

## Our Contributors.

### "Ask for the Old Paths."

BY ULSTER PAT.

"Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." But are not his professing people now saying, as in the days of Jeremiah, "we will not walk therein." Even sturdy Presbyterianism has lost much of its virility in an aesthetic invitation of paganism, observing days, bringing the gospel down to the comprehension of men by means of pictures, and attracting—or attempting to draw all men—by means of music, song, and sensation. Jesus said, "I if I be lifted up from the earth, will I draw all men unto me." But his professing followers now a days manifest greater faith in the drawing power of an organ, an anthem, or a "sacred solo." Pastors give, and men receive as the word of eternal life, the novel instead of the scriptures, which testify of the true Saviour—the Bonnie Briar Bush for that which burned but not consumed, and the Crucifixion of Philip in substitution for the crucifixion of Christ.

Do you want proof? that even our evangelical educators and leaders are not studying the inspired scriptures at first hand, in a teachable spirit, and with a determination to give forth only what is to be found therein. Take up any religious publication at this season and try how its pictures and reading matter correspond with the sacred narrative. The Word of God is that the Saviour was born, in the season when shepherds kept night watches over their flocks, at Bethlehem. But the Church is telling us that it was in the depth of the Bethlehem winter—and by a significant coincidence, on the same day of the same month as the Babylonish Messiah, whom it originally commemorated. For the pictures, I will take the periodical nearest my hand—*The Band of Hope Review* for December, merely saying that it is not worse but rather freer from error than the average. On the first page we have two men standing, one and a lad seated, gazing curiously up at a star, many times larger than its fellows, and sheep near by. This is labelled, "While Shepherds Watched!" The hymn writers tell us that the shepherds were "all seated on the ground"—but let that pass, neither they nor the artist, know anything about it. Luke says—and he had traced the course of all things, he affirmed accurately—that there were shepherds abiding in the field keeping night watches over their flock, when "an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them." And they did not gaze up curiously, as the artist imagined, but "were sore afraid." The next picture shows three angels, not with the herald, but up on a level with the giant star—bigger now, though the other stars are not—using their wings energetically, singing, and playing upon harps of exceedingly earthly (pagan) device. Then we have two men in gorgeous a paret, kneeling and presenting costly caskets, etc., to an infant of a few days, who holds out its hand to receive the gifts, in the

lap of its mother, whose necklace and apparel contradict the assertion of poverty; over whom leans an aged man, and near him is a stand with a pine cover, while a cow gazes curiously at the kneeling strangers. Now, Matthew tells us—what we might reasonably expect so long subsequent to the enrolling which had so overcrowded the little community, that there was for a short season no room but in a stable for the humble pair—that the wise men from the East found "the young child with Mary his Mother" in a house. The time that had elapsed before the arrival of the Magi is indicated by Herod slaying the male children—"from two years old and under, according to the time which he had carefully learned from the wise men." The letter press references to the "child" Jesus, the little Christmas of the French, and our own Santa Claus, *et hoc genus omnes*, pagan myths, are erroneous and unscriptural, eminently calculated to lead the children in the direction of the dangerous deceptions of Romanism and Ritualism.

My object in writing this is to appeal to the Presbyterianism of Canada to steady the Protestantism of this land and lead back to the old paths our people, so zealous yet prone to will worship. If properly instructed, they have in them the qualities that, by the grace of God, would make them, not unworthy successors of the Scottish reformers of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, who, it was well said by a committee of the General Assembly in 1844, in scriptural and practical divinity, "attained to such richness, copiousness, and variety, as none but the Puritans have ever rivalled; while, in addition, their national shrewdness, and stern force of intellect, combining with the sound creed which Knox learned from Calvin, preserved them from that oscillation or vibration between Pelagianism and Antinomianism, which has too often, especially in times of excitement or awakening, characterized the evangelism of other lands." Well would it be if our people would substitute for the modern "religious" novel "the writings of the men who compiled our earlier standards, and who had the chief hand in the composition of the shorter catechism, the writings which formed the Scottish character in Scotland's best days, and whose dingy and well-thumbed volumes, preserved on cottage shelves from generation to generation, and read on winter evenings, by the dim firelight, kept alive true religion in many a district where, in the pulpit, the trumpet gave forth uncertain sound, or a sound all too certain on the side of error—the writings which, beginning with Knox's startling appeals, take in the many weighty words of wisdom with which a suffering and often sinning church was edified,"—these writings must be worthy of a revival, especially in an age which has been summoned once more to take up its hereditary testimony for the crown rights of the Redeemer, and the spiritual freedom of his Church. If Presbyterianism "owns these fathers as handing down to her the principles of her church polity, she may do well to consult

them, as having also moulded the form, and breathed into that form the spirit of her homely and heartfelt piety." And if, in his great kindness and forbearance, God should now pour out in any portion of his church a measure of the blessing which was often experienced of old, and revive his work in the midst of the years, "nothing can be more suitable for giving a healthy tone to such a movement and prevent the risk of its being marred by shallow and upstart fancies, than to leaven the minds of men with the same style and kind of Christianity, high-toned manly, and practical, as well as deeply meditative and spiritual which was formed under God by those masters in ancient learning, moral science and holy writ.

Orillia, Ont.

### Aged and Infirm Ministers' Fund.

Unless there is a very considerable increase over last year to the contributions of congregations, there will not be money on hand next spring wherewith to meet the annuities then due, even on the reduced scale heretofore paid. This will come as a surprise to many. It is however easily explained. The revenue last year was insufficient to meet the expenditure of the year. As reported to the Assembly in June, the ordinary fund was in debt \$1,321 or \$964 more than it was a year previously. It is true that there was added to the capital \$45,000 on the 28th February last and \$20,000 in June, but a full year's interest on these accounts will not be available for the current church year. The additional interest available is, however, offset by the action of last Assembly in deciding that, hereafter, the annual rates of ministers be added to capital instead of going to the ordinary fund and being available for the payment of annuities, as in the past. These annual rates will, this year, about equal the interest available from the increased capital, so that unless the contributions from the church are very considerably in excess of those of last year, the revenue will not be sufficient to meet the expenditure and to remove the deficit at the close of the year.

The amount contributed by the congregations of the church, both for the aged and infirm Ministers' Fund and Widows' and Orphans' Fund is comparatively small,—not quite \$14,000 in all.

A considerable number of congregations contribute nothing at all to these Funds. Were all to contribute and were the larger congregations of the church to deal more generously with these funds, the committee would be able to meet their liabilities and pay the annuities in full. Will not the elders of the church make themselves felt here?

It is hoped in connection with the allocation of moneys by missionary committees, in the next few weeks, that the claims of both the Aged and Infirm Ministers' Fund and Orphans' Fund will receive due consideration.

He who never connects God with his daily life knows nothing of the spiritual meanings and uses of life; nothing of the calm, strong patience with which ill may be endured; of the gentle, tender comfort which the Father's love can minister; of the blessed rest to be realized in His forgiving love, His tender fatherhood; of the deep, peaceful sense of the infinite One ever near, a refuge and a strength.—Archdeacon Farrar.