

FRAGMENTARY NOTES.

IRELAND—BELFAST, THE NORTHERN ATHENS.—PRESBYTERIANISM—SOME EMINENT PREACHERS.—(Continued.)

Leaving Greenock by steamer I had a pleasant sail to Belfast, and although the mayflowers were blooming in some places, when I arrived at five o'clock on a May morning the mountains were covered with snow.

Belfast has been called the "Northern Athens," and is the commercial capital of Ulster, and right well it deserves the name, for here the tall chimneys, the Lough covered with boats, the railway whistle and the massive waggons drawn by Clydesdale horses, at once indicate that this is a growing, thriving city.

It seems rather strange that until a few years ago Belfast was not called a "city," only a town. The authorities over there are not so liberal in bestowing the name "city" on mushroom towns as we are on this continent; for in some of our new places when the proverbial blacksmith's shop, tavern and postoffice are fairly under way, in many cases we call the new-born village a city. Belfast has grown rapidly, and the city is being extended on all sides. It has for years been the great centre of the linen manufacture, from which industry large fortunes have been realized in past years. A very large business is done in flax and flaxseed, the latter imported from Rotterdam and Riga, besides a little from England.

Irish farmers are well posted in the raising and handling of this delicate product; and the success or failure of the crop as a general rule decides the prospects for the year. Small farmers used generally to sow a peck of flaxseed for every pound sterling of rent they had to pay, and this part of the farm produce was generally devoted to the paying of the rent.

Shipbuilding has assumed colossal proportions in Belfast. Some of our very best ocean steamers are built by Harland & Wolff. Mr. Harland has been mayor of the city, was knighted by the Queen, and represents one of the "Divisions" of the city in Parliament. The ship carpenters of Belfast are an influential body, and have important political influence in elections. They are nearly all Conservative, and are members of the Orange Society, and any candidate who can secure their influence, other things being equal, would have fair prospects of success. The terms "Conservative" and "Liberal" used to be potent in Belfast, but of late years, since the Home Rule question began to be agitated, parties now are better known as "Unionists" and "Parnellites," or in England as "Gladstonians" or "Unionists."

For the present the Parnellites would seem to be disorganized without any hope of being soon drawn into line, and although the results of the coming general election are by no means certain for Salisbury, still his prospects have not been so good for the last five years. The passive and dignified position which he maintained during the Parnell and O'Shea excitement was worthy of a great statesman, and the Land Purchase Bill which has been carried through this session by Mr. Balfour should secure the Government the support of every Irish tenant farmer irrespective of creed or politics. There was a danger that the Bill might be so altered in the House of Lords that its effects would have been destroyed, but the Chief Secretary made it no secret that he wanted the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill, and should Mr. Balfour never introduce another important measure, this Land Purchase Bill will bring him enduring fame. It is among the greatest Irish measures passed since the Emancipation Act was carried.

Mr. Balfour has shown an ability of statesmanship altogether uncommon in a young man hitherto unknown to fame. At present there is no just cause for discontent in Ireland. The land laws are as good, if not better, than in any other country, and the taxes are lower than in either Scotland or England.

RELIGIOUS QUESTIONS

seem to be the disturbing elements. Roman Catholicism largely predominates, and of course wishes to control the educational interests of the country, and what is highly reasonable, the other denominations will not consent to this. The priests at present are casting Parnell aside and standing up for the Church.

Home Rule will no doubt be the cry at the next election, but the Protestants will generally stand by the Unionist Party. Presbyterians are Unionists almost to a man, and it is said there are only two or three Episcopalian clergymen Home Rulers. The next election will probably seal the fate of the Home Rule Party.

There are now no real grievances to be redressed more than the ordinary problems which trouble every country and which ordinary legislation is fitted to meet.

The liquor traffic, Sabbath observance, the education question and such like require the immediate attention of the Government. The settlement of these questions will be jealously watched by the Protestants of Ireland.

In view of an early vacancy in Belfast the Presbyterians have arranged to run a Presbyterian candidate irrespective of politics, as they think our denomination has not nearly the number of representatives in Parliament to which our numbers, wealth and intelligence entitle us.

Mr. Henderson, a Conservative, has been nominated, and is likely to command the suffrages of a majority of the electors. He is managing editor of the Belfast News Letter, the most influential paper in the north of Ireland. Mr. Wolff, of Harland & Wolff, is talked of as a candidate. Sir Edward

Harland at present represents one of the divisions of Belfast in the Conservative interest.

Sir Edward is a Unitarian, and Mr. Wolff hardly professes connection with any Church, so that under the circumstances Mr. Henderson's election is pretty safe.

In the past years Presbyterians have been content to be hewers of wood and drawers of water to a dominant Church, but they are waking up and exhibiting a strength which will strike terror to their enemies. There can be no reasonable objection to the candidature of Mr. Henderson except that he is a Presbyterian, which is the very reason why he should be elected by an overwhelming majority.

Presbyterians are arranging to contest a number of seats at the next general election, and if they only be true to the venerable and historic Church of which they are members and to each other, they can easily double the number of their representatives in the House of Commons.

I was much pleased to meet the Rev. Samuel Houston and Mrs. Houston, of Kingston, who were on a well-earned holiday. Mr. Houston when I met him was enjoying himself among his Belfast friends, who may be said to be legion. He was looking forward with much pleasure to the meeting of the General Assembly, to which he was a deputy. Unfortunately Mr. Houston was seized with typhoid fever, which laid him aside. He has many friends in the Irish Church; he keeps himself posted on Irish affairs, especially the history and particulars of Irish Presbyterian ministers. He is known to be a man of extensive and accurate information. He was educated at Queen's College and Presbyterian College, Belfast, and McGee College, Derry, where he had in the latter institution such instructors as Drs. Witherow and Croskery, whose writings are so well known on this side of the water. He was a prize man at college and led in a number of the classes. When he left college in response to a call he came to Canada to engage in ministerial work. Those who knew him intimately were in the habit of saying that his studies were only commencing. As a preacher he is fresh, thoughtful and instructive, always giving a connected view of the passage of Scripture under consideration. He is an unflinching advocate of Presbyterian doctrine, and will never be found among those who for popularity or other causes ignore the work of the atonement or the office of the Holy Spirit.

I hope that before this appears in print Mr. and Mrs. Houston, to whom their congregation owes so much, will be safe back in Kingston. Mr. Houston received his M.A. from Queen's College (now Royal University), Belfast.

Toronto.

K.

MISSIONARY TACTICS IN JERUSALEM.

MR. EDITOR,—In your issue of May 29 you published a letter under the above heading from the "Official Reporter of the C. O."

Your readers must be wondering who that unheard of, extraordinary personage or corporation "the C. O.," and who that singular "Official Reporter of the C. O." can be, and as I happen to know something of both, permit me to satisfy their legitimate curiosity, particularly as you have allowed my name and mission work to be introduced and discussed in your columns by "the C. O. Official Reporter."

Let me premise that I simply narrate concisely the statements made to me and to others in this city of Jerusalem by "the official reporter of the C. O."

And first, the "Official Reporter of the C. O." is, he says, "the forerunner"—a species of John the Baptist—of one whose advent in Jerusalem he predicts for the middle of this very month of June; so we have not long to wait; whom he had known for seventeen years; who works miracles—it is not stated where, but presumably in England; and who is to work miracles here, first by resuscitating Dean Stanley—whether here or in England is not specified; and, second, by invading people's private rooms at all hours of the day or night, passing through closed doors and thick walls, and so forth. He is not Christ Himself, but he who sits, or is to sit, at His right hand on His second appearing, and when He sits on His throne to judge the quick and the dead. The newcomer is to be recognized by wearing a common red cotton handkerchief round his neck, like his "forerunner."

Second, the "forerunner" has unmistakable signs of identity, for he has unfortunately a club foot, which excites pity; but yet he says he came all the way from Port Said on foot, with only four penny loaves for the way, which also inclines people to pity him and to ask him to their table, as I did once; but then it is only stupid Arabs who don't traduce those with whom they have eaten bread and salt.

The "forerunner" says the "C. O." are a small sect of "Christ Obeyers," who give all they have to the poor, according to Matthew xix. 21, and that is impliedly made to account for his shabby clothes, etc. He has been here fully three months, he says, as "investigator and judge of missionaries and their work in order to report to 'the C. O.'" As his letter in your columns proves, he condemns St. Paul for saying: "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel" (1 Cor. i. 17), and eulogizes schools and hospital work above all preaching. I hope, then, that when this mission opens schools and begins medical work, he will condescendingly smile on them also!

His theology, at first plausibly of an enquiring nature, becomes in the end highly, peculiarly dogmatic, for instance actually he claims to be loved and to be told so, because he says he is an enemy.

The "forerunner" has all the airs of a schoolmaster, probably a disappointed one, seeking to ingratiate himself for some such occupation; thereby illustrating the old adage, "There is nothing like leather."

He has at all events accomplished a marvellous feat on paper; he has endowed some labourers here with Pentecostal polyglot powers!

It were mockery to congratulate my friends of the London Society for Jews on their new champion and advocate. I am, sir, yours truly,

A. BEN-OLIEL.

Jerusalem.

VACANCIES.

MR. EDITOR,—There appeared recently in your columns the Interim Probationer's Scheme, which was passed at last Assembly, and probably it is as good a one as we shall get for years to come. Assuming this, I want to say very emphatically that the scheme must fail to a large extent in its aim unless congregations give up a custom which has obtained wide currency of late years, viz., that of arranging a long list of names, giving only one Sabbath to each man. What is the result very often? It falls to the lot of one of the very best to be there on a wet Sunday, or when roads are at their worst, or when some of the leading men are from home, and of course this man cannot be called, for one-fourth or more of the congregation never heard him.

Or, he may select subjects for that one day not best fitted to captivate people on the spot, though quite capable of doing so.

Or, his misfortune may be that day to have a severe cold or some other disability, and his case is disposed of (adversely) in these circumstances.

Then it is well known that some men have the knack of appearing to much better advantage for a single day than they would if heard several times, while many of the best men must be heard frequently to be appreciated at their real value.

In view of all this how amazingly unwise for congregations to plan to hear one or two dozen men only one Sunday each and expect to form, instantaneously, an accurate opinion of the fitness or otherwise of each man for that charge!

Instead of hearing twenty-five men, one Sabbath each, and pass over the very best of them, how much better to select say three or four names, and give to each man not less than two Sundays, and the result would be in very many cases that out of the first five heard, or perhaps before they were all heard, a pastor would be selected who possessed precisely the qualifications needed for that particular place.

Were this done, and due promptness exercised in taking the mind of the congregation at brief intervals, such misfortunes would be few and far between as vacancies having a widowhood of six months, twelve months, aye, twice twelve with all the manifold evils that usually accompany and follow.

OBSERVER.

THE PRACTICALNESS OF DOCTRINE.

It is unfortunate that there should be a growing antipathy against doctrinal preaching. It denotes a certain degree of ignorance as to the real meaning and nature of doctrine. The fact is, doctrine, considered in its general aspects, is a very practical thing. It is quite probable that many people are prejudiced against doctrine for the reason that they mistake theory of doctrine for doctrine itself. There are many theories of doctrine, but they may have no vital and essential relation to doctrine itself, and often they do not have. Take the doctrine of repentance. It is intensely practical. But there are various theories of this doctrine, some of which at least are not at all practical. They are mere unpractical theories, having no value and are mischievous. Then there is the doctrine of regeneration. This, too, is very practical, for it relates to a work done by God, on certain conditions to be complied with by the sinner. But there are several theories about this doctrine which are impracticable. Yet the real and true doctrine itself is vitally and exceedingly practical, with reference to a compliance with its terms, and especially with regard to its issues. The proof of one's regeneration is to be found, not in a theoretical profession of the fact, but in the active doing of those things that are in harmony with the fact that God has changed the heart and given it a new life and pure impulses. The doctrine of regeneration is, that God, upon condition that a person repents of his sins and believes on Christ, works a radical and transforming change in his heart, and that this is evidenced by bringing forth fruits which correspond with the nature of such a work and change. And so we might go on to enumerate other doctrines of the Bible and show that there is more or less of practicalness in them. And it is easy to show also that all true Christian practice has its foundation and roots in some form of Christian doctrine, and that it is only as one is well indoctrinated that he can be practical in the right lines and most efficient manner.—C. H. Wetherbe.