

THE CRITIC'S CORNER. IV.

Dr. Robertson Nichol as a Statesman.

The British Weekly has been for the past year conducting a vigorous campaign against the new education bill, and we can quite believe that the action of this journal has strengthened the opposition to the bill and quickened the enthusiasm of Nonconformists. In this province where the education question is, if not quite satisfactory, at least free from bitter sectarian strife, we can sympathise with the difficulty that Nonconformists have to face in England. One thing is certain that if England is to keep up in the struggle for commercial supremacy popular education must be made more efficient; and the government of the day makes solemn profession that this is its aim in framing the present bill. Many educationists, both Liberal and Conservative, think that the present proposals may be made the basis for a more truly national system of popular education.

On the other hand many distinguished men maintain that ecclesiastical rather than educational interests have been considered in framing the bill. The result is a controversy of the most varied and violent kind. The British Weekly has been concentrating its force on one point namely "passive resistance;" that is its favours "A solemn league and covenant" of those who are prepared to promise that if the government proposals become law they will not pay the school rate. This is regarded by the supporters of the government as a threat of illegal warfare and unconstitutional resistance which ought to be disregarded in a dignified but firm fashion.

Nonconformists who are quite as intelligent and conscientious as Dr. Nichol doubt the wisdom of such a pledge; and some of those who will make the most telling opposition at the proper time will not bind themselves now, or join an organization which dictates the cause which ought to be left to each man's conscience. The British Weekly will no doubt render effective service in the course of religious freedom, but its proposals can scarcely be classed as statesmanship. The grievances of Nonconformists are real and important but they do not constitute the whole situation. As we have already pointed out many churchmen and conservatives would like to have the bill withdrawn, and more time taken to review all the facts of a very complex case. These people, however, feel that extreme violence on the part of some Nonconformist leaders only hampers them in their efforts to secure fair treatment. To talk of the "solemn league and covenant" in these days when every householder has a vote seems somewhat out of date. Mr. Balfour and Mr. Chamberlain only hold office so long as the people support them, and both Nonconformists and Clericals must appeal to the bar of public opinion. As for refusing to pay rates, it has been pointed out that two can play at that game. Mark, we are not ridiculing "passive resistance," it has done noble work; but we doubt the wisdom of making it the chief thing at this stage, and of making it assume the form of an organis-

ed conspiracy. In other words, while we sympathise with the British Weekly in its main contention, we doubt whether its handling of the whole question is proportionate and statesmanlike. Principal Fairbairn speaking recently in Glasgow concluded with three weighty points:

First, they demanded an honest, a thoroughly complete, and sincere representative system of education in England. Second, they wanted to offer the present bill a coherent and united opposition—they wanted to kill it; Third, but if it pass—when then? That will depend upon two things (a) the bill when framed (b) the conscience of the individual man. He himself would not allow any assembly to intermeddle with him in his sense of duty. He made pointed use of Dr. Brown, of Edinburgh, who refused to pay the annuity tax, but who would not allow his church by public vote to approve of his action. If it should become a law let them act so that it might cease to be law, and while doing so let them stand by the man with a conscience.

This we believe to be a strong position, bold and yet wise. We have hope that before long out of this controversy will come larger freedom and more efficient education; but we can see clearly that Nonconformists must manifest both wisdom and perseverance, as well as energy and enthusiasm.

AGED & INFIRM MINISTERS' FUND.

The special attention of ministers is called to the new regulations for the administration of the Aged and Infirm Ministers' Fund, which will be found on page 67 of the Minutes of Assembly of 1902. It will be observed from these, that the basis of the annual rate has been changed, and now depends upon the age of the minister at the date on which he connected himself with the Fund. These new regulations were adopted by last Assembly, and the rates require to be paid for the current year, by all ministers, according to the new regulation. Ministers are particularly requested to attend to this in forwarding their rate, and along with it, to state the date of their connection with the Fund, and the date of their birth.

DATE FIXED—ATTENTION!

The following sent to the DOMINION PRESBYTERIAN for publication explains itself, and Dr. Campbell so well places the subject before our readers as to render unnecessary a single word from us.

Statements have been sent to all Congregations having some balance yet due for Common Fund, with request that balances be secured, as far as that is possible, before DECEMBER 31st, 1902, that being the date set by the Assembly when all remittances are expected to be in the General Treasurer's hands. The aggregate of these balances is about \$43,000.00; but it is reasonable to expect that this amount shall be largely reduced before the year ends. No doubt there are exceptional circumstances on account of which even strong and willing Congregations may be unable to obtain the full amount from the original subscribers. As has been frequently mentioned, many Congregations have made up the shrinkage within their own bounds; a course which may be commended, again to many with balances yet due. The example of the Maritime Provinces, where only about \$3000.00 remain unpaid on \$97000.00 subscribed is very striking, and especially so when it is understood that the late meeting of Synod exhorted further effort, in order that a yet more perfect record may be at-

tained. Our Eastern brethren are not more, but less, wealthy than our people in the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec; and even in these latter Provinces the poorer Presbyteries, such as Algoma, North Bay, Kingston &c., are most fully paid up. The shortage, in fact, is largely in congregations which are apparently well able to pay in full, and it may be hoped that these will take note of the example of their weaker brethren. Some urge reasons for their shortcomings, the most popular of these being:—"We undertook extensive work in renovating or in putting up new buildings; thus we found need for the money at home and did not like to press for payments for Common Fund." Looking back to the time of subscribing, one finds that many of these Congregations then discounted the future, saying:—"We are going to do a great deal at home and must only give 10 or 20% to Common Fund." There are even a few, perhaps half a dozen, who have taken part of the money subscribed, and even reported as paid in, and used it for the Debt Fund. None of these are reasons; what shall we call them? We are thankful to say that these cases are more the exception than the rule. The rule seems to be:—"We are going to look after this matter, but there is no hurry so long as we get all in before the closing date." To these it may be answered; the time for action has now come. The Assembly has named the date and the Agent is to retire immediately after. Those who are taking it easy should now be up and doing that their work may be closed in time. No doubt many will do so and we shall see the Central Provinces at the side of the Maritime Provinces, or perhaps getting a little ahead; but in order to do this all must devote their best energies to having these balances cleared off at once. I do not speak fully to-day as to the North West. There is much more due there, in proportion, than in the East or Centre, one reason for this being that on many subscriptions taken last year the last instalment is only now due whatever other reasons there may be, one can only believe that the rich returns throughout the Prairie district this year, make it certain that the balances shall be vigorously dealt with. This is what we all expect, and have no doubt that when their Synod meets the matter will be dealt with by such a discussion and deliverance as shall set these energetic and quick-moving Western men to work with such zeal and faithfulness as shall make the result very creditable to them. We all have an idea on which, perhaps, we rather pride ourselves, that a Presbyterian subscription list is worth pretty nearly its face value. Three-fourths, or more, of our Congregations have wrought out that idea and have paid in full, and what is asked is that the others work faithfully in the same direction. Many of the balances are small and might be wiped out at any half hour's conference of those in charge. Why should not that be done? Others are larger, needing more careful planing and harder work; but they can be met by such methods in all but the exceptional cases already noticed. Will not friends in those Congregations see that these methods are used.

Note again.—The Assembly's date for closing is Dec. 31st, 1902. All remittances should be in by then. All Congregational "Record Books" should be sent in to me at Perth, Ont., not later than January 7th, 1903.

Perth, Nov. 1st, 1902.