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## The Canada Presbyterian.

TORONTO, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 11th, 1891.

**F**UNDAMENTAL questions in the science of government are receiving a good deal of attention just now. Here is one that will stand discussion: If a member of Parliament buys his constituency, has he not a right to sell it? Of course he should not buy it, but if the people tempt him to do so and take the money, has he not a right to recoup himself? If the people sell their representation, sometimes at a very high figure, why should not the purchaser be allowed to sell again?

**T**HE Presbyterian Church in Canada has probably as much to be grateful for as any Church under the sun. We have no heresy trials, and that certainly is something to be thankful for. We have plenty of work and that should awaken gratitude. All things considered the Church is growing fairly well, and instead of belittling the work that is being done we should thank God and take courage. In the services of Thanksgiving Day we should remember ecclesiastical as well as personal, family and national blessings. The man who does not do so can scarcely be called a loyal Presbyterian.

**M**R. BALFOUR, the new leader of the British House of Commons, is a gentleman of high scholarship and varied attainments. Not long ago he said that the right way to get that highly desirable thing called culture is

To wander easily through books, reading what you like, and not taking too much pains about your Greek accents and irregular verbs.

Mr. Balfour differs from the learned specialist who regretted on his death-bed that he had not given all his time to the Dative Case. Most of us would like to believe in Balfour's theory. Wandering easily through good books is a delightful way to get a liberal education.

**M**RS. ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS WARD, in a prefatory note to the memoir of her father, says:—

The writer of this memorial has not thought it necessary to call attention to defects in the character which she has sought to portray. Whatever such existed it has not seemed to her the duty of a daughter to seek them; nor is it in the power of his daughter to recall them.

It is not at all necessary for the friends of Dr. Phelps to point out his faults. That pleasant duty may be safely left to his rivals, or his enemies, if such a worthy man could have enemies. In fact it is rarely, if ever, necessary in these days for the friends of a minister to point out his faults even when he is living. His enemies can always be trusted to do that in the newspapers.

**D**ISCUSSING the Briggs case the other day a member of the New York Presbytery said that "ecclesiastical trial brings ecclesiastical trouble." Neatly put, no doubt, but the blame for the trouble is too often placed on the wrong shoulders. Ahab accused Elijah of troubling Israel. The prophet promptly repelled the accusation, and showed that the king himself was the troubler. Any number of people and several religious journals from which better things might be expected accused the New York Presbytery of making trouble when it called Professor Briggs to account. It was not the Presbytery that made the trouble, it was Professor Briggs himself. The men who try to scuttle the ship are the troublers—not the men who try to stop the leak. If fighting for sound doctrine is making trouble then Martin Luther was a violent troubler. So was John Knox and scores of other men whose names will never die unless and until the name of the Lord Jesus Christ dies. It is quite true that heresy trials in our day do a vast amount of mischief. It is painfully true that they leave ugly scars. It may be sorrowfully admitted that the

ordained servants of God never appear to such poor advantage as when they are ranged on each side of a heresy trial, but let the blame for all these bad results be laid on the shoulders of the man who compels his brethren to try him.

**I**N charging a grand jury the other day Mr. Justice MacMahon made the following timely and pertinent observation:—

If the people of the country want to be honestly and well governed they must start at the polls. The ballot was given to the people and for the people in order that they might have honest representatives in Parliament.

That is exactly the doctrine THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN has been trying to inculcate for some time. Chasing the offenders who happen to have been caught is well enough, but it is like trying to purify the blood by lancing a boil. The boodling operations at Ottawa and Quebec are mere symptoms of a disease that is preying on the body politic. The treatment, to be of any value, must begin at the polls. If the people want honest government they can have it, if they don't they can easily have the other kind. The Pacauds and McGreevys are just as good as the people who send them to Parliament.

**P**RESBYTERIES should tackle the Summer Sessions problem with a good heart. The difficulty is one highly credible to the Church. If our Home Mission work were poorly done there would not be so many fields. Each vacancy calling for supply is a certificate of character to the Home Mission Committee. If our theological students were not good workers in the home field there would not be so much demand for their services in winter or any other time. The problem is one of distribution purely. There are enough of men to do the work, but they are not on the ground all the time. Is there not statesmanship enough in the Church to solve this problem? Where is our Chalmers? Where is the kind of minister they call in the Old Country an ecclesiastical statesman? There is ample work for that gentleman in this young Church. We didn't say "great Church." That phrase is not so much worked now as it once was.

**T**HE prospects for a political clearing up in Quebec are not particularly bright if we may judge from the following description of the people, recently given by the *Montreal Witness*:—

There is no evidence that the people of the province have shown the very smallest compunction for what their rulers are accused of having done, or that a single vote would change sides if there was an election to-morrow. A shrug of the priest's shoulder, or the failure of an election fund, or a promise of a wharf or bridge would alter more votes than a Baie des Chaleurs deal in every county. Just let either party threaten to make the people pay the cost of their own Government instead of raising it by loans, and squeezing it out of Montreal and the other provinces, and see what a victory it would give to its opponent. Such is the political morality of our people that Mr. Mercier, guilty or innocent, if he can only hold himself together, is as secure on his throne as ever he was in his life.

All of which being true, for the *Witness* knows its own province well, the labours of the Commission it is to be feared will not bring about any permanent reform. There is not much hope for an electorate that can be moved by the shrug of a priest's shoulders, or the failure of an election fund, or the promise of a wharf or bridge. A man who barter his ballot for a bridge is scarcely fit to take part in the government of his country. Had the people been taught to build their own roads and bridges the Province would be in a better position to-day.

**E**VEN in the self-governed Presbyterian Church the most cruel things are sometimes done in connection with ecclesiastical trials. The late Dr. Noyes of Evanston defended Professor Swing in the famous heresy trial in Chicago twenty years ago. If we rightly remember he was appointed by the Presbytery to that duty. If not appointed he was recognized by the Presbytery and given every opportunity to fill a position created by the constitution of the Presbyterian Church—that of counsel for an accused brother. The *Interior* has just brought to light the fact that soon after the trial Dr. Noyes was refused a secretaryship on the Home Mission Board because he defended Professor Swing. Could anything be more cruel? Yes one thing more cruel was done the other day. Two members of the New York Presbytery were appointed to prosecute Dr. Briggs. The moment they began their work they were put under a galling fire, and as respectable a paper as the *New York Evangelist* sneered at them as unknown members,

tried in the most offensive way to belittle them, and actually went so far as to publish the contributions of their congregations to the schemes of the Church, in order to show that their congregations were not as wealthy and important as the congregations of the men who were standing by Dr. Briggs. And yet these members were merely doing what the Presbytery appointed them to do. It may well be questioned if the heresy taught by Dr. Briggs and preached by Professor Swing did as much harm as the scars left in the efforts made to try them. Nor is it much if any better in Scotland. The violence of the language too often used by the orthodox wing and the egotistic impertinence of the youthful clerics who sneer at the McCaskills and the Highland Brigade and pose as higher critics and the "friends of Dods" do probably more harm than all the alleged heresy of the Dods school. The world knows little about and cares less for the Higher Criticism, but it has a keen eye for the sins of clergymen.

## THE BRIGGS CASE.

**T**RIALS for heresy are not in accord with popular sympathies. The individual against whom a charge of erroneous teaching is brought is certain to receive a large measure of indiscriminate favour. Those who are placed in the position of prosecutors are usually regarded in the light of persecutors. They are at once accused of heresy hunting and held up to public ridicule. This is evidently unfair. Even admitting that one who professes to have made important discoveries in religious truth is liable to misrepresentation and apt to be misjudged, admitting also that unworthy jealousies may be mingled with the desire to maintain and defend received truth, it has to be remembered that members of Presbytery are under solemn obligation to uphold the truth contained in Holy Scripture as it is formulated in the acknowledged standards of the Church. The presumption is that Presbyters will not make a keen inquisition for heresy in these days unless they are constrained to do so. Great latitude of statement is allowed those who profess to have received new light in matters of doctrine. It is only when prominence is given to opinions at variance with the recognized teaching of the Church that action is taken. There is no disposition to search for unsound doctrine, and when it is believed that it is being taught in prominent places, as in theological seminaries, many would feel that they were unfaithful to their trust if they permitted such departures from orthodoxy to pass unnoticed. It is also to be borne in mind that many who pronounce on the questions at issue are not always competent for the task of condemning or acquitting an alleged heretic. The subjects under discussion are generally of an abstruse character, and require a somewhat intimate knowledge of the nature and history of doctrine. Those who decide off-hand on the merits of a heresy trial are not always in the best position to pronounce a positive judgment.

It has to be remembered that in the case of Professor Briggs of Union Theological Seminary, New York, that the now famous inaugural delivered from the newly appointed Chair of Biblical Theology produced a wide-spread commotion. It occasioned much misgiving and alarm. A large number of Presbyteries in the Northern Church felt it to be their duty to urge that action should be taken. His own Presbytery took up the case and deliberated whether they would proceed to trial. It was decided that an investigation should be held, and charges and specifications were formulated relating to certain statements made in the inaugural. The matter was also before the General Assembly, though in a different connection. The question they had to decide was whether they would sanction the appointment of Dr. Briggs to the new Chair in Union Seminary. By an overwhelming majority they declined to approve of the appointment. A committee of Assembly was appointed to confer with the directors of the Seminary. These respective bodies have met in conference, but the directors have resolved to stand by Dr. Briggs, and there for the present the matter rests so far as they are concerned.

The Presbytery of New York met last week for the purpose of trying Dr. Briggs on the charges specified, and, contrary to general expectation, the case was speedily ended for the present at least. Dr. Briggs made a most elaborate and able defence, and whether it was owing to the keen logic of the learned professor or to other influences that do not appear on the surface, the prosecution was virtually abandoned by a large majority of the Presbytery.