of the amount of sand deposited by this river. The water at present covers about half the extent of country at first flooded, and wherever the water has been there is now a bed of sand from three to ten feet deep. I heard people in Canada speak of how terrible would be the sight of such a number of corpses and how unhealthy, etc., but there is none of that and what was once a fertile plain is now a desert of sand. There are traces of at least five different beds of the same river, and wherever I have been at least a third of the country have been rendered barren. Even small streams have sand-plains two or three miles wide throughout their whole course.

The chief official in the Province of Honan has been degraded three steps, and kept in his office because he has so far failed in closing the breach.

When the river broke out there were not more than fifty people residing at the breach, now there is a city with over 100,000 inhabitants. This city is called "The Great City of the Dragon's Mouth," and might be more properly called the

city of straw mats, as the houses are all built of straw matting. Nine million taels have already been expended on the work, a tael being equal to about \$1.04 of our money. The officials, to whom we spoke, said that the actual amount spent on the work could not possibly exceed 2,000,000 taels. On being asked where the remainder went a laugh and a shrug of the shoulders was the only reply. We were also told that the number of sufferers supported by the Government is about 1,170,000.

All along the bank, there are temples erected to the river god, and the people keep on worshipping this god, although he has shown his weakness so often. At times, the Chinese do look at things in a practical way. In one locality, when rain was much needed, the people prayed and offered large offerings to the rain god, but no rain came and the heat was terrible. So they said, Look here old man, we will not stand this any longer, and without more ado they removed the god from the temple, and placed him on a table in the open air, where he could get the full benefit of the sun. Then one by one they would come and say, How do you like it? Is it not hot enough for you? etc. I did not hear whether rain came or not, but the god was punished for his negligence.

After leaving the great city of the dragon's mouth, we proceeded along the southern bank of the river and reached Kai-Fang-Fu on the evening of October 11. We did not attempt to enter the city, as we did not want to have a row. The guards stationed at the gates of the city are instructed to keep foreigners out. Of course your passport gives you permission, but it would only cause trouble. We remained in the western suburb over night, and proceeded on our way the following morning to the seaport of Kai-Fang Cun-Hsien. For several days we passed over barren country, nothing grown but peanuts of an inferior quality. You are pestered continually with the peanut vendor. After passing several large places, some of which are almost in ruins, we reached Kuli-te-Fu, which is a large and an important place, on October 15. The next day we turned northward and felt that we were making for home. We passed through a fair country for a distance, until we reached the old bed of the Yellow river, of 1857. It is at least fifteen feet above the level of the surrounding country, and with adjoining plains at least twenty miles wide. The light sand in great drifts resembles the large snow banks in Canada. While crossing this plain we encountered a terrible sand storm. The sun shone for a while, then it began to grow dark and great clouds appeared in the distance. Suddenly the temperature changed becoming quite cold. The clouds rolled on, the wind increased, and soon sand was flying so thickly that it was impossible to see ten yards ahead. This continued for seven hours, and we made very little headway. I hung a blanket at the door of my cart, but after all, I was nearly blinded and choked, etc., and everything was covered with about an inch of sand, so you can imagine what it would be outside. We crossed the Yellow river again south of Pa-Chou. When the river was high the salt merchants sent a number of their junks down the country with salt, but after the break they were left high and dry, and all along the course of the river these junks are to be seen waiting for the return of the waters. We are anxious to get home and we ask our carters how many days to Tientsin. They say, eight days travel and the rest day. They are told if they do it in seven days and the rest day, they will receive nine days pay, because we pay them for Sabbath, although they only rest. They agree, and after a while they come back and say they will get us into Tientsin by Saturday night, that is six days, if we will give them the same, viz, nine days pay. This makes it very interesting and we say, "Yes" because we have learned what carters are. One condition is laid down by them, that we get up earlier. All along we have been getting up between four and five o'clock, and have been ready to start by break of day, but that is not early enough, so we agree to get up whenever they call us, imagining that we may prepare to get up about half-past two. We go to bed about eight o'clock and sleep. The call is given and we bestir ourselves, light the candle and look at our watches. Imagine our consternation, just half-past twelve. There is no help for it however, and we turn out, make ready, and are out on the road at half-past one, and go forty-eight miles, where previously we went from thirty-four to forty. We go to bed this night at half-past seven, and soon the call comes. We look at our watches again, and find it is twenty minutes past eleven. We are on the road before one o'clock, and get to Pang-Chia-Chung at half-past six, having gone twenty-two miles. We remain here for breakfast. We say good-bye to our travelling companions, and move on along for Tientsin. This is Wednesday. By night we have travelled fifty-five miles. We see a little change in the country since we passed through it six weeks ago. The grain is all gathered in and the wheat sown.

We are up every morning about the same time, viz, twelve o'clock, and reach Tientsin Saturday afternoon, at three o'clock, October 27. We rested here over Sunday, and had the pleasure of seeing and hearing Staveland P. Smith, who, with his ladylove, has come from Shan-Si to be married. They travelled eighteen days, then went up to Peking, and found that as the lady was not a British subject, they would have to remain for six weeks before they could be made one. So they are improving their time, and with the other missionaries are holding special meetings for the foreigners in Tientsin. He is a splendid fellow, intensely in earnest, and living very near his Saviour. I will now have to close. There is much I would like to tell you about, but I will have to reserve it for the next letter. We arrived at Chefoo, November 1, having been about seven weeks, and having travelled 1,700 miles, over 1,200 of which was by Chinese carts. Pray earnestly for us and for our work.