

Our Contributors.

A LITTLE OIL FOR THE ECCLESIASTICAL MACHINE.

BY KNOXIAN.

Letters in the public journals, and other outward and reliable signs, show that the Presbyterian ecclesiastical machine is not running smoothly. There is a little friction, a little heat, a little straining and a good deal of creaking. The late meeting of Assembly seems to have increased the friction. The grievances, real or imaginary, have existed for many a day, but the late Assembly seems to have been the straw that nearly broke the camel's back. The camel does not take kindly to having his back broken. Hence this discussion.

The things chiefly complained of are these: (1) The business of the Assembly is conducted by a few members, and (2) the same names occur too frequently in special and standing committees, some Presbyteries having a large number of representatives on these committees—others having few or none. This seems to be about the size of the grievance.

To be of any use a discussion of these points must include a description of the writer's personal position. Should he say that there is nothing in these alleged grievances, or that if there is something in them, a reform is impossible, or at least very difficult, then those who complain would probably say: "That writer belongs to the *coterie*, he is in the ring, he belongs to the clique, he helps to pull the wires and manipulate committees and all that sort of thing." In fact, like Dr. Laing, he might have the *magna pars sui* missile thrown at him. Should he agitate for reform, or at least for a change, other parties—those on many committees—would be likely to say: "Ah! that little man is a chronic sorehead, he is a disturber of the peace, a troubler in Israel, he is soured because his name does not appear in the minutes."

This contributor belongs to neither class. He never helped to strike an Assembly committee. He has been put on and put off committees, but he never asked why put on or why put off. It would not elate him were he made an *ex-officio* member of every committee in the Church, nor depress him should he never sit on another committee during the term of his natural life. He has addressed the Assembly but two or three times, and then only when appointed to do so by an inferior court or committee. Such being the case he hopes to be able to approach this question in a judicial frame of mind, and pour with a kindly hand a little oil on the creaking parts of the machinery.

Now let us lay grievance number one on the table, examine it carefully on all sides, dissect it and see what kind of a thing it is. Put in the fewest words it amounts to this: "The business of the Assembly is transacted by a few members." Business here must mean making speeches, and moving and seconding motions, for no one asserts that the voting is done by a few members. Everybody votes. Let it be assumed that the Assembly numbers 400, and the "few" who are charged with monopolizing the business number, we shall say, twenty. Now, how, in the name of common sense, can twenty members control the deliberations of 380 if the 380 are not willing? Assuming for the present that the twenty do what they are charged with doing, and that in so doing they do wrong, whose is the fault? At whose door does the blame lie? An Irish soldier during the Peninsular War brought in a dozen prisoners. The officer asked him how he got so many. "Bedad," said Patrick, "I surrounded them." Do the twenty members of Assembly surround the 380 and compel them to surrender their rights? If so, the twenty must be much better soldiers than the 380. That twenty members, or thirty, or even fifty in a body where all have equal rights can control the 300 against their will, is a numerical impossibility. If the majority are deprived of their share of the business, or in any way unduly interfered with, the fault is their own. If the cry "a few do all the business" is a charge at all, it is a charge against the *majority*. They are the sinners. If they did their whole duty they would not allow a few to unduly control the business of the Church. That is precisely how the matter stands, and no amount of complaining can change the hard facts of the case.

Now about grievance number two, which may be formulated thus: A number of members from certain

Presbyteries serve on several committees, while some Presbyteries are not represented on any committee. These are literal facts which anybody can verify by looking at the minutes. Now let it be assumed for the sake of argument that this is a real grievance, and probably it is. For years complaints have been made about this matter, and it must be acknowledged sometimes made by men who are anything but grievance-mongers. If wrong is done, either the system of appointing standing committees is defective, or the power that works the system does not do its duty. If the system is defective why does not somebody propose a better and push it through the Assembly? If the system is right why do not members of Assembly see that it is properly worked? To blame the committee that strikes standing committees is to do worse than nothing. The Assembly is about twenty times as large as that committee. Why not amend its report when committees are not properly constituted? Where are the representatives of ignored Presbyteries when their Presbyteries are being ignored? What, in the name of common sense, is the use of attacking the work of a small committee when the Assembly itself accepts the work of the committee and adopts it as its own? Assuming that some names ought to be struck off these committees, and quite likely some of them should, why does not the Assembly strike them off? Assuming that other names should be put on, why does not the Assembly put them on? The report of any committee may be amended or referred back by the full court. The committee itself may be discharged and a new one appointed. There is no sort of sense in talking about "cliques" and "coteries" and other delightful little bodies of that kind which may possibly exist. The Assembly does, or is supposed to do, its own business. If standing committees are manipulated why does the supreme court tolerate the manipulation? If there are "cliques" and "coteries" why does not the Assembly stamp them out? The same transparent senselessness is seen in the attacks on the special committees appointed by the Moderator. If these are not properly constituted why does the Assembly not change them? For that matter why ask the Moderator to strike committees at all? It is no part of his ordinary duty as Moderator to strike committees unless so desired by the Assembly. The plain, unvarnished truth is just this: If there are any grievances, for the existence and continuance of these grievances the General Assembly is itself responsible.

THE CHURCH AND THE SCOTT ACT.

MR. EDITOR,—I wish to be particularly understood that there is not one word in the following argument against temperance, voluntary self-sacrifice or total abstinence from anything either for one's own good or for the good of others. The General Assembly, in adopting an "emphatic protest" against the recent action of the Senate of Canada in passing amendments to the Canada Temperance Act, departed from the policy of the Church and violated sec. 5, chap. xxxi. of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which reads: "Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical; and are not to intermeddle with civic affairs, which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition, in cases extraordinary; or by way of advice for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate." They did not adopt an "humble petition," but an "emphatic protest," and their advice was not asked by the civil magistrate. Principal MacVicar and the overwhelming majority who voted with him were both unworthy of their country and untrue to their ecclesiastical ancestry in condemning the action of the Senate of Canada.

The duty of synods and councils is clearly pointed out in the Confession of Faith: "It belongeth to synods and councils ministerially to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience; to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of the Church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same; which decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in His Word." The humility of Dr. MacVicar found vent in the threat: "He would venture to say also very

plainly, but very firmly, that it was dangerous for any body of legislators to rush in the face of public opinion." And this assembly of political divines who, if they had done anything, should have simply presented an humble petition, received this threat with loud applause.

Dr. MacVicar also talked very valiantly about becoming a terror to those who differed with him on what he is pleased to call evil, but which I and hundreds of thousands call good. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." I tell this modern Alva that "love worketh no ill to his neighbour," and that if he reads his Bible he has not caught the lofty inspiration that pervades it and that "a man's doing good and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law and not under grace." (Con. chap. xix.) "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to His Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith or an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also." (Con. chap. xx.)

When Dr. MacVicar spoke of the "ecclesiastical ancestry" of the body he was addressing, he was not stating a strictly historical fact, since that body had not an ecclesiastical ancestry in common, some being descendants of an Established Church and some being the descendants of those who voluntarily surrendered the immunities of a State Church for the enjoyment of spiritual freedom. But the position the General Assembly adopted in interfering as a Church with civil affairs is not only not in accord with the history of the Presbyterian Church of Canada but also of that Church in Scotland and of the Reformed Church from which it sprang.

Previous to the Reformation the State was subject to the Church of Rome. Luther and Melancthon, who were the leaders of the Reformed Church, demanded the independence of the Church and protested against the confusion of religion and politics. The appeal of the Scotch Reformers to the Estates of Parliament in 1560 resulted in the abolition of the Papal supremacy in Scotland and the recognition of the Reformed religion. But Knox and his associates had at once entered on a struggle with the State against the encroachments of the civil power. They contended that "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any way contrary to His Word, or beside it in matters of faith and worship." The tolerance which secured to the Church complete freedom from the State, secured the State freedom from the Church. This is the only principle on which such security can rest and this principle was embodied in the Westminster Confession.

The Church continued to grow in spirituality and strength until a century later when the cause of patronage, and not the cause of Christ, was the aim of mercenary and political clerics. With this political trickery came in heresy and scepticism and even the Westminster Confession was threatened. Political demagogues played fast and loose with both the Moderates and the Evangelicals, and the Church became degraded and the people depraved. But the fathers of the Church during the different epochs of its history—Knox, Henderson, Melville, Erskine, Thomson, Chalmers, Candlish and others—were ever found opposed to prelatic and Erastian Church government and in favour of the complete freedom of the Church from the civil power. I do not mean by this that they were not in favour of an Established Church, for of course they were; but they believed in the Church having complete control over its own affairs and the ministers of the Government complete control over affairs of State. In fact, they claimed that the Standards of the Church prohibit the State from meddling with matters spiritual as peremptorily as they prohibit the Church from meddling with matters civil. It was a denial of this position after the decision in the celebrated Auchterarder case that caused the Disruption of the Established Church of Scotland, when four hundred of its clergy left it. But through all these