

Our Contributors.

WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE IN MEETINGS?

BY KNOXONIAN.

We mean of course meetings of the same or similar bodies. You attend a Presbytery meeting, and everything goes off well. Business is put through in good time, the members are in good humour, everybody takes part and contributes his quota to the pleasant result, and everybody goes home well pleased.

You attend another meeting in the same place and composed mainly of the same members, but it is as different as possible. Business drags. Everybody seems out of sorts. Everything seems taken by the wrong end. The court strikes a snag every five or ten minutes. There is little done, and that little is not done well. You go home thankful that Presbytery meetings come only once in two or three months, sorrowful because you worse than lost a day on which you might have read a book, or written a sermon, or visited a dozen families, and wondering whether there is not some better way of managing Church business than by Presbyteries.

Now what made the difference between these two meetings? It is perhaps impossible to name *all* the factors that make the difference in any given case. Can you name all the points of difference between a pleasant and an unpleasant man and account for them in a philosophic way? Can you say exactly why most people are much more pleasant at some times than at other times? It is easy to say that they are in a different *mood*. That is simply stating a fact, not giving an explanation. May it not be that meetings have moods just as well as men?

It may be well to say here that we are now viewing meetings from a purely human standpoint. The influence of a higher power over bodies of men is not the matter to be discussed at present.

Everybody knows that between meetings of the same Session, or the same Presbytery, or the same Synod, or the same committee, or the same anything. There is often a world of difference. The meetings of the General Assembly could easily be classified according to their tone. Once upon a time we left one before it closed, inwardly resolving that it was our last. In the lobby we ran against two or three members who were taking up their grip-sacks and muttering about that being enough for them. At the station we met one of the most prominent and influential members of the court, and he was out of sorts too. He said the meeting was the grimest thing he had ever seen. It was "grind, grind, rasp, rasp, rasp," all the way through. Some meetings of Assembly are a tonic while you attend and a pleasant memory for the rest of your life. The same is true of Synod meetings, in fact of meetings of every kind. In our day and in our Church no small part of the time of an active Church worker is spent at meetings of one kind and another, and it is therefore a matter of no small importance that meetings should be made as pleasant and useful as possible. If we *must* spend part of our lives in that way, and it seems as though we must, we should aim at spending that part as well as circumstances permit. We make but one journey through life, and if we have to stop every day or two and attend a meeting of some kind, it is a matter of some importance that the meetings should be good ones.

What are some of the factors that seem to make meetings pleasant and useful or mar them?

The surroundings have much to do with the problem. A nice room, comfortable seats, good light, proper temperature, and, above all things, pure air, help a meeting mightily. Did you ever notice how irritable most men get when they have sat for a few hours in a badly-ventilated room? The irritation is caused mainly by breathing air three or four times that their Maker intended to be used only once. For the last two hours they have been defiantly breaking one of God's natural laws. They may have prayed for grace to help them to keep their tempers, but they had no business to do that without letting in some pure air. Their prayer was fanaticism as long as they kept the windows down. If people must spend a considerable part of their lives at meetings, it is a matter of prime importance that meetings of all kinds be held in as comfortable and healthful a place as possible. Economy at the expense of health is often the worst kind of extravagance. A little elegance added to the healthfulness and comfort of a room is not a bad thing.

The people who make up a meeting are not nearly as important a factor as the *mood* they happen to be in. The same people sometimes make a very pleasant and sometimes a very unpleasant meeting. Much more depends on mood than on personality. A good deal depends on the chairman and secretary, and a good deal more on the temper of those who take a prominent part in the business. If the people who are speaking and moving and seconding are irritable, or angry, or ugly in any way, the meeting is almost sure to go wrong. On the other hand, if the principal actors are wise and conciliatory, and can keep themselves under control, any ordinary meeting is sure to go right. The British practice of putting in an occasional hearty laugh at meetings that are not devotional helps immensely to relieve tension and make a meeting run smoothly. The strained, anxious, half-irritated atmosphere that pervades most Canadian ecclesi-

astical meetings forbids the British style. Our friends across the ocean do not worry and strain half as much as we do, but they get on with their work quite as well. They don't need to be everlastingly standing with a club grimly defending "the dignity of this court." The dignity is old enough to take care of itself.

The nature of the business to be transacted has much to do with the pleasantness or the reverse of a meeting. Important questions are nearly always handled pleasantly, partly because large questions are mainly discussed by large men who have learned to control themselves and respect the rights and feelings of others. Little, nagging, irritating, half-personal issues are always the worst, politics and popery of course always excepted.

Some people take a particular delight in raising questions at meetings that are likely to turn the meeting into a bear-garden. Stern duty may sometimes require service of that kind, but for once that it is done at the call of duty it is probably done ten times at the call of something else.

A few men with voluble tongues, brassy cheeks and unenlightened consciences can spoil any meeting. The most unreasonable despot on earth is the man with an unenlightened conscience.

A few vain, ambitious men who use a meeting simply as a pedestal to exhibit themselves on are sure to spoil it if the sensible portion do not put an end to the exhibition. Time's up.

DIOTREPHESES.

BY WARFLECK.

PART I.

Dr. William Smith's Bible Dictionary, probably the best extant, has this brief article on Diotrephe: "A Christian mentioned in 3 John ix., but of whom nothing is known." Nothing known of this man? Why here is his portrait at full length; here is his history in a nutshell. Word-painting resembles profile drawing. An artist like Bengough only needs to dash off half a dozen lines with a bit of chalk or crayon, and an audience will exclaim: "That's Sir John Macdonald!" or "That's Mr. Blake!" or "That's some well-known local celebrity." So the pen of inspiration, in half a dozen words, gives the character and history of old-time saints and sinners. Nothing known of this man? There is enough known about him to consign him to everlasting infamy. So much that he has hung in irons for more than eighteen centuries, and stands to-day as the prototype of the greatest disturbers of the Church and the world in the age that is passing over us!

Let us briefly note what we know about this man. First, he loved to "have the pre-eminence"; in other words, he loved to be first. Well, what harm is there in that? There is a love of being first which is of the very essence of a laudable and worthy ambition. First at the post of duty, first in skill and excellence, first in all manner of noble achievement. But such things as these were foreign to this man's nature. He loved to be first in honour and power, in place and distinction. If even an apostle stood in his way he must be swept aside. His ambition was like the car of Juggernaut, bound to roll on to its destination, no matter who was crushed in its onward progress.

Second, we not only know what was the controlling aim and motive of this man's life, but we know how he acted. See verse ten. The Apostle John was, in some respects, the most eminent of the apostolic band. Christ had a very special regard for him, based not on mere favouritism, but upon the substantial excellence of his character. This man, however, had no perception either of the virtues or the claims of others. Enough that the Apostle John was in his way, he must "step down and out," no matter what means are necessary to get rid of him. "Prating with malicious words" against so good and exemplary a fellow-saint as John: what a revelation this is of the man's character! It raises the doubt, whether, in the true sense of the term, he was a Christian at all. One may be a Christian and speak hastily, thoughtlessly, foolishly, but to "prate with malicious words," how can a man or woman do that, and yet be a Christian? Surely only on the principle of a certain definition of a Christian said to have been given by one of the old divines: "A person with a little grace and a great deal of devil." We must accept this definition as in some sense correct, or extinguish at one fell swoop, the claims of all who are like Diotrephe, and there are indeed many of them. "Prating with malicious words," what more common disturbance than this of the Church's peace, what worse hindrance to its prosperity and usefulness?

Let us now consider for a little the teachings of reason and Scripture about this love of being first. Mankind, irrespective of the precepts of religion, profess to believe in the duty of modesty. It is theologically held to be a virtuous and beautiful thing for people to be modest, to entertain humble views of themselves, to be of a retiring disposition, and instead of rushing to the most distinguished places of honour, to be content with less conspicuous positions. Especially is this virtue of modesty professedly regarded as peculiarly appropriate for young persons, and ornamental to them. I am speaking now of the theological side of life, for it must be owned that this kind of adornment has very much gone out of fashion.

When we come to Bible teaching on this subject, we find Christian obligation set forth in such passages as these: "In honour, preferring one another"; "In lowliness of mind let

each esteem others better than themselves"; "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder, yea, all of you, be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." When Jesus was on earth, disputes arose among His disciples who should be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. On one of these occasions, Jesus took a little child and set him in the midst of them and said, "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." Once the mother of Zebedee's children came to Christ asking for her two sons that one might sit on their Lord's right hand and the other on His left in His kingdom. How impressively He rebuked this desire to be first, on that occasion. "Can ye drink of the cup I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? They say unto Him we can." He replied: "Ye shall indeed drink of My cup, and be baptized with My baptism, but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but shall be given to those whom it is prepared of My Father." Honours in the kingdom of heaven are distributed on changeless principles of eternal rectitude. There is no favouritism or partiality shown in that Divine realm.

In the light of these passages and others that might be cited, we see plainly that Diotrephe, whatever he might have been in other respects, was in this feature of his character, the very antipodes of the Bible ideal of a Christian. He was "carnal" and "walked as men." His, in this particular, was the spirit of the natural, the unrenewed man. He was exemplifying one of the worst features of human depravity. How thoroughly opposite was his spirit to that of the Lord Jesus, "who, though He was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant. Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross." From that scene of self-sacrifice, humiliation, and suffering, amid which Jesus cried, "It is finished," and gave up the ghost, there issues a voice to all those who call Him Master and Lord: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

It may be well for us to pause here and look around us at the many displays to be seen of that love of pre-eminence which gave Diotrephe his bad distinction in the olden time. What trouble is thus caused in the family, husbands and wives contending for supremacy; brothers and sisters trying to get the upper hand of each other; relatives and neighbours moving heaven and earth to outrival one another. The desire to be first, what endless disturbance and strife grow out of it.

It is the same in communities: people trying to get ahead of each other in houses, furniture, equipage and style of living generally. What neighbourhood quarrels, what petty jealousies and even serious contentions, are engendered by this spirit.

In the scramble for municipal honours and places, we behold the same evil disposition showing itself. Often, when there is no pecuniary gain to be made, men move heaven and earth to get some little paltry office. It is simply a craze to be first which influences them.

The unscrupulous rivalry of business men is generally for the purpose of making money, but often it is prompted by the Diotrephean spirit. Firms or individuals aspire to be the "leading house" in a particular line, and often advertise themselves to be such when all they proclaim to the public is the fact that they covet the distinction of being first. What a disgrace to our civilization, not to say to our Christianity, are some of the advertisements that disfigure our newspapers. Palpable falsehoods are printed in huge letters, and many merchants literally "glory in their shame."

This craze to be first, to get and keep the upper hand, is the great blemish and curse of our politics. Party is, to a great extent, not so much representative of principles as of a determination and effort to get and keep office and power. The most ingenious devices, the most disreputable trickeries, are practised with this end in view. All arts are considered justifiable to accomplish party objects. Slander and detraction of others, the very weapons wielded by Diotrephe of old, are made use of to pull down rivals, and exalt "WE, US, and CO." This makes really good men averse to politics. No wonder. He who goes into the political arena, puts his character in jeopardy. His real faults are exaggerated, and fictitious ones are invented, to bring him into disrepute. What devils incarnate our leading politicians are if we credit their stories about one another! "Prating with malicious words" is the mode of warfare pursued, now as anciently. The Gospel of peace and good will is ignored in politics. There we are the veriest heathen, nay, worse; the enginery of hell is brought into play to demolish the citadel of the opposing party. No pencil, though dipped in the gloom of the pit, is black enough to depict the injurious results of following this man's mischievous example.

But we have more particularly to do with the Church. Here, too, the spirit of Diotrephe largely prevails. The strife is not so much to be holiest and best as to be greatest and first. What rivalry there often is, to be the leading man, the leading woman, or the leading family in a not overly numerous band of professed disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus. In how many cases, is there some one man, who, like Diotrephe, loves to be first in a church, and is bound to be, whatever happens, or whoever objects, and regardless of all consequences. He sits on the ecclesiastical throne, and nothing dare be done but what is according to his direction.