

Our Contributors.

THE ONE THING NEEDFUL

BY KNOXIAN.

Why is money so scarce at the headquarters of the Presbyterian Church in Canada? Why is it necessary to send so many circulars urging congregations to provide more money for colleges, missions and augmentation? Why are the men that the Church has put in charge of her work so hampered and hindered for want of funds? Why is it necessary to talk at almost every kind of a Church meeting about money?

There is only one reply, and that one covers the ground. There is not enough of vital godliness in the Church as a whole to do the work that the Church is trying to do. Talk until you are twice as old as Methusalem. A few people in most congregations do their duty, or, perhaps we should say, live up to their privileges, for giving to the Lord's work is a precious privilege, but a large number give almost nothing, and many give absolutely nothing. We said a few people in most congregations give liberally, but it is a sad fact that there are whole congregations that do almost nothing, and whole Presbyteries that have scarcely a liberal congregation within their bounds.

According to the tables of averages submitted by Dr. Torrance in his last report to the General Assembly, each member of the church gave to the schemes of the Church \$1.69, during the ecclesiastical year ending in April, '94. The year previous each member gave one cent more. Less than half a cent per day is the sum total of average giving for all the schemes of the church for the year that ended last April!

Why is the average so low? Because many give nothing at all. Why do so many give nothing at all? Because they are not sufficiently under the influence of the Holy Spirit, to be moved to give. That is the plain English of the whole matter. More spiritual life would bring more money. A revival of vital godliness would increase the contributions without any special effort on the part of those that the Church has commissioned to carry on work that cannot be done without money.

It may be urged that there has been depression in business for over a year, and that the funds have suffered in consequence. What are the facts? Some places have suffered from depression, while others have prospered, and, we venture to say, the places that suffered most have supplied the greater share of the funds. Toronto has, perhaps, suffered more than any other community, and, although we have not the figures before us, we venture to say that the Presbyterians of Toronto have not decreased their giving by one cent. The same is likely true of Montreal and other communities that have suffered from the depression in their pocket rather than in their imagination.

The price of wheat is low. It no doubt is, but the purchasing power of a bushel of wheat is as great now as it ever was. If wheat is low, almost every thing the man who raises wheat has to buy is correspondingly low.

The depression argument loses much of its force in the face of the fact that the average giving to the schemes was not much higher when there was no depression, real or imaginary. The highest average we can find was in 1890, when it rose to \$1.82, or about half a cent per member per day. How much better face does that put on the matter?

And, be it remembered, that these averages are a long way above the mark, so far as the membership is concerned. In every congregation there are adherents who give much more liberally than many of the communicants, and whose gifts bring down the average giving of the members much below the average given by Dr. Torrance.

Two Dominion cabinet ministers spoke at three meetings in Ontario last week. The burden of their speeches was that Canada is prosperous. The people cheered

them to the echo. How comes it that the country is always prosperous during an election campaign, and becomes suddenly depressed when money is wanted for church purposes?

There is only one effectual remedy for crippled church work and depleted church treasures. That remedy is more of the power of the Holy Ghost. Committees, however efficient, are only human, and, being human, cannot do much to move the hearts of men. Overtures cannot impart grace. Motions and amendments never converted a sinner nor revived a saint. Circulars, however urgent, cannot promote a genuine revival, especially when they get no farther than the waste basket. "Bring it up in the Presbytery" has not as much spiritual influence as many a Highlandman's grace before meat. The Presbytery may need revival quite as much as the people. The worst feature of the situation is that those who need life most are always the most opposed to the use of any means that might increase life. Their remedy is to brandish the ecclesiastical club in the faces of the people. Clubs never frighten dead men. Even a commission of Presbytery cannot do much work in a spiritual graveyard.

There is danger of a deficit in some of the funds next June. There is something worse than a deficit here now. A deficit in life is more dangerous than a deficit in dollars. Remove the deficit in life and the deficit in dollars will go itself.

SAIN'T FRANCIS OF ASSISI.— PART II.—Concluded.

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It was not until a man of Assisi threw in his lot with Francis that he conceived the idea of bringing together a few companions, who with him would carry on the Apostolic work. Many of all classes—nobles, merchants and peasants—joined him, and thus the Order of "Brothers Minor" was founded. The official Rule of the Order was the words Francis heard at Portinuncula, with the additions: "If any man will come after me let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me; for whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it," and, "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me." "Brethren," Saint Francis would add, "this is our life and our Rule, and that of all who join us; go then and do as you have heard." The real Rule was Francis, on whom all eyes were bent: the Brothers saw in him their visible Christ. "Imitate me," he could say with all humility, as Saint Paul did. The most complete humility and the most perfect confidence in his inspiration lived together within him. "Thou wishest to know why it is I whom men follow? Thou wishest to know? It is because the eyes of the Most High have willed it thus; . . . as His most holy eyes have not found among sinners any smaller man, nor any more insufficient and more sinful, therefore He has chosen me to accomplish the marvellous work which God has undertaken; He chose me because He could find no one more worthless, and He wished here to confound the nobility and grandeur, the strength, the beauty, and the learning of this world." "Infinitely lovely," his biographer says Francis was. He was past middle height and had much grace and delicacy of body, and a noble bearing. His voice was soft and sonorous, and his dark eyes were full of tenderness, though they could glow terrible with indignation. Often a look or a word would win him a disciple, such power had he.

Portinuncula was the headquarters of the Little Poor Men, and the forest around was their cloister. From this retreat they went forth through the surrounding country preaching, calling themselves God's Jugglers. They worked, ate and slept with

the peasants, sometimes meeting with insult and maltreatment, but oftener with kindness; and when asked who they were, they would answer simply, "we are penitents, natives of the city of Assisi." Francis had a vision of the greatness of his Order, and with it he would comfort his disciples when despondent: "I saw a multitude of men coming towards us, asking that they might receive the habit of our holy religion, and, lo, the sound of their footsteps still echoes in my ears. I saw them coming from every direction filling all the roads." The vision was a true one, and happily at the first vision of the corruption of his ideals and the disappointment of his hopes, consequent upon the rapid increase of the order, was hidden from him. Later on he saw all: "A time will come," he said bitterly, "when our order will so have lost all good renown that its members will be ashamed to show themselves by daylight."

Very beautiful and idyllic is the picture of the life of the Brothers at Portinuncula. They had a few rude huts, and for ten years this was their place of retirement for rest and spiritual refreshment. They were truly brethren, dwelling together in unity. His Round Table, Francis sometimes called them, and the poor board round which they sat, he loved to call *mensa Domini*. Again men saw the gospel of the Beatitudes; joy and perfection of character were to them identical. It was a laboring, not a mendicant order. Each brother worked at his own trade, taking for pay only the necessary food; for they were allowed to hold no property whatever, except their tools and clothes. When they were preaching they begged their food. There was nothing hard or ascetic in their devotion to poverty. Poverty was their bride, and they worshipped her as a true knight does his lady. Cheerfulness was a duty, or rather their spontaneous life; they were God's jugglers. They gave up all things that they might possess all things. With Francis as with Jesus avarice was the root evil. "Sell all thou hast and give to the poor," was his first command to the wealthy and noble who would follow him. It must be remembered that poverty was frequently then the result of wars and oppression, and was not so often as now accompanied by moral degradation. Saint Francis resisted to the last all attempts to change the rule in this respect, and as he began his apostolic life by the symbolic act described, so at the close of his life he caused himself to be divested of his clothing, and laid upon the ground in the arms of his Lady Poverty. But he only required this poverty of those who were devoted to the missionary life. Surely he followed the very word of his Master.

It is perhaps his intense love of nature which, as much as anything else, so endears the Saint to Ruskin. His love went out to every creature, and was as boundless as the universe. He felt kinship with everything. The sun, the wind, and fire were his brothers; the birds and the flowers were his sisters. "Brother birds," he cried to a flock that gathered fearlessly about him by the roadside, "you ought to praise and love your Creator very much. He has given you feathers for clothing, wings for flying, and all that is needful for you. . . ." "It is my turn to speak," he said to the swallows that drowned his voice with their chirping: "little sister swallows, hearken to the word of God; keep silent and be very quiet until I have finished." Every creature had a part in the divine purpose and was sacred. One day a leveret was brought to him. "Come to me, brother leveret," he said to it, and the creature, set free, ran to him for refuge, refusing its freedom.

They made no display of their fastings, and self-renunciation, and Saint Francis had the prophet's contempt for mere formal observances. "The sinner can fast," he would often say; "he can pray, weep, maccerate himself, but one thing he cannot do, he cannot be faithful to God." It is related of Brother Ginepro that, to escape an admiring crowd at Rome, he joined a group

of children playing at see-saw, and continued absorbed in his pastime until the crowd, disgusted, went away; and when Francis, owing to ill-health, was persuaded to indulge in a slight luxury, he would only do so openly that he might not appear more than he was. He had no desire to perform signs and wonders. Though he seemed to have possessed mysterious power, he never used his gifts to impress the multitude, or gain adherents. Brother Egidio even prayed for grace not to work miracles that he might keep his humility. It was the advance of spiritual pride among the Brothers that Francis most feared. "Little brother Francis," he delighted to call himself, and he was the servant of all. The Brothers went out as servants at first, and performed the most menial services amongst the poor and sick, and in private families. When it was proposed by Cardinal Ugolini, as a mode of reforming the Church, that bishops should be chosen from the Brothers Minor to replace the corrupt ones, the Poverello, alarmed, answered: "If my friars have been called *Minores* it is not that they may become *Majores*. If you desire that they become fruitful to the Church of God, leave them alone, and keep them in the estate into which God has called them." Most noble, even if mistaken, was his attitude towards the secular clergy. "I would first convert the prelates by humility and respect," he replied to one who complained of the hostility of the bishops: "for when they see us humble and respectful towards them, they themselves will beg us to preach and convert the people. As for me I ask of God no privilege unless it be that I may have none, to be full of respect for all men, and to convert them, as our Rule ordains, more by our example than by our speech."

The attitude of Saint Francis towards the Pope and the church was peculiar. Always protesting his filial obedience, and always believing in it himself, he yet believed his own inspiration to be higher than Pope or church, and resolutely and passionately asserted it when attempts were made to change his rule. All are familiar with the story of his journey to Rome, with the eleven brothers, for the Pope's approval of his order, and the cold reception he received. His enthusiasm and earnest assurances of fidelity to Rome in the end won a qualified approval from the representative of Christ; for Francis asked no privilege, but only permission to live the gospel life. There is no doubt of the Pope's warm admiration, but he feared the original and daring spirit of the twelve Umbrian apostles. They received the tonsure, and Rome absorbed them gradually into her life, until, in process of time, they became an ecclesiastical institution. After many nobles and learned men had joined the order, there was a strong party in favor of adopting some of the principles of the older orders, and this is what the papacy desired; but Francis despised learning as a source of pride, and clung to the simplicity of his rule. Once at a chapter-general of the order, Cardinal Ugolini gently suggested the adoption of a rule more suited to the changed conditions. Drawing the cardinal into the midst of the chapter, he said vehemently: "My brothers, the Lord has called me into the ways of simplicity and humility. In them he has shown me the truth for myself, and for those who desire to believe and follow me; do not then, come speaking of the Rule of St. Benedict, of St. Augustine, of St. Bernard, or of any other, but solely of that which God in His mercy has seen fit to show me, and of which He has told me that He would, by its means, make a new covenant with the world, and He does not will that we should have any other. But by your learning and your wisdom God will bring you to confusion." But the pressure of the new ideas proved too much for his failing strength. The spirit of the time was enthusiastically opposed to St. Francis; for it was the early period of the renaissance and men glorified learning. He yielded the government of his order to another. At his