

Our Contributors.

SOME SLIGHT IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

BY KNOXIAN.

To say that the last General Assembly was the best since '75, might be saying too much. It is quite safe to say that it was one of the best. The tone of the meeting was good; its business capacity was good, and considering the extreme heat of the weather, the big Court was fairly industrious and energetic. There was little time spent over small questions, and no wrangling over any, large or small. The brother who rises regularly with his point of order, was either too much baked with the heat to rise, or he left his point at home, to keep company with the thirdly of his last sermon. On the whole, the big Court moved along at a fair pace, did useful business in a good natured, sensible way, and wound up a day earlier than usual.

There was one extremely critical moment. The zeal of some of the members very nearly led the Assembly to go too fast in the Montreal case. The good sense of these members, and their willingness to proceed in a regular, constitutional way, was shown by the readiness with which they came back from the edge of the precipice, when the danger was pointed out by Principal Caven, Dr. A. D. McDonald, and others. Any kind of a deliverance at that point that had anything in it would have had the appearance of a pre-judgment of the case in the absence of Prof. Campbell, and would also have looked like a vote of want of confidence in the Presbytery of Montreal. That Presbytery is well able to attend to its own affairs without any prodding from the outside. If the matter ever comes before the Assembly, it will do what it believes to be its duty. In the meantime, let the Presbytery of Montreal do its duty, and let the rest of us do our duty by attending to our own business.

In some respects, Assembly meetings have greatly improved during the last few years. The old-time speech, with the long introduction, is as clean gone as Othello's occupation. Nobody begins now with the ancient formula, "Mr. Moderator, I feel I cannot give a silent vote on this question." The speaker sails in without saying anything about his feelings. Like a sensible man, he assumes that if he speaks, the members may take for granted he does not feel like being silent.

At this last Assembly, there was a distinct improvement in the popular evening meetings. Owing to the intense heat and the inability of human nature—even Presbyterian human nature—to keep up the interest beyond a certain point, the evening meetings of the second week were not quite as well attended as those of the first, but all were good. Brother Murray, of the Halifax Witness, declared a year ago, that these evening meetings should be "mended or ended." They were most distinctly mended, and, therefore, need not be ended for some time yet.

Gradually—very gradually—the Supreme Court is beginning to spend less time on small matters, and more on large and vital questions. There is room for more improvement yet in this direction. A little more confidence in committees and their reports, would save valuable time. There is no sort of sense in appointing a committee to do work, and when they have done it, mangling it for an hour or two. Some reports may need a little touching up, but not all. Time would be saved by appointing the best men on important committees, and when they have done their work, why not assume that the men who have gone to the bottom of the business, know more about how it ought to be arranged, than others who may not have given it a moment's serious consideration.

Would it not be a good thing to ap-

point standing committees according to some system. About twenty-five bodies, called standing committees, have to be appointed at each meeting of Assembly, and it is no reflection on anybody to say, that the work is scarcely done in highly scientific style. Whether a name goes on or goes off, depends on—well it is pretty hard to say what it depends on. Perhaps the principal reason why it goes on, is because it was on before. That must have been the reason why the name of a deceased minister was put on one of the College Boards at the last Assembly meeting. Would it not be well to have a system by which one-third of each committee or board, would be composed of new men. If members retired in some systematic way, the unpleasantness of striking names off would be avoided, and new blood would be introduced each year.

Would it not be well to spend more time on the financial and statistical report. This is almost the only report that brings the Church, as a whole, before the Assembly, and might it not be a good thing to look at the Church as a whole. The other reports, or most of them, deal with parts of our work. Dr. Torrance in his admirable reports, brings the Church as a unit before the Assembly, but the Assembly, for some reason or another, never gives much consideration to the unit. Looking carefully at some part, perhaps a small part, of the work of the Church, and paying no attention to the Church as a whole, painfully reminds one of the man who could see a fly on the barn door, but could never see the barn.

Most assuredly, it would be an improvement to have a standing committee on theological education. Who knows the number of theological students in the Church, or the amount contributed for theological education, or the number of students graduated in each year. Why are these important figures not known? Simply because the College work of the Church is presented to the Assembly in six different parts. By all means let each College report for itself, but there should be a standing committee to give our people a bird's-eye view of our College work. How would the Home Mission work, or the Foreign Mission, or Augmentation, or French Evangelization look if broken into six fragments and presented to the Assembly in six reports. Why should a good Presbyterian be expected to wade through six reports for facts and figures about theological education, when he finds the totals all ready to his hand in every other department. The work done in the colleges is just as important as the work done anywhere else, and the Church should be told all about it, in exactly the same way as our people are told about every other kind of work.

RELIGION AND PLEASURE.

BY W. G. JORDAN B.A.

"Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." This is a clear, sharp description of one class of worldly men; regarded in the light of Paul's life and teaching, it is very suggestive and leads us on to the consideration of important truths.

It is a terrible catalogue out of which this short sentence is taken. It shows us the tendency of a God-forsaking life. Sinful lives are not all alike, there is great scope for individuality in producing varieties of wickedness. But there is in all the same root of selfishness and lawlessness. It is not pleasant to admit that we are included in this stern unflinching indictment, but he is a conceited or self-satisfied man who has not detected the seeds of these evils in his own hearts. We can not now discuss the general question, but we read over this plain list and we pause when we come to one striking sentence: "Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." This moves us to think in these days, when there is so much that is called pleasure, and we ask what does the apostle mean by placing two things in direct opposition which need to be brought into perfect harmony. Man is called to find his true life in

a supreme love of God; the great commandment urges us to love God with all our powers, all around us there are allurements towards pleasures which are dangerous or wicked. Hence, arises the great contradiction of life which we must each meet and settle in some way. We cannot shirk this issue; whether we will or no, our character is assuming a definite form.

I fancy I can hear some young man say: "Is there then a downright and final contradiction between religion and pleasure? I have been told so, but I did not think the statement was quite true. There are people who tell me that religion is a moping, melancholy business which takes all the music out of a man's life. They think they can get through this world very well without much religion, and if it is necessary to swallow it as a preparation for the next, they are ready to take it as a bitter pill just before they die. This is common talk among those who scoff at religion, but I did not expect to hear it from the pulpit."

That kind of talk has behind it a false conception, both of religion and pleasure. The word in the text may be used of lawful delights and healthful enjoyments, but it has a strange tendency to go downward in its meaning, and points most frequently to those pleasures which are specially earthly and selfish. Do you mean by pleasure, doing as you like, living recklessly, delighting in the feverish excitement of drinking and gambling, or in the selfish pursuit of gain and popularity? Then the answer is plain, such pleasure-seeking cannot be reconciled with any lofty thought of religion. If you mean wholesome enjoyment which builds a man up in purity of life and strength of character, we maintain that such joys flow from real religion.

Among the first Christian disciples difficult questions arose concerning their relationship to society, but in many things their way was clear. Persecution drove them near to each other for comfort and help. The newness and peculiarity of their faith, naturally made them separate from the outside world. The idolatrous practices of the time, and the brutality of the gladiatorial show, unquestionably cut them off from popular amusements. Now the Church and the world do not stand in such open contrast, though there is the same wide difference of spirit. Some Christian men feeling this, seek refuge in a narrowness of life which cuts them off as much as possible from their fellow-men. Others again are disposed to pride themselves on their toleration, their sweetness and light, their success in showing that religion does not frown upon any really bright and beautiful thing which God has given us. They say, "We revere our Puritan forefathers, and we know that in order to fight their battles they needed to be stiff and strong, but we think the time has come when we can have purity without Puritanism. We cannot now follow out these two tendencies in their varied treatment of life, worship and service; we point to them merely for the purpose of showing that it is a great problem which has not yet been reduced to any small rigid explanation.

Paul did not attempt to create the Christian life in a man by a series of prohibitions. There must be prohibition in the home and in the state, but the renewal of the individual soul cannot come in that way. Notwithstanding all the uses of the law, "Thou shalt not" had failed to regenerate the world.

It does not appear to enter into Paul's thoughts that the Church ought to rule every detail of the individual life by minute regulations. That system was fully tried by the Pharisees and produced shallowness of experience and unreality of life.

Paul does not ask tiny questions about our life or make fine distinctions in regard to social relations. He meets our need by presenting a positive life in Christ, and he makes us feel that there is no force which can meet pleasure-loving but God-loving. He thus gets behind ac-

tions, to the life which inspires them. This description is provocative of heart-searching and questionings. "Pleasure-lovers rather than God-lovers." Love is the ruling force of life. What a man loves he seeks after, what a man loves he thinks beautiful, what he loves attains a mastery over him, and by its constant attraction shapes his life and moulds his character.

(a) Pleasure-lovers are pleasure-seekers. The soul goes out to seek what it loves. These lovers of gaiety are ever seeking to make life a good time in their shallow sense. Ease and fun are definite and constant objects of their search. Hence, their life becomes thin, and they think that their personal fancy is the highest guide of life.

(b) Pleasure-lovers make sacrifices for pleasure. In this spirit also love demands its sacrifice. Duties are neglected and the claims of others slighted. Opportunities of learning truth and receiving good are sacrificed at the shrine of pleasure. This often leads to the sacrifice of health and honour, of that which is noblest in manhood and purest in womanhood.

(c) Pleasure-lovers pursue a phantom. They see many fine sights and hear much of the world's bewitching music; they have passing sensations in great variety, but the reality which love craves they do not find. They come at last to that weariness which says "all is vanity."

(a) Lovers of God taste a joy which is unknown to the shallow devotees of pleasure. Those whose supreme interest is in the theatre or ball-room, do not understand the joy of sincere worship, real pleading prayer and rapt communion with God.

(b) A man like Paul is so filled with the love of God, and the intense purpose of his life, that the questions of pleasure and amusement do not concern him personally. His life was so completely given up to others that there was no need for him to ask how to spend his evenings or how to employ his spare time. The one great desire with him was so to instruct the young disciples that they would be able to order their lives on Christian principles. But the intensity of his purpose did not sour his life or narrow his character.

(c) The great lesson of his life, in this connection, is that prohibition from outside, as Church etiquette, however reasonable, cannot deliver us from the subtle love of pleasure. A new love must be brought in. The story of the cross must become a reality to us, revealing the love of the eternal God. This entering into the soul can inspire enthusiastic joy and a buoyant hope which will enable a man to walk right through this bewildering world. Christ saves us from becoming lovers of pleasure by making us lovers of God.

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A LIFE STUDY.

By M. GRANT FRASER.

"Be content here with the heartsease, expect roses and lilies in the far land."—Paxton Hood.

It was such a pretty cottage, with roses and honey-suckle clustering around the windows, and casting shade and fragrance about the porch. The bees and humming birds thought so, as they flitted from flower to flower lulling you to sleep with the music of their wings. Such velvety, golden bees.

"O, velvet bee, you're a dusty fellow. You've powdered your legs with gold." And then the marigolds, the sweet peas, and the columbine. Were there ever flowers so fair, so fragrant? But the loveliest, sweetest of all was the heartsease, not in the garden at all, but in the bonnie cottage itself. Heartsease so starry-eyed, shedding such light and beauty around, that all garden flowers were as nothing beside her.

There are some people, true and good no doubt, whose light shines inward; it does not radiate to those around. But it was different with the little widow in