

Our Contributors.

THE GOSPEL IN LARGE CAPITALS.—I.

DR. PATON'S STORY OF A CHRISTIAN ADVENTURE.

BY FIDELIS.

In an age which is pre-eminently one of luxury and self-indulgence, in which it almost seems as if the spirit of "enduring hardness" were dying out, even among those who regard themselves as "good soldiers" of Christ, it is refreshing to follow the thrilling though simple story of Christian adventure in which that noble missionary hero, Dr. Paton, has recorded the toils and vicissitudes, the successes and defeats, the perils and hairbreadth escapes of his devoted labors on two small islands of the Southern Sea. As a story of adventure, pure and simple, it is full of fascination to the most careless reader, but as a record of a work of faith and love, following with apostolic fidelity the footsteps of the Lord Himself, it may well act as a "Gospel in Large Capitals"—to use a phrase of Dr. Paton himself—whereby our too prevalent, self-indulgent laxity may be rebuked, and our love and zeal stimulated to follow so inspiring an example.

This book is not yet as widely known as it deserves to be, and Dr. Paton has suffered much from misconception and misrepresentation, even in Canada. It may be well, therefore, for readers of THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN to have at least an outline of its contents presented to them. The book opens with a description of Dr. Paton's early home, the loving mother, the tender, saintly, noble-hearted father, as delightful in their quaint simplicity as any of the sketches of Scottish life which have of late become so popular. The character of the schoolmaster, too, so harsh, even savage a disciplinarian, yet so kind-hearted in the more ordinary affairs of life, is well sketched in, though we feel that his professional severity, repelling his pupil from his tuition was no small cross to the studious boy in his early years. As narrow means were the rule in the poor stocking-weaver's home, John Paton, at twelve years old, took his place at the loom. This early acquaintance with manual work, not only at the home but in the harvest field, and with the Sappers and Miners who were making an Ordnance Survey of Dumfriesshire, was by no means thrown away, but stood him in good stead when the needs of his mission to savage people made such multifarious demands on head and hands.

After his brief educational experiences, including six weeks at the Dumfries Academy, John Paton was fortunate enough to be chosen to fill a position under a Reformed Presbyterian congregation in Glasgow, in which while doing a certain amount of mission work, he was to have the opportunity of prosecuting his studies at the Free Church Normal Seminary. Of this opening he eagerly availed himself, and packing his few worldly possessions, including his Bible, into a bundle tied up in his pocket-handkerchief, the future apostle of the New Hebrides set out as an humble wayfarer on his forty mile walk from Torthorwald to Kilmarnock, on his way to Glasgow, this first of many a weary pilgrimage by the same mode of travel. His own account of his leaving home, and his parting from his father, who escorted him for the first six miles of the way, is as touching an episode as any chronicled from "Thrums" or "Drumtochty." From it we quote the following graphic passage.—

"For the last half mile or so we walked on together in almost unbroken silence, my father, as was often his custom, carrying hat in hand, while his long flowing yellow hair (then yellow, but in later years white as snow) streamed like a girl's down his shoulders. His lips kept moving in silent prayers for me, and his tears fell fast when our eyes met each other in looks for which all speech

was vain. We halted on reaching the appointed parting place; he grasped my hand firmly for a minute in silence, and then solemnly and affectionately said: 'God bless you, my son! your father's God prosper you and keep you from all evil!'

"Unable to say more, his lips kept moving in silent prayer; in tears we embraced and parted. I ran off as fast as I could, and, when about to turn a corner in the road where he would lose sight of me, I looked back and saw him still standing, with head uncovered, where I had left him. Waving my hat in adieu, I was round the corner and out of sight in an instant. But my heart was too full and sore to carry me further, so I darted into the side of the road and wept for a time. Then, rising up cautiously, I climbed the dyke to see if he yet stood where I had left him, and just at that moment I caught a glimpse of him climbing the dyke and looking out for me! He did not see me, and after he had gazed eagerly in my direction for awhile, he got down, turned his face towards home and began to return—his head still uncovered, and his heart, I felt sure, still rising in prayers for me. I watched through blinding tears till his form faded from my gaze; and then hastening on my way, vowed deeply, and oft, by the help of God, to live and act so as never to grieve or dishonor such a father and mother as He had given me. The appearance of my father when we parted, his advice, prayers and tears, the road, the dyke, the climbing up on it, and then walking away, head uncovered, have often, often, all through life, risen vividly before my mind, and do so now while I am writing, as if it had been but an hour ago. In my earlier years particularly, when exposed to many temptations, his parting form rose before me as that of a guardian angel."

Such a picture as this, which might be indefinitely multiplied from Scottish homes, is a good offset to much of the exaggerated and superficial outcry as to Scottish religious rigidity and dourness of demeanour, and vividly recalls the immortal and true lines of Scotland's wayward but best beloved bard—

"From scenes like these, auld Scotia's grandeur springs
That makes her loved at home, revered abroad;
Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,
An honest man's the noblest work of God."

As it happened, when young Paton reached Glasgow for his final examination which was to settle the matter, there was another candidate whose claims were so closely matched with his own, that the examiners were greatly perplexed how to decide. Finally the matter was settled by dividing the work and the salary, a proposal accepted by the young men who, if they suffered in pocket, gained time for study by the arrangement, and who worked together harmoniously without a single dispute during the whole period of their joint discharge of the duties of the mission. The combined work and study were, however, too much for both young men, and both were compelled to give it up at the close of the year. Young Paton was more fortunate than his companion, who never entirely recovered, while he was soon so far restored by his native air and home tendance, that he was able to get back to work, this time as the teacher of a small school at Girvan.

Having saved the magnificent sum of £10 for his college expenses, John Paton went to Glasgow for his first session at the university. Of course, his purse was empty before the session closed, and he was on the point of pawning his books and leaving Glasgow in search of work when an opportunity turned up of securing the latter as teacher of a mission school, in which he scored his first victory over brute force, by subduing young roughs and bringing order out of moral chaos. Indeed, he so raised the attendance and repute of the school that its managers, with little sense of justice, thought fit to supersede the young man to whom it owed its prosperity, by a more advanced and accomplished master. It was a significant testimony to his judicious mingling of firmness and kindness, that a presentation was made to him on leaving by some of the very young "roughs" whom he had subdued into steady and attentive pupils.

In the direct Home mission work of the Glasgow City Mission, Mr. Paton while going on with his college studies served his full apprenticeship for the Foreign field.

Widely different as the city slums were from the Pacific island with its naked savages, the work of taming rebellious hearts was the same, and needed the same qualities of untiring love, energy and patience, which in these years of hard work at home were so greatly developed and trained. He had to "endure hardness" too, being "passing rich on forty pounds a year," out of which pittance the always dutiful son saved enough to materially assist the good father and mother at home with their large family, and also with the gradual liquidation of an unjust, but unfortunately legal debt. When he at last, in spite of no little opposition from good Christian friends, had accepted the position of a missionary to the New Hebrides, he counted it as "one of the purest joys" of the time that he was able out of his advanced salary to send home a sum sufficient to wipe out the last penny of the unjust claim against his beloved parents, in connection with the noble struggle they had made in rearing so large a "family in thorough Scottish independence."

AN IMPORTANT OVERTURE.

MR. EDITOR,—At the last meeting of Assembly the following overture from the Synod of Manitoba and the North-west Territories was submitted and discussed at considerable length:—

"Whereas the administrative work of the Church involving the raising and expenditure of money is carried on by several committees and boards which, holding no stated conferences, act independently of one another; and whereas the General Assembly receiving and dealing with reports in succession is not thus in the best position to give that wise and effective direction to the policy of the Church which, with its whole work and resources in view it might be expected to give; and whereas as the result of this mode of action the resources of the Church are apt to be called forth by the special activity and methods of a particular committee or board rather than by the comparative needs and merits of the respective branches of the work as determined after a well-considered view of the whole situation by the Assembly; Now, therefore, the Synod of Manitoba and the North-west Territories humbly overtures the Venerable the General Assembly to take these premises into consideration and to constitute a committee in which the various committees and boards of the Church should have representation, whose function it should be to take the whole work into consideration and to make such suggestions to the General Assembly as might aid in greater unity and consistency to the policy of the Church, and to discharge such other duties as the Assembly may prescribe."

The above overture was submitted on motion of myself, seconded by Principal King, the terms of our motion being that "the overture be received and remitted to a committee to be appointed at this Assembly which shall report to next Assembly."

After considerable discussion Dr. Warden, not in any spirit of unfriendliness to the motion, but with a desire to get more rapidly and directly the mind of the Church on the matter, moved an amendment that "the overture be received and sent down to Presbyteries to report their opinions thereon to next Assembly;" and, the motion having been withdrawn, this amendment became the finding of the court on the subject. As the overture is now on the way to Presbyteries, and as many of the brethren suggested to me, as the mover in Assembly, the advisability of discussing the question in the Church papers, I crave space in your columns for some remarks upon it.

First. Let me say that the overture not being printed and in the hands of members seemed, as we judged from the range of the debate, to be considerably misunderstood in the Assembly. This misunderstanding was due in part at least to the fact that, the overture was brought on by the Committee on Bills at the same time with certain overtures from Western Presbyteries about the salaries of missionaries, and although totally different in scope and character, it became confused with them during the debate. The misunderstanding may have been due also to the fact that, some charges as to excessive

cost of administration under present methods were made by one of the brethren who spoke in favor of the overture, thus giving the debate a turn which the movers of the overture did not contemplate and for which neither they nor the overture should be held responsible. Another misconception of the overture was present in the mind of the member who said that, it was unreasonable to think that an outside committee could give the Assembly as safe and reliable information as the several committees charged with the carrying on of the various enterprises of the Church. This misconception was simply due to lack of opportunity to look into the overture, for the principal thing contemplated is not an outside committee, but one composed of representatives from all the committees and boards indicated, whose information would be obtained from the work and projects of all the separate bodies, and whose advice to the Assembly would be the safe and reliable advice of men who gave it with a full view of all the work of the Church before them.

In view of the prevalent misunderstandings and misconceptions the above remarks have been made in the direction of indicating, somewhat negatively, what the overture contemplates. Only a few more words on the more positive side, by way of defining its origin, scope and character, can be written at present.

First, it may be said that the overture, which is the outcome of much thought on the part of a great many who have the profoundest desire for the welfare of our beloved Church, contemplates a general committee whose functions shall be advisory. The idea in the minds of those supporting the overture is that more *compactness* could be introduced into the Church organization thereby obtaining greater unity and consistency in Church policy and lessening the danger of friction. The Church is constantly likened to an organized army, and yet there are some respects in which the likeness could be made more real with benefit to the Church. It is not enough for an army to have a field of operations. It must also have a definite plan of campaign carried out not by the colonels of the different regiments, each doing what seems right in his own eyes, but rather by a commanding officer and staff whose sources of information are more numerous, and whose view of the field is more extensive than that of a single officer, and who consequently can direct the movements of each separate body in the best interests of the whole. The analogy, while it need not be unduly pressed, is apparent. It is not enough for our Church to have a field of operations. It must have a definite plan of campaign carried out not by the different conveners and chairmen of the several committees and boards whose reports are considered in succession and are generally agreed to by Assembly without immediate reference to their bearing on other schemes, but rather by some general committee representing all the rest, who, with wider sources of information and a truer *conspectus* of the work of the Church as a whole, could the better advise the movements of Assembly in the different schemes. The estimates for all the work of the Church might be considered by this general committee before each Assembly, instead of by each committee separately as at present. The Assembly would have a greater feeling of security in passing them, after they had been considered by such a committee, and the congregations of the Church would not be perplexed by showers of independent circulars and appeals throughout the year, while at the same time the spontaneity of their giving would be enhanced rather than hindered. No Parliament or Legislature would have any feeling of security in passing estimates that had only been considered by the heads of departments separately, nor would the country feel satisfied to contribute the amounts asked; but the case is altered when the estimates are known to have been carefully considered by the whole Cabinet to