

## THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

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## CLUBBING.

The reports from many quarters are most encouraging. Already not a few clubs have been sent in, and in other quarters the work is being prosecuted with vigour. Wherever nothing has yet been done we desire to urge immediate action. One day next week will be worth half-a-dozen later on. Let the effort be made at once, and a good club will probably be the result. Our Premium Engraving for the year 1881, entitled "God's Word," has just been received, and we shall at once commence to mail it to subscribers in the order in which names are entered on our books.

## CHURCH DEBTS.

NO argument against church debts is now needed, for all are agreed that such obligations are not blessings in disguise, but at the very best only necessary evils. Time was when many thought differently, when a mortgage on a church property was looked upon as a benefit rather than otherwise—a something calculated to encourage rather than to depress, to stimulate church life and activity rather than to deaden and destroy. That time, however, has passed away, and now with ecclesiastical liabilities as with personal ones, people feel that the less they have to do so much the better. At the same time we can scarcely sympathize with those who say that it is not only imprudent, but sinful, to contract any debts at any time or in any circumstances for religious purposes. Occasionally this can scarcely be avoided, though in all cases it is very necessary in the contraction of such obligations to have that prudence which is profitable to direct. A congregation, like an individual, may have very good reason for believing that, in the erection of buildings necessary for carrying on the work for which it has been called into existence, it may very prudently and properly spread the payments over a certain number of years. Making every reasonable calculation it may be able to say that the necessary work can in this way be accomplished both more easily and more efficiently than if attempted by one great and exhausting effort. At the same time it is very evident that the less of this the better, and that the danger of getting almost inextricably into debt is in ordinary cases far greater, and far more formidable than that of erecting unworthily shabby churches, or of crippling the energies of congregations by making extraordinary efforts to pay for everything in cash.

For some time past there has been all over the Presbyterian Church in Canada a very praiseworthy activity in the erection of comfortable and commodious places of worship. It may be quite true that people could have done more had they chosen, but at the same time they deserve all commendation for what they have accomplished. Nor is it true, as is often insinuated, and sometimes even broadly asserted, that this has, as a rule, been done by merely running into debt and leaving formidable obligations for coming generations to discharge. In a good many cases it is quite true that new churches have been opened not altogether free of incumbrances, and that in some instances the liabilities have been and are rather formidable. But we are not aware of almost any even of these where a very large amount of present effort has not been made, or where the outlay has been unreasonably beyond the position and prospects of those who incurred it. To speak of this, that, and the other congregation being "drowned in debt" is, in the vast majority of cases, to use unwarrantably harsh language, and to imply very undeserved condemnation. Isolated instances of the kind there are, but, far from being the rule, they are the rare exception. It has come to be the fashion, for instance, with some people to point to Toronto, and especially to the Presbyterian congregations there, as striking illustrations of this

extravagance and debt-contracting tendency in the erection of church edifices. We are told that there is scarcely a Presbyterian church in the whole of the metropolis of Ontario, which is not hopelessly depressed and hampered by a load of debt which can neither be borne nor got quit of. And it is at the same time broadly asserted that if such congregations could not afford to build such fine and expensive churches, they ought to have been satisfied with less. All such talk is really very much beside the mark. That there is a very considerable amount of debt on some of the lately erected churches here is quite true, but that the energies of the several congregations are depressed, and their general activity in the cause of Christ interfered with, by these obligations is very far from being the fact. On the contrary, it will be found that the congregations in question are anything but depressed, and that as a matter of fact they are now doing more for extra-congregational purposes both at home and abroad than ever they did before. True, it may be urged that if they had erected less expensive churches they would have had the more to devote to other purposes. Very possibly, but is it quite certain that they would have had the heart to give with correspondingly greater liberality on account of what they had saved on their several church properties? We doubt it. Not one of these congregations is lazily acquiescing in its burden of pecuniary obligation as a permanency, and, after all, we are not aware of one of them that has incurred liabilities beyond what prudence might justify, and what ordinary exertion and liberality, with the blessing of God, may not within a reasonable period comfortably and completely discharge.

At the same time it is quite true that when it can at all be managed it is in every way preferable to have new churches opened entirely free of debt, if that freedom is taken not as an argument for resting and being thankful, but for making still greater and more vigorous efforts in holding forth, as well as holding fast, the word of life. Very gratifying cases of this latter kind of liberality and successful exertion are occurring every now and then, and we trust that the zeal and liberality of such congregations will provoke many to go and do likewise. It has often been remarked that very few if any are likely to hurt themselves either in the way of building churches or in supporting religious ordinances. It is all the other way. Those who have been most liberal in such work have had to testify that the more they have done, the more their power of doing has increased. Loss by giving to the Gospel they have not felt to be possible. It has been all gain, so that the extra effort, in connection with the erection of a new place of worship, or in any other department of Christian enterprise, has only quickened activity and increased the power both of doing and giving, while the gain in spiritual prosperity has in many cases been best of all. It would be a great mistake for any congregation to lessen or altogether to give up its contributions to the general schemes of the Church on the plea that in the meantime it is so much taken up with its own operations it has nothing to spare. The reports of congregations are giving gratifying proofs that the opposite is the better plan, that the more that is being done for congregational purposes, so much the more will be spared for outside work, and *vice versa*. The Presbyterians in Canada can do a great deal more in this way than they have as yet attempted. They are but warming to the work, and we believe that a few years will see not only all present church debts extinguished, but the general work of the Church conducted on a scale and with a liberality which will make present exertions and contributions even the most liberal appear comparatively insignificant, and as indicative of what could be described as only the day of small things.

## PRIVATE CHARACTER IN THE TREATMENT OF PUBLIC PERSONS.

THE "Mail" dismisses our criticisms on its defence of the notorious Sara with the simple reiteration of the not very self-evident proposition that neither we nor anyone else could ever think of carrying out the principle applied to the Bernhardt in our treatment of other public characters. Instead of such a thing being impossible, we hold that is just that which ought to be done far more generally and far more rigidly than may unfortunately have been the case—just that which we shall do our humble endeavour to carry out to the letter in every such instance. As it is, this principle

is carried out more or less in every community and in all the details of social life, where morality has not become a dead letter, and decency and honour have not been fairly laughed out of court as exploded frauds. What is the meaning of the whole system of certificates of good moral character? Has it no meaning? Is it merely a poor soulless tradition handed down from times when the old-fashioned virtues of sobriety, truthfulness and honour were still somewhat in vogue? Are such certificates of any use? Are they ever acted on? Does their possession ever secure a position and bread? Does their absence ever entail rejection and shame? If so, then the principle which the "Mail" says cannot be applied is most certainly so far brought into requisition. But is it urged that that may be all very well for servant men and waiting damsels, but for those in the higher scale it would never do? Wouldn't it? What about the doctor that is to heal our bodies, or the minister that may be asked to benefit our souls? No bringing the facts of their private lives to determine the treatment they shall receive or the confidence we shall repose in them! Are we to take into all the confidences of private life the doctor who is notoriously a rake, or the minister who preaches a good sermon, but goes every night regularly to bed drunk, though in a strictly "private" capacity? Are Christianly decent men to run and race all the day, button-holing and badgering in favour of the election to public office of men who make no secret of their believing that seduction is a mere innocent amusement, and that to debauch one's neighbour's wife, and thus wreck his family peace and perhaps drive him to an early and dishonoured grave, is nothing—and have their conduct regarded as all right and proper? We may be sunk pretty low, but we should hope we have not yet come down so far as that would imply. To be sure, we have heard of professedly Christian and decent men voting and canvassing for cockfighters, blacklegs, gamblers, drunkards, swearers, and profligates of the deepest and most ostentatious description, and excusing their conduct on the plea that their candidates were "clever fellows," and would look after public interests well. But did anybody ever hear of this taking place except in localities where morality had sunk to the lowest ebb, and where Christianity had become the poorest sham? Private character no factor in the formation of public judgment, or in the honour and confidence given to public persons! The whole moral sense of any community which has not sunk into the condition of an incipient Sodom rises up in indignant protest against such a principle. Certainly a wooden-headed blockhead is not to be chosen for public service—for a member of Parliament for instance—because he happens to be a decent man. But on the other hand will decent, pure-minded, Christian fathers of families, and members of churches, choose one to represent them in the highest assembly in the country, to make laws for them, and generally to mould the nation's course in their name, and as their representative, who is a miserable, swearing, drinking, rake-helly, debauchee—one who scoffs at decency, and boasts of his triumphs in gallantry, and makes his whole life one long-continued scandal, almost as bad as that of Sara herself—simply because he has a certain amount of ability, and has not as yet sinned away his entire garnishing of brains? We trow not. Perhaps there may be cases where this, unfortunately, has taken place. Perhaps there may be those in Ottawa to-day who never would have been there if the decent Christian voters of the country had done their duty, and who in that case *ought* never to have been where they are. But take the worst of them, and suppose that they had, with half the indecent impudence of this wandering actress, proclaimed on every house-top and at every street-corner their own degradation and disgrace, would any constituency in Canada, even the most ignorant, mercenary and immoral, have chosen them to sit in Parliament? We do not believe it. And would it have been thought outrageous and unpardonable for decent men and decent journals to have protested in the name of all the proprieties against the election of such, even though this one had been the "proudest he that ever walked the footstool," and that one among the ablest that ever helped to frame a nation's laws and mould its destinies? We should hope not. To return, however, more particularly to the case under discussion, we have merely to add, what indeed is the baldest commonplace to any at all acquainted with the past, that again and again have there come round times of great pretended and often