

Our Contributors.

CONCERNING LEAN PEOPLE.

BY KNOXONIAN.

How have you wintered? We mean of course mentally and morally.

At this season of the year farmers examine their barnyard animals to see how they have got through the long winter. The human animal might well examine himself to see how he has spent his winter evenings. Taking four hours for an evening since the beginning of last November we have had about three weeks of winter evenings. What have you done with these evenings?

Have you danced and talked small-talk until your mental condition is scarcely one remove from idiocy?

Have you gone to meetings of a poor kind until an idea, should you happen to get one, would feel lonely in your head?

Have you trotted around on general principles doing nothing in particular except sinfully wasting precious time?

How many good books have you read during these evenings? Have you laid up any useful knowledge for future use? Are you a better-informed, better-equipped man than you were last November? In short, how have you wintered mentally and morally?

The great trouble with too many men is that they are mentally lean. They have no resources. They can do nothing, suggest nothing. Ask them what they would do themselves when they find fault with what other people do and you soon learn that their work consists exclusively in talking about other people's work. The little question, what are you doing yourself? knocks them as helpless as an upset turtle. What would you suggest? puzzles them like a high class conundrum. People of that kind are suffering from intellectual leanness.

The main fault of many speeches is their leanness. They are poorer than Job was in his worst days. They are as empty as the pocket-book of an average parson at the close of his summer vacation. There is nothing meaty in them—nothing that feeds anybody with a half decent mental appetite—nothing that makes a thoughtful man think about anything except the amount of precious time he has to waste in listening to lean speeches.

In speeches leanness and length nearly always go together. If a voluble man has nothing to say there is no reason why he should stop at one time more than at another. If a man has honestly prepared a decent speech and knows what he wants to say, he knows when his matter is ended; and if he has an average amount of sense he stops when his grist is ground. There is nothing more in the hopper and he stops the mill. But your lean, loquacious talker has no grist in the hopper. Quite often he hasn't got any hopper to put a little grist in. All he has is the wind that drives his mill; and there is no known reason why the wind should stop blowing at any given time.

Dr. Donald Fraser was one of the most entertaining and instructive speakers that ever graced the Canadian platform. He stood high even in London and a man who stands high in London in any line is as high as a man can rise in this world. In his autobiography Dr. Fraser tells us that he wrote the principal part of his speeches and usually made them fifteen or twenty minutes in length. A fourth-rate tea-meeting orator takes that length of time to assure the audience that he is glad to be there, and tells them what he said to his wife before leaving, and how he stuffed himself at the tea-table. Then he gravely informs the people that he has nothing in particular to say; and takes half an hour or more to prove the truth of the only sensible sentence in his speech. Anybody who knows him would cheerfully admit the truth of his main proposition with out any proof at all.

Some sermons suffer from leanness. As a rule the Presbyterian pulpit supplies as much good spiritual food as an average hearer can digest. All preachers, however, have not had the advantage of a good

Presbyterian training; and leanness in sermons is not as rare a thing as it should be. There is some reason to fear even Presbyterian preachers allow themselves to get lean at times. It is not easy to be always up to the mark. No clock strikes twelve every time. The only preacher who attains absolute uniformity in the pulpit is the one who preaches so badly that he cannot get any worse.

Spurgeon used to say that pulpit leanness is the cause of church quarrels, and he illustrated his point by the fierceness with which hungry dogs fight over a bone. The figure is not any more complimentary to disturbers of the church than to lean preachers; but it is a fact that a lean pulpit does cause even a large proportion of the quarrels that disgrace the church, and besmirch some of the belligerents for the remainder of their lives. Is it not notorious that too rich spiritual food without a corresponding amount of work will make men just as liable to quarrel as the poor fare of a lean pulpit. Rich provision and lack of exercise cause dyspepsia. Dyspepsia makes even the best of men cross; and when men are dyspeptic and cross they quarrel just as quickly as when they are hungry. If those men who are turning the American Presbyterian church into a bear garden had smaller salaries and a group of mission stations to work every summer we would not hear so much criticism, higher or lower.

How can mental leanness be avoided? One good way is not to make companions of people who are mentally lean. Leanness of that kind is contagious. If you associate much with lean people there is always a danger of becoming lean yourself.

Another good way is to avoid meetings at which you hear lean speeches, lean addresses, lean lectures and lean efforts of various kinds. Of course duty may sometimes bring us into the desert of lean oratory, and then we must stand it.

These are negative ways. The best positive way to avoid leanness is to read good books.

Next to the reading of good books is the hearing of meaty, suggestive speeches, lectures and sermons.

How have you wintered mentally and morally?

WOMAN—PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN.

REV. W. S. M'TAVISH, B.D., ST. GEORGE'S.

What has Christianity done for women? In order to answer that question it will be necessary to describe the condition of women in heathen lands and then contrast their position with that of women in those lands where the Gospel has made its influence felt. Of course it must be admitted that in heathen lands, even as far back as the beginning of the Christian era, there were women who wielded a powerful influence for good or evil. Cleopatra, of Egypt, might be mentioned as an illustration. While she was a mere girl of 19 summers she held captive no less renowned a man than Julius Caesar, and when she was a few years older she wielded such a mighty influence over Anthony that for her sake he gave up almost all that he had so dearly won. But her career is exceptional. We would no more think of taking her as a type of heathen womanhood than we would think of taking Socrates, Plato or Marcus Aurelius as types of heathen manhood. And so in heathen lands to-day we might find a woman here and there who has risen above her surroundings and who, therefore, is treated with deference and respect but we must remember that such cases are exceptional.

What then is the social condition of women in heathenism? Pagans have always taught that woman is inferior to man, intellectually, and just because they believe that, they treat her accordingly. Her condition is degraded indeed. She can have no companions but those her husband chooses for her. She can be married without her consent and she can be divorced according to the whims or caprices of her husband.

An eminent writer in treating of the condition of women in the South Sea Islands says, "They were barbarously treated. Their condition was very low. They could not eat certain kinds of food or live under the same roof with tyrannical lords." In speaking of Persia he says, "Woman in Persia was unwelcome at birth, untaught in childhood, uncherished in wifehood and motherhood, unprotected in old age and unlamented at death—the tool of man's tyranny, the victim of his passions, the slave of his wants. Stealing, lying, profanity were common vices among them. They were coarse and degraded, passionate and quarrelsome, and, like birds in a cage, content with their slavery. They laughed at the absurdity of a woman being educated."

The same writer in speaking of the condition of the women of Madagascar before the Gospel was introduced says, "A man might put away his wife without cause and take a new one as often as his caprice or his passion led him."

Even in Corea, "The Hermit Kingdom" where women are treated with more deference and respect, perhaps, than in any other heathen country, even there a woman is not permitted to go out alone in the day time, nor is she consulted when arrangements are made for her betrothal.

But it is needless to present other facts or quotations, for what is true of woman's condition in one heathen land is true, in a greater or less degree, in all those countries where the purifying, uplifting power of the Gospel has not yet been felt.

How marvellous and striking in contrast with this is the condition of women in this Christian land! Here she is the friend and companion of man, sitting at the same table, discussing the same problems, and attending the same places of amusement and entertainment. Not only so but with what respect the marriage tie is regarded here! Society is here a Christian institution. Woman, raised to a new condition under the Gospel, adorns our assemblages. She is now prepared to discuss those problems which are agitating the public mind. She reads books, she sits beside our young men in college halls, listening to the same lectures, grasping the same subjects, passing the same examinations.

If we turn now to the spiritual condition of women in heathenism, and then compare their condition, in that respect, with that of their sisters under the Gospel the contrast would be no less striking. What is the condition of women spiritually, in heathenism? No tongue or pen could adequately picture it. Many, realizing that their condition is almost hopeless, seldom look for light; others who long and plead for light never find it.

But look at the favored circumstances of woman under the Gospel. She attends the same house of worship as man, listens to the same sermons, has the same offer of salvation made to her, has the same privilege of accepting it, and is assured that if her faith in Jesus Christ is what it ought to be, then she shall have the glorious privilege of sitting down with the redeemed in heaven. In every sense, woman in Gospel lands is made "Our Sister," (Romans 16. 1), nay more, as Dr. Holland says—

"True sister of the son of man,
True sister of the Son of God—
What wonder that she leads the van
Of those who, in the paths He trod
Still bear the cross and wear the ban."

The Gospel has broken down all barriers. There is no division now. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

DIVINE AND HUMAN AGENCY.*

BY REV. H. M'QUARRIE, WINGHAM.

ACTS 26 : 18 — "To open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."

Whatever our calling or profession may be we ought to be able to give a satisfactory reason for pursuing it. No work should be engaged in by any man till he is fully convinced that it is a lawful calling. He should not only have the approval of conscience, but also the divine approval. Having this he need not be ashamed nor afraid, although called to defend himself before kings. The Apostle knew that the Lord had called him to the work of preaching the Gospel and this knowledge was to him a source of great comfort, for he not only knew what the Gospel had done for himself, but also gloried in the fact that the Lord had counted him worthy, putting him into the ministry—gloried in the privilege of making known to perishing men the way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. "Necessity," he says, "is laid upon me; yea, woe is me if I preach not the Gospel."

In his address before Agrippa, Paul, for the third time, gives an account of his conversion and call to the ministry. He seems to condense into one saying various utterances which were made to him by the Lord at different times. The call he knew was from heaven, for he says, "Oh, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but showed first to them of Damascus and Jerusalem and throughout all the coasts of Judea and then to the Gentiles that they should

* Sermon preached at the opening of the Synod of Hamilton and London, in Knox Church, St. Thomas.

repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

This passage clearly reveals that in the salvation of sinners, divine and human agencies are employed. This is seen:—

I. First in the commission given by the Lord to the Christian ministry: "I send them to open their eyes." It is a sublime mission. Christianity is a religion of light. Those who follow Christ have their eyes opened and walk in the light, as He is in the light.

As light and darkness are figures frequently used in Scripture to represent knowledge and ignorance, so opened or closed eyes are figures of a similar kind. To open the eyes simply means to enlighten and instruct; means that men are to be taught that sin is something more than mistake or a calamity, or even a disease; they must be made to understand that it is a crime. They are also to be instructed how a holy and just God can forgive sin. It is necessary to have men enlightened to convince them that they need pardon. In order to do this let the search-light of God's truth be turned on their sins. We say their sins, not the sins of the men of a former generation. It is easy and generally quite safe to denounce the sins of Scribe and Pharisee committed eighteen centuries ago. A preacher's popularity is not likely to be injured though he should in scathing terms condemn the inhabitants of Sodom, or wax eloquent in describing the iniquity of backsliding Israel. He may with all safety condemn the cruelty and wickedness of the persecutors of the early Church. He may give vent to his righteous indignation as he refers to the horrors of the Spanish inquisition, or the massacre of the Huguenots; and in the most pathetic terms portray the sufferings of the Covenanters in the time of Claverhouse. While doing this he may have clear evidence that his descriptions are highly appreciated while the eyes of his hearers remain closed to the sins of the present day.

Paul never imagined that the commission required him to open the eyes of the men who lived in the days of Noah. He knew that he was commissioned to go to the men of his own generation and every preacher of the Gospel should now understand that it is to the men of the present day that he is sent.

We have several examples given us in Scripture, which are very instructive, as to the best method of doing this. When David had so sadly fallen the Lord sent Nathan to him to call his sins to remembrance. The prophet at first adopts the parabolical style and tells the King that there were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds, and a traveller having come to him he spared to take of his own flock, but took the only lamb that the poor man had and dressed it for the wayfarer. "David's anger was greatly kindled against the man and said, 'As the Lord liveth the man that hath done this shall surely die.'" The opportunity had come, the sermon must be applied, and Nathan said unto David, "Thou art the man." We have a similar case of this outspoken style in the account given of the meeting of Elijah with Ahab in Naboth's vineyard. "And Ahab said to Elijah, 'Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?'" And he answered, "I have found thee because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord." Equally bold and outspoken are the words of him who came in the spirit and power of Elias. When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism he said unto them, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Neither was he afraid to reprove King Herod for his wickedness, but said unto him, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." This plain speaking, no doubt, was the cause of his losing his head. But preachers need not be alarmed, for they are in no danger of being overtaken by such a calamity. A fearless exposure of wickedness may cause a decapitation of salary, but their heads are quite safe. But whatever the consequences may be, a minister is under the most solemn obligation to open the eyes of his hearers so that they may know their danger and the way of escape.

Peter's method on the day of Pentecost is a good example to follow. He gave a clear statement of facts by which he proved that Jesus of Nazareth was the true Messiah and then practically applied the truth, charging home upon his hearers the awful crime of crucifying the Lord of glory. "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

So, in Paul's first reported sermon