

Our Contributors.

HAS THE MACHINE BROKEN DOWN.

BY KNOXONIAN

One of the most useful papers at the recent meeting of the Presbyterian Council was that read by Dr. Munro Gibson on the weak and strong points of Presbyterian polity. The Doctor began by saying that as they were all friends he would lay out his strength on the weakness. Had he been addressing an audience of Episcopalians or Methodists no doubt he would have put the strong points of his church before them in the most attractive style imaginable. Dr. Gibson is a strong man, one of the strongest all-round ministers in London; he is an honest man and being both strong and honest he could afford to deal candidly with the weak points of the denomination to which he belongs. The old weakling yell, "He's runnin' down the church," or "he's praisin' the Piscopals," or "the Methodists," has no terrors for Dr. Gibson and should not have for anybody. The best friend of Presbyterianism is not the man who shows his love for his church by abusing other denominations, nor is he the man who refuses to see any weak points in his own church, nor yet the man who would rather see his own church suffer than adopt any good thing his neighbours may happen to have. The best friend of Presbyterianism is the man who can see the weak points in the polity of his church and suggest something to improve them. One man with a good suggestion for strengthening a weak point is worth several hundred who can do nothing better than talk about "the fathers."

Dr. Gibson, in common with most thoughtful, observant men, thinks that lack of proper supervision is one of the weakest points in the Presbyterian system. So impressed was he with the fact that he recommended the appointment of an official whose duty it would be to go around among the brethren, give them help and counsel, stimulate the congregations and tone up things generally. We are writing entirely from memory and have no means at this moment to verify our statements, but unless our memory is a long way behind its average, the foregoing is the substance of what the London Doctor said on the matter of supervision.

Of course, the Doctor did not say we should have a bishop. He is too much of a Scotchman and a U. P. to use that word, but he certainly did show that some kind of supervision is needed over and above that given by an average Presbytery. Is there a candid, intelligent Presbyterian in Ontario, not hopelessly wedded to old forms, or hopelessly prejudiced against any change, who does not feel the force of Dr. Gibson's position. Who has not seen violent ruptures of the pastoral tie that might have been prevented by timely counsel and help, who has not known ministers that might have been kept off the rocks by a few words from a wise, fatherly minister whose advice or admonition would be none the worse for having a background of official authority. Is there a congregation in the church that might not be improved by a few hints from the right kind of a man. Is there one that might not be toned up by a visit from a rousing preacher? The cool, though utterly groundless assumption, that the minister has nothing to learn and that congregations need no suggestions, is the tap-root of many a trouble.

What a scene there would be if anybody should propose in one of the higher church courts, the appointment of a supervising officer somewhat like a bishop. In the basement and lobbies there would be a general whisper that an office was being provided for somebody and the somebody would be named. There would be a deluge of indignant oratory about "interference with the constitutional rights of Presbyteries." The Presbyteries that regulate their meetings by the timetable of the local railway, that practically adjourns at train time, no matter what business remains to be done, that finish their business with a little group of two or three around the Moderator, that never visit a congregation

until its affairs have gone hopelessly wrong, these Presbyteries would, of course, lead off in the defence of their fundamental rights. Then there would be the usual speeches about "use and wont" and "ultra vires" and "incompetent" and all that sort of thing, and of course the proposal would be voted down.

There is always one feature in such cases that can never be explained. The men who need help most and whose congregations would be most benefitted by judicious supervision are usually the men who most violently oppose any change in the direction of improvement.

Supervision of the kind indicated by Dr. Gibson is of course out of the question in Canada, except in the large mission fields. The church would not have it, no matter how much good it might do.

What is the next best thing? Supervision of the right kind by the bishops we have. Why should not the Presbytery in a kindly, Christian way, say to each one of its members: "Brother, how are you getting on in this congregation of ours? How do they use you? Do they give you reasonable help? Are you reasonably comfortable? Is your work making reasonable progress? Any special difficulties or hindrances? Anything we can do to help you?" What pastor worthy of the name would object to a visitation of that kind.

Nor would any decent Presbyterian congregation object to a proper examination into its affairs by Presbyterian visitors in whom they had confidence. The fact is, that most of them would rather like it, and the less they liked it the more they would need it.

Would congregations insist on finding their own supply during vacancies if they and their Presbyteries were on better visiting terms. How did so many congregations, and some of the best ones too, learn to look upon the Presbytery somewhat in the light of a hostile body that they hear from only when there is something wrong or when money is needed. Good Presbyterians were never born with that sort of feeling. How does it come about that the business side of church work is almost the only one ever heard of in too many Presbyteries? Would not the business, the Lord's business, be better done if the spiritual side had more prominence.

Suggestions for changes in our system come from quarters that demand and must have attention. The suggestion of this corner is to put more industry and brains and conscience into the system we have.

NOTABLE CHRISTMAS DAYS.

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

When scanning the page of history one is surprised to find how large a number of notable events have transpired on Christmas day. Some of these have been quite in harmony with the day—a day which speaks of peace on earth, good-will to men; others again have been utterly at variance with it. We shall pass a number of both classes under review.

About the middle of the second century a sad Christmas day was witnessed by a number of Christians in the Catacombs of Rome. While they were there celebrating the festival of the Nativity, a command was given by that philosophic emperor, Marcus Aurelius, to slaughter them. The awful command was obeyed, and not a solitary Christian escaped.

On another Christmas day, about the close of the third century, a similar scene was witnessed in Nicomedia. On that occasion, Diocletian, the last of the Roman persecutors, was celebrating, as the heathen were wont to do, the December festivals. Hearing that a company of Christians of Nicomedia were assembled in a private house to worship God and to praise Him for the gift of His Son, the cruel emperor ordered his soldiers to surround the building, to set fire to it, and to take precautions to prevent the escape of any one. The dread decree was executed with too great fidelity, and that day added many names to a martyr-roll already too long.

Following on the course of Roman history we meet with a more peaceful scene when we reach the Christmas day of the year 360. On that day Liberius, Bishop of Rome, consecrated Marcella as a nun. It would seem as if

that were a time of great rejoicing, and that a great crowd had come to witness the ceremony, for as the Bishop addressed her he said, "Thou seest what great multitudes are come to the birth-festival of the Bridegroom."

Leaving the ecclesiastical history of Rome and turning to that of Ireland, we find a remarkable Christmas day referred to there. It was on that day, about the close of the fifth century, although the exact day cannot be ascertained, that Patrick, in the presence of a large company who had been brought into the church through his instrumentality, gave to the world his famous hymn, "Christ be with me."

What a glad Christmas that must have been at Rheims, in 496, when Clovis, king of the Franks, and 3,000 of his warriors were baptized in the grand old cathedral there! The motives of Clovis and his men in receiving the ordinance cannot be commended, but certainly nothing was left undone to make the scene a magnificent and impressive one. No wonder there was great rejoicing, for such a scene had never been witnessed there before and probably never will be again.

The twenty-fifth of December, in the year 800, is by far the best known Christmas of the middle ages. The people of modern Europe have seldom had the privilege of beholding such a scene as was presented on that memorable day. It was on that day that Charlemagne, the mighty conqueror, was crowned with great pomp and circumstance by Pope Leo, at Aix-la-Chapelle.

It is a very noteworthy fact that the first Norman king who reigned in England was crowned on a Christmas day. On the twenty-fifth of December, in the year 1066, William the Conqueror was crowned by Archbishop Ealdred in Westminster Abbey. The day was marked, however, not only by a coronation, but by a most egregious blunder. It seems that, though the English signified by shouts their assent to the ceremony which was then proceeding, their shouts were thought by the Normans to be those of derision. The outcome was that the Normans set fire to the buildings around the Abbey; the people rushed out to save their property; the ceremony was hastily concluded; the king was left almost alone at the place of coronation and general disorder prevailed. Thus the day which opened so brightly was soon shrouded in gloom and horror.

From a political stand-point the Christmas day of the year 1688 was the strangest that the English people ever witnessed. Two days previously, James II. had abdicated, and William III. had not yet reached England—indeed, had not yet been invited to come. Thus the English people were that day without a king. Of course, during the days of the Commonwealth they were in a similar case, but on this particular Christmas day there was no one who could be really looked upon as an administrator in the realm. May this peaceful anniversary come and go—yes, come and go times without number, before the English nation shall again pass through a similar experience!

Two very important events are connected with the Christmas of 1786, and it is also remarkable that they both relate to missions. It was on that day that William Carey, the great Baptist missionary, and Charles Grant, one of the founders of the Church Missionary Society, first formally set forth their views on the subject of Missions; and it was on that day also that Dr. Coke and his three companions landed at Antigua in the West Indies, for the purpose of prosecuting missionary operations there. Surely Dr. Coke and his friends must have regarded it as most significant that they, the messengers of the gospel of peace and good-will to men, should have reached the scene of their future labors on the day which commemorates the birth of the Prince of Peace!

A. MacLaren, D.D.: Every community of Christian people ought to radiate warmth and light which it has absorbed from its present God. Our love ought to answer His, and, being caught and kindled from that mighty fire, should throw back to its source some of the heat received, in fervors of reflected love, and should pour the rest beneficently on all around.

A WORD OF WARNING.

BY REV. J. A. MACDONALD, ST. THOMAS.

Your plain words about the Protestant Protective Association are hopeful and encouraging. The time has surely come for such a protest. Protestants who have read history with an open eye, who can measure modern movements, and who can distinguish between things that differ, are beginning to feel silence intolerable when it is taken to mean acquiescence. It is now more than a year since I learned of the organization and tactics of this association in western Ontario. At that time I warned my people that "the horns and hoof of a new popery had appeared over the doorstep of the Church of God." Further experience has only confirmed that judgment.

But I do not now write to expose the essential popery and inherent jesuitism of the P. P. A., or to protest against men whose loud-mouthed "Protestantism" far exceeds their practical Christianity being allowed to trade on the Protestant name. I would do a far more distasteful task. Taking a concrete example, I wish, if it is not already too late, to warn our ministers and people and such of the general public as may hear my warning, against one of the worst frauds, one of the most dangerous agents of political and social strife and moral corruption, that, whether as journalist or preacher, I have ever come in contact with. It is with extreme reluctance that I write a name so redolent of all moral rottenness as Margaret L. Shepherd. Were it not that she is taking advantage of the silence which such reluctance has secured, and were she not already notorious throughout the country, I would still be content with the warning given my own congregation in April last. But nothing can now give her notoriety, and she has so unsexed herself as to forfeit the protection which makes womanhood sacred.

It was in the early spring of the present year that she first visited St. Thomas, London, Woodstock and neighboring towns. So profitable did she find her enterprise that she worked it with enthusiasm and vigor. In each of these cities she reaped the benefit of a strong anti-Catholic feeling and made good use of the P. P. A. movement. At first she gave out that she had been a nun, and told suggestive stories of her bad birth and dissolute life. She found, as she finds everywhere, well-meaning but panicky Protestants who believed the stories, that would now be willingly forgotten, about priests' letters found in strange places, rifles and ammunition stored away in Catholic church cellars, and a general Protestant massacre arranged for the 27th of September last. These gave heed to her words and emptied their purses in response to her appeals. Some weak-minded men and women were fascinated, morally hypnotized, by her strong personality and smooth speech. Others followed her for filthy lucre's sake. Masculinity was given to her cause by those who found she could serve their turn and help them to municipal or parliamentary positions. And when it was whispered that her record is shady, another class, found in every city, gathered together like vultures to the carcass. These "lewd fellows of the baser sort" are always attracted by the brazen impudence of a woman who drives a coach-and-four through the seventh commandment and opens her meetings with prayer.

I have been tracing up this woman's course, and have followed her career in Ontario. Everywhere it is the same. Her work in America is of a piece with her work in Britain, so emphatically condemned by Mr. W. T. Stead, Mrs. Bellingham Booth, and other moral reformers. The evidence from New England, from Chicago, from Charlottetown, P.E.I., and from other points, substantiates the judgment formed of her work in Ontario. The testimony borne by some who know her life-history, and by others who were beguiled into her service and who speak from painful experience and intimate association, is simply appalling. It staggers belief. The details are horribly disgusting. I dare not publish some sentences from letters now before me, received recently from men and women whose names are a guarantee for truth and prudence. They are frightfully damning. It seems a startling