

SPECIAL  
ARTICLES

## Our Contributors

BOOK  
REVIEWS

## THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

By R. G. MacBeth, M.A., Paris.

The General Assembly has never been considered an infallible authority but has generally won approval for wisdom, sound judgment and statesmanship. The last Assembly, however, has been assailed with considerable energy from many quarters for some of its decisions and has in certain directions been criticised with something akin to bitterness and even contempt. We would expect this, in almost any event, from those who are not in sympathy with religious work, but when members of our own church persistently attack the tone and decisions of our High Court we feel ill at ease and are moved to examine the situation more closely. Amongst the decisions principally complained of in connection with last Assembly we might instance three. The first in the McCall case in the matter of the Widows and Orphans Fund. The second is the Cambell case from Nova Scotia where a widow asked for a grant from the income left by her husband to the Church. In the first case the rules and regulations of the Fund, and in the second, the provisions of a will, stood in the way of granting the specific relief asked for, but the petitioners were widows and a little discussion and consideration should have led to action that would have saved the Church from reproach. The third instance is the extraordinary treatment meted out by the Assembly to a motion in regard to Separate Schools which simply reaffirmed the historic position of the Presbyterian Church on the question. Concerning the last of these I have received many communications from prominent men in different parts of Canada who felt like leaving a Church that "had failed to be Protestant in a crisis time" and one from the most influential Liberal in British Columbia who declared that the motion could not possibly offend any political party and that the action of the Assembly was "a disaster to Canada." With these correspondents who are all leading Presbyterians I have done what I could in order to retain them in connection with the work of the Church.

The purpose of the present letter is not to argue on the merits of these questions but to say that many who attended the Assembly commented most unfavorably on the lack of earnestness and painstaking in the deliberations and discussions. One intelligent elder who attended for the first time felt in great disappointment and regretted that the high opinion he had always held of the Assembly was not borne out by contact with that body. There may have been reasons for this strange and discouraging effect produced upon many who were present and upon some who were not. Grant Hall in which the Assembly convened is a magnificent place for a convention. It is perhaps the stateliest hall in Canada. But, except for the evening meetings, it was not well suited for the Assembly. Its vastness and the noise made by its new chairs as people moved upon them, made it difficult to hear at times and this may account in some measure for the manifest inattention which prevailed. Perhaps, and somewhat naturally too, the question of Queen's was looked upon as the principal one for that Assembly and once that was disposed of, the main business was considered at an end. Certain it is that the attendance began to thin out very early. On Wednesday night at the opening session it was announced from the Clerk's table that certificates should be handed in at once as some of the Commissioners wished to leave on Friday. One wonders why

they attended at all. Saturday saw a considerable exodus and at the beginning of the week there was such manifest hurry on the part of those who remained that some questions received very scant notice. So much was this the case that after those present had cried "agreed" to pass something a college principal next me said, "If one moved the abolition of the Confession of Faith it might go through without debate." Another leading commissioner who was being prevented from speaking by cries of "vote" had to appeal earnestly to those present to do the business of the church properly even if it took a day longer. But they had evidently concluded to finish that night and hence "the slaughter of the innocents" that took place. My complaint as to the motion on Separate schools is that, judging from the wild things said in the corridors, two-thirds of the members never took the trouble to read it. It is on the minutes of Assembly and there are not a dozen ministers or elders in the church to-day who could vote against it unless they wish to part with the splendid past of the Presbyterian church and condemn great leaders like Principals Cayen and King, and Dr. Robertson. The very fact that, in defiance of rules or order, not to speak of courtesy, the notice of motion was shelved before it could be presented to the House, shows an inconsiderate and unreasoning haste which one does not expect to find in a great deliberative court.

The object of this letter, then, is to make appeal to Presbyteries in connection with their election of commissioners to Assembly. If men are not willing to go and devote their time and attention to the business of the church till it is properly discussed and passed, they should stay away and let others do who would. The Assembly is not a holiday outing. The practice of having all the commissioners chosen in the Presbytery by rotation on the roll may encourage this sense of irresponsibility on the part of some. If all or even half were chosen by ballot there would be a better Assembly. And the times demand earnestness. There are problems ahead whose tremendous and far-reaching significance forbids anything like trifling. It is not a time for going about these things "with a light heart." We may conscientiously differ upon all or any of these problems, but we should be so willing to devote our best powers to their solution that even the onlooker may see how in a grand sense, we feel the weight of the burden that rests upon us. In a later issue I may, with your permission, indicate some of the questions that are pressing upon the church for settlement.

The Manse, Paris, Nov. 17th, 1905.

A Society of Buddhists is to be formed at Rangoon, Burma, whose object is to reform Burmese theatrical performances. These ought to have been reformed some centuries ago; and one would like to know whether the Europeans could ever have seen need of reforming them if Judson and his successors had not taken the Gospel to Burma.

In World-wide Missions it is stated that in the Punjab, one of the great provinces in the northern part of India, there are said to be only forty families of Brahman priests, whereas formerly there were three hundred and sixty families. Numbers of Brahmans are entering secular callings, because the office of priest no longer affords them a living. The cause of this waning of a non-Christian religion is attributed to popular education and Bible study.

## THE WILL OF GOD.

By Rev. John Watson, D.D.

Among many incidents which have arrested my attention and excited my imagination during a ministry of thirty years, the four following are the most convincing, because they were all confirmed by evidence outside of my own experience.

My colleague in Glasgow was a man of very noble character and great loyalty. He showed me much kindness, and after I came to Liverpool we were in frequent communication. When he was laid down by a dangerous illness I was in a state of constant anxiety, and was ready at any moment to go to Glasgow. One Sunday morning I received a letter informing me that the crisis had passed, and that he was out of danger. This gave me much courage for the morning service, but during the afternoon the satisfaction cooled away, and I became despondent. A shadow fell over me, and I heaved a sigh in spite of testimony that he was not recovering but that he was dying. During evening service my spirits sank lower, and on returning home I felt utterly wretched. It was laid upon me that although I had engagements on Monday I should make haste and go up by the mid-night train to Glasgow. As the train climbed Shan in the breaking of the day, I said to myself how foolish is this thing, that, with the letter in my pocket saying that he is better, I should be hurrying to him as if he were dying. As I drove to his house I arranged what I should say, but it was not necessary to offer any explanation after I had seen the servant's face. She was weeping, and told me that he was then dying. I went upstairs and took his hand. He could not speak, but was pleased to see me, and I was with him when he entered into rest. They had wished to summon me, but the chance had taken place suddenly, beginning on the Sunday afternoon, and they considered that in the circumstances it would be impossible for me to come. But I had been summoned.

It was my duty one Sunday evening to preach in a church in the North End of Liverpool, and as is my custom, I had determined to preach again the sermon of the morning service, because, as a rule, the message is more living than that of some former day. Driving to the church and going over the subject in my mind, I found it had lost interest, and that even its reasoning was slipping away. On arriving at the church I had absolutely nothing to say, and I asked the minister to take the service, which I had intended to take, in order that I might recall some other discourse. No sooner had the service begun than a sermon of months ago began to rise in my memory and to take possession of my heart. The subject was more or less, "The Departed," and the point of the sermon was the comfort of faith to those who were left. When I rose to preach I felt the spiritual power which comes to a man who has a message, and I was thankful that my subject had been changed for me. In the vestry the minister remarked that no doubt there was some good reason for this other sermon, and that moment the reason entered the room. A minister who had lost a young wife to whom he was tenderly attached, and had fallen into a state of despair, read in a Manchester paper that I would preach that evening in Liverpool; so he came from Manchester, he hardly knew why—more in restlessness than anything else—and heard that sermon. When the text was given out he knew why he had come, and also that the word was intended for him. It