

Our Contributors.

CONCERNING SHORT OATS.

BY KNOXONIAN.

The season for growth is nearly over for this year. Grain that did not grow during the past few months cannot grow at all. It has missed its opportunity. It had only one, and that one will never return. In two or three localities in Ontario the opportunity was not a good one. There was not enough of rain, and those people who have a squint towards Agnosticism say that the clergy were to blame because they did not bring down the rain. Be that as it may, the oats are short in several localities, and the reason is because they did not grow at the right time.

There is a time for mental growth in the life of every man, and if he does not grow during that time, the chances are about a million to one that, like the oat crop of 1888, he must remain short. Of course we mean mentally short. Hugh Miller said that one of his neighbours was always a profound mystery to him. The mysterious thing about him was that he had walked this earth for fifty years without picking up a single idea. A man who lives fifty years without picking up an idea, will never pick up one. The season for mental growth begins in early life. It may continue long after fifty, but if it does, it must begin long before fifty. There need be no dead line of fifty in the life of a preacher or any other man. If one begins in time to cultivate his mind and keeps up the cultivation vigorously, there is no reason why, with ordinary health, there may not be good mental growth between sixty and seventy.

There is time for the moral and spiritual growth in the life of every man. Spiritual growth, like mental, must begin early if it is to make much progress. A man converted at fifty or sixty usually needs all the remainder of his life to do the negative work of getting over his bad habits. There is little time left for positive work. We have no right to set limits to the power of the Spirit. A sinner may be converted at any age. But the fact remains that the most useful Christians, as a rule, begin the Christian life early. There is a summer time for spiritual growth, as well as for natural growth, and if the growth does not take place in the summer of life, it rarely takes place in autumn.

The best time for a minister to give his mental growth a good start is the first ten years after he finishes his college course. As a rule, the battle is lost or won during these years. The idea that the best time for mental growth is during the college course is a huge delusion. You might as well say that the best time for digestion is while one is eating his dinner. Some people, not particularly cynical, would say that *bolting* in this connection is a better word than eating. The most that any professor can do in a few months is to show students the work, give them a few hints about using their tools and apply some motive power.

The motive power is, perhaps, the most important part of the work. The professor who can give his student such a push in the direction of mental growth that the young man will feel the power of the push for ten years after he leaves college is the right kind of a professor. To some students it would be easy to give a push of that kind; others need the power of a steam engine.

The critical time with most ministers, so far as mental growth is concerned, is the first few years after settlement. If a young minister relies mainly during these years on what he has learned at college, nineteen times out of a hundred he will not long know even what he did learn at college. If he uses his college course as a mere starting point and goes right on with independent study, other things being nearly equal, his success is fairly certain in any Church not infested with clerical wire-pullers. The trouble is that many young ministers in this country are often placed in positions in which generous study is exceedingly difficult, and, in some cases, absolutely impossible. One cannot read books if one has no money to buy them. Astronomy may be studied when driving on moonlight nights between stations, but astronomy is only one branch of knowledge. It is difficult to read theology deeply and at the same time hunt up the dishes for a tea meeting. Collecting one's salary may greatly strengthen one's belief in the doctrine of human depravity, but human depravity is only one point. There may be, as Shake-

spere observes, sermons in stones, but a long drive over a stony road is far more likely to knock the sermon out of a man than put one into him. Poverty may be a great blessing for those who like it, but its power as a generous educator of ministers has been tremendously overrated. Dividing the last dollar between the baker and the butcher never helps a minister mightily in dividing texts.

There is a time for growth in business. A man starts out in some line and after a time, when he looks back, he finds the start was a good one. Then comes the critical moment. If he goes too fast he may go on the rocks, but if he tries to stand still he is sure to go back. Clever business men tell us there is always a point somewhere, and if you strike out at that point you are almost sure to be right. If you miss the point once you may never get another chance.

In fact, growth at a certain time seems to be indispensable to success in everything. If growth does not begin at the right time it may never begin. If a boy does not grow an inch in height between twelve and twenty all the power on earth cannot make him a tall young man.

Moral: Grow mentally, morally and spiritually at the right time, or you may be as short as part of Ontario oat crop of 1888.

CLERICAL GLEANINGS.

BY REV. JAMES HASTIE, CORNWALL.

BREAKERS AHEAD.

Your minister is called, installed, welcomed to your sanctuary and your homes, settled in his parsonage, and ready to go about the work to which you have summoned him. It is quite worth while for you to pause for a moment on the threshold of this pastorate, and think it all over and make up your mind what you are going to do about it. It is quite safe to say that the pleasantness, the fruitfulness and the permanency of this relation depends on you quite as much as on him.

The thoughtful observer finds much that is curious in the rise, decline, and fall of the pastorates in many of our Protestant Churches. If Agur, the son of Jakeh, had lived in our day, he would have added, I am sure, to the four things too wonderful for him, his fifth one, viz.: The way of a Church with a minister very often. It is one of the things that no philosopher ever can find out. What produces the violent likings and the violent dislikes, and the violent changes from liking to disgust with which some Churches are affected in their relation to their ministers? One sees but little reason oftentimes for the antipathy with which the relation ended, or even for the idolatry with which it began, and wonders which was the greater illusion.

The critical period of any pastorate is apt to set in about the close of the second year. At first, all goes on swimmingly. The new voice in the pulpit, the new ways of putting things, the new mental habit and equipment, the new method of work awaken the attention and engage the interest of the people. In some respects the new pastor is an improvement on his predecessor, and the people are inclined to make the most of these superiorities; he is found to be so good that they idolize him, attributing to him powers and perfections that he does not possess. By and by the glamour vanishes, and the man begins to appear in his true character. He has his defects as well as superiorities; his aridities as well as freshnesses; his foibles as well as his virtues. He is not perfect. He does not possess some of the good qualities he was imagined to possess. It begins to be suspected by some that their doll is stuffed with sawdust. By a natural reaction the over-estimate is followed by an under-estimate; and this is quite likely to break out about the end of the second year, though the period of incubation is sometimes longer and sometimes shorter.

Like that philosophical old lady who had observed that when she lived through March she always lived all the rest of the year, I have noticed that if a pastor gets through his second year and well on into his third year, without any serious alienations or disturbances in his parish, he is likely to have smooth sailing for some time to come.

The roots of bitterness that cause the final disruption of the pastorate, are likely to spring up in the period of disillusion that succeeds first love.

Let me, therefore, hang up this precautionary signal. Do not overestimate your pastor at the beginning, and then you will not be so likely to underestimate him a little further on. He is probably a little less perfect than some of you think him now; he is probably a little nearer perfect than some of you will think him by and by.

Scale down your enchantment, and discount your disappointment. "Ephraim," said the prophet, "is a cake not turned"—raw on the one side, scorched on the other. Let your affection for your pastor shun these perilous extremes.

Finally, if there be any thoughts of kindness in your heart toward your pastor, or any purpose of helping him, do not delay too long shaping them in word and deed.

How many pastorates there are whose graves are covered with the costliest and sweetest flowers! How often the minister staggers on year after year under a burden too heavy for him, spending his strength for his people, wishing that they would lighten his load a little, yet feeling that when he makes the heaviest sacrifices they regard him as an unprofitable servant, who is only doing what it is his duty to do, till at length the burden becomes unsupportable, and he lays it down. Then the appreciation that he has needed all along begins to find expression—then, when it is too late.

I have sometimes thought at funerals that if half of the kind things that are said of the departed while the crape flutters on the bell-knob, had been said to him while he was yet in the flesh, he might have lived many years longer. And, in like manner, if the grateful words, tearful tributes, and generous proffers with which the resignation of the pastoral office is often greeted, had been distributed over the previous years, the resignation would not have been written.

TWO TRAVEL PAPERS.

FROM CALAIS TO ROME—AIX-LES-BAINS.

BY MARGARET COMRIE.

The voyage was over, and Calais was reached. We lived—i. e. our friends assured us of the fact; we shall live, they further declared—much to our unbelief and indignation.

With countenances of that exquisitely delicate tint so characteristic of a young beech tree in June, we sank down helplessly on the *douane* table, in the midst of a noise worse than that which overpowered the Tower-of-Babel masons some years ago. Without a touch of compassion in his black eyes, and with an extra shrillness in his tones, a French official approached, voraciously and gesticulating; but, finding all his efforts fail, for we neither understood nor moved, nor gave up our keys, the ruffian uttered a piercing shriek of bad English *ancez tobac, mees?* This was the last straw to the day's burden. Probably, had we been as accustomed then, as we afterwards became to the sight of a Russian lady smoking her cigar in the garden of an Italian *pension*, we should not have felt so depressed by the personal suspicions of this unfeeling Frenchman! Propelled into a Paris carriage by the efforts of our party, we relapsed into a state of gloom, inanition and repugnance to food, a condition most gratifying to the rest of the company, who were of opinion that breakfast had not proved as sustaining as usual that day, and whose fears had grown wolfish with regard to the number of sandwiches in the lunch baskets. Our gloom and despair continued until we reached the south of France, where the sunshine had a marvellous effect in changing the aspect of affairs. Reviving wonderfully under its genial influence, we arrived at Aix-les-Bains, on the shores of Lake Bourget, in Savoy—the quaintest little French town you can imagine.

Necessity, in the shape of health, compelled a stoppage here of a few weeks, which, although eager to press on to Rome, we did not find reason to regret. The weather was charming, the vintage was at hand, and furthermore we soon discovered that, at Aix, we were not so far from Rome and the Romans as we had believed. On the morning after our arrival we walked up the narrow village street to the market place, where, right in the centre of the large open square, we found a massive Roman triumphal arch. There it stood with the venerableness of 1,500 years upon it, and looking as if it meant to stand for 1,500 years more. How came the Romans to be