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THE DOMINION PRESBYTERIAN,

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J. BLACKETT ROBINSON, Manager and Editor

Ottawa, Wednesday, Sept. 9 1903.

ARE SABBATH SCHOOLS DEFECTIVE?

We observe a good deal of attention being directed by Protestant writers to the importance and defects of Sabbath Schools. Agreement is pretty unanimous they are not what they ought to be; that in general they are ungraded, stereotyped, and taught for the most part by teachers got together by hook or crook. Have Protestant churches been on the wrong track? Is it wise to spend nine-tenths of congregational money and effort on adults, and only one-tenth on Sabbath Schools? Should the proportions be reversed? When missionaries go to the foreign field, do they not base their hopes as to an expanding future of fruitfulness and usefulness on getting hold of those who today are boys and girls, but who quickly move on to manhood and womanhood? Is that wise and necessary policy not as wise and necessary in what are nominally Christian countries?

The Roman Catholic theory is to get hold of the children—no period too early—inculcating religious and ecclesiastical views in the plastic mind on every school-day in the week. From their point of view, who can say they are not in the right? In the States, we note some of the large congregations employ the most competent men as superintendents who can be obtained, paying them suitable salaries, and regarding them as necessary assistants to the minister. Where this can be afforded it seems a desirable innovation. In the cases to which we have alluded, it seems amply to pay for itself, indirectly if not directly. But whether with paid superintendents or not, it is time the Protestant churches vigorously rubbed their eyes, and looked at the situation as it is. The General Assembly might do worse than devote the bulk of its time at the next meeting to the defects, the possibilities, and the clamant necessities of our Sabbath Schools. Thence lies the future.

THE DOMINION PRESBYTERIAN

A COMMENDABLE MOVEMENT.

The inauguration of a new movement in favour of election reform, on the part of one of our most influential denominational bodies, is an event in the modern history of Canada worth taking note of. Some time ago, reference was made in these columns to the great function of our clergy which tends, or ought to tend, to the purification of the public conscience, with special reference to the political methods which have become a matter of notoriety in every section of the country. And we are delighted to find that our clergy are awakening to the importance of that function, and the marvellous benefits that are sure to arise from its discreet exercise. The Rev. Dr. Chown, one of the most distinguished preachers in the Methodist body, has been commissioned by the last conference to undertake the supervision of this work of reform, and, it is said, that in a month or so, he will visit the Eastern Townships, to explain the great object of his great mission. It is the intention of the department of the church, to which Dr. Chown is to give his special attention, to deal with the immoralities which are openly making of our national life a by-word and reproach, extending specially in the meantime to the repressing of the mischief-making methods of the gamster, the theatrical advertiser, and the election-organiser; and it is to be hoped that the movement will become a general one under the support of every denomination.

The movement comes opportunely at the present moment. And we say this with no political bias in our words. A general election is imminent. We do not know when it will come, but everybody is in an expectant mood over it, from the humblest heeler of the "machine" to the most honourable-minded voter. The contest has for its main object the deciding of the destinies of the country,—that is, whether the great interests of our growing and prosperous nationality shall be made a foot-ball of by the men in power, with millions of the people's money at stake, or shall be conserved so as to make the present prosperity a leading towards a permanent prosperity. Where so much money is involved in the building of a third transcontinental railway, there has come into the minds of the electorate the suspicion that a large percentage of that money will be devoted to a great election fund, with no possibility of getting at the right consensus of public opinion concerning the doings of the government, if such a fund be used to debauch the constituencies as they have been in Ontario and in the several federal by-elections. This of course, so far, is only a suspicion; yet the suspicion has to be dealt with as if it were a fact, if the constituencies are to be protected from the indirect methods of either side. Dr. Chown is not a politician. He is a reformer. And there is not a community in Canada that does not know how the sanctity of the ballot has been profaned of late years, and electioneering made a mere trafficking in votes, with a heavy percentage counted out in the actual cur-

rency of the country, to him who buys them for the candidate. Hence there can be no honest man who does not think well of Dr. Chown and his task, if he can only get the particulars of the methods he proposes to adopt, beyond the mere elocution of the pulpit.

It certainly seems almost out of place for any one to make even a suggestion, in this connection. And yet it will be a pity if the true voice of the people be deprived of its freedom at this junction in the history of responsible government, simply from the absence of some practical plan to frustrate the methods of the "machine." How would it do for the clergy of every town and village to organize a club, which shall have for its object the purification of the election, by the protecting of the ballot. It is said that few men can vote without its being known for which of the candidates he votes; and it is said, with the precision of certainty itself, by the professional canvasser, that a man who takes money for his vote, cannot possibly receive such a bribe and escape being detected as one who votes as he pleases. The ominous suggestion was once made that the devil should be defeated at his own game by his own methods; that poor men in sad need of five or ten dollars should take the money offered by the candidate's men as a charity, and then vote as he pleases. But such would not only be the most heinous of games to play, but is said by the experienced heeler to be an impossible game. The ballot is not secret. The "machine" has provided against every shift of the election law, which has thus, virtually become a dead letter. What cares a large proportion of the candidates for a protest nowadays, unless it be on the score of the law expenses? His political status does not suffer. Besides there is every chance of his arranging a "saw off" and thus save his pennies. Hence risks are taken and will be taken. There is no perfect assurance of secrecy. And yet it is this very assurance that must be secured if Dr. Chown and his organization would be practical. All the amendments to the election law, that have been made from time to time, have not yet given any community any assurance of the secrecy of the ballot. And so the kernel of reform lies there. Can such an assurance be secured? Some believe it can; and a vigilance committee or club of honest God-fearing men organized in every community to see to this, will have done more to bring about the purification of our election-law tinkering than could be thought of. We recommend the idea to Dr. Chown, as he passes along the constituencies to give them of his advice, and to free public opinion from the slavery into which it has fallen in these later days.

MARCUS MANSFIELD.

Literary Notes.

Harper's Bazar for September opens with a charming article by Marion Foster Washburne entitled *An Irresponsible Ramble*. Shopping in Italy is another interesting article. Elizabeth Jordan's short story, Number Seventeen, is ex-