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TORONTO, WEDNESDAY MARCH 28, 1883.

SEVERAL communications and Presbyterian reports have been unavoidably held over until next week.

THE admirers of Col. Ingersoll try to make a great deal of capital out of his alleged fine personal qualities. They say he is genial, good-natured, gentlemanly, and very kind to his friends and family. His conduct lately, while defending some of the Star Route gentry, proves the reverse. In an altercation with one of the opposing counsel, he picked up a heavy inkstand, evidently with the intention of throwing it, and politely said to his fellow member of the bar, "You are a dirty dog." Being reproved by the judge he declared that no one would be allowed to attack him with impunity, and then blasphemously added—"I would do it at the day of judgment. If I were assailed by God, I would defend myself with my puny little power." The genial, gentlemanly scuffer suddenly becomes the blatant, violent ruffian with very little provocation. Ingersoll is not an exception. We hear a great deal about the fine personal qualities of certain agnostics and infidels. Nine-tenths of them, if scraped a little, would come out in their true character, as clearly as did Bob, when he seized the inkstand and shouted, "You are a dirty dog." The thin veneer comes off very easily, and then the man appears exactly as the Bible describes him.

THE story begun in this and to be concluded in next number of THE PRESBYTERIAN is "Rab and his Friends." Its genial author died last year, and many appreciative biographical and critical notices of him have appeared in magazines. "Rab" has enjoyed a wide popularity. Those who have read the story before, if they have leisure, will find still greater delight in reading it a second than they did the first time. To many of our younger readers it will be new, and for their sakes chiefly it is now reproduced. Professor David Masson in an article in "Macmillan's Magazine" says: "Though the story, as the author vouches, 'is in all essentials strictly matter of fact,' who could have told it like Dr. John Brown. Little wonder that it has taken rank as his masterpiece, and that he was so commonly spoken of while he was alive as the author of 'Rab and his Friends.' It is by that story, and by those other papers that may be associated with it, as also masterly in their different varieties, as all equally 'done to the quick,' that his name will live. Yes, many long years hence, when all of us are gone, I can imagine that a little volume will be in circulation, containing 'Rab and his Friends,' . . . and that then readers now unborn, thrilled by that peculiar touch which only things of heart and genius can give, will confess to the same charm that now fascinates us, and will think with interest of Dr. John Brown, of Edinburgh."

THE Hamilton Presbytery had a singular case under consideration the other day. It appears that the Rev. Mr. Walker, of Binbrook, has been saying some severe things about our climate in a letter to the Glasgow "Herald." The Hamilton brethren come to the defence of the climate with this resolution:

"That the Presbytery deem it their duty in the interests of truth, as well as out of a proper regard for the country in which God has cast our lot, promptly and emphatically to declare that many statements in that letter, while they contain a small element of truth, are so exaggerated and extreme that they cannot fail to convey a most erroneous, misleading, and false impression regarding our country generally," etc.

Not having seen Mr. Walker's letter to the "Herald," we are not in a position to say anything about his description of Ontario winters. If, however, he has managed to say anything "exaggerated and extreme" about this winter he must have a stock

of adjectives such as few men possess. The Hamilton brethren should remember that the climate around Burlington Bay is comparatively mild, and the snow-fall comparatively slight. If they wish some additional light on this case they should take a trip over the Northren or Midland as soon as possible. There are a few snow-banks, not a hundred miles north of Toronto, an exaggerated description of which could scarcely be given by any ordinary man in the English language. The train men and passengers who spent nights in these banks would be important witnesses for Mr. Walker when he makes his defence, as we learn he intends to do in May.

Now that the higher courts of the Church are soon to meet, would it not be a good thing to spend one or two seditious at each synod meeting in considering the state of religion, Sabbath school work and other vital matters of that kind. Of course "business" has to be done. There must be more or less routine. So long as men have minds of their own and have the right of free speech, there must be discussion. There is no use in calling a meeting of Synod or any other kind of meeting, if those who attend do or say nothing. We have no sympathy with those who think that the time of a Church court should be spent mainly in religious exercises. The other extreme is certainly not desirable. It does produce a bad impression to spend days on business, some of it very trifling; and then be compelled, for want of time, to hurry over vital matters at the close of the meeting. It is not easy to suggest a remedy. The right of free speech is an inestimable blessing, but it brings some drawbacks. The observance of these rules will help:—Never speak on a matter so small that it is not worth attention, except from those personally interested. Condense what you have to say. If you can't condense, conclude that nature never constructed you for speaking in a Church court. Strike out the introduction and conclusion, and give the business part. Avoid personal allusions—the court does not care much how you feel on any question. Above all things, don't get up interminable debates on small questions of procedure. That is what wearies and worries people, and spends time.

IN a few days a large number of our students will be on their way to their labours in the Home Mission field. Some of them have had considerable experience in mission work; others go for the first time. For these young labourers we ask a kindly reception wherever they may be sent. The work of the student missionary is often not a little trying, and most of the difficulties meet him at the beginning. Usually he is a stranger, and has to go through the ordeal of getting acquainted. The roads are generally very bad—sometimes there is neither sleighing nor wheeling, and sometimes both. A friend of ours went from Knox College to his field of labour a few years ago by three modes of travel. He left Toronto by rail, then rode a distance on wheels, and arrived on a sleigh. Some of the students that went to Manitoba last summer had no mode of travel at all. Students have been known to feel a little homesick on certain kinds of mission fields. A little kindness and personal attention does not hurt a student or even a full grown preacher. It positively will not ruin these young men if an elder or some leading man in their station should occasionally say he enjoyed the services. The danger of making even ministers proud in this way is not half so great as people imagine. Most men who preach get enough to keep them humble. We ask no sympathy for our students. No man who preaches the Gospel should consider himself an object of sympathy. We do ask, however, a hearty welcome, hearty co-operation, and kindly encouragement for the young men that the Church is now sending to all parts of this land.

A VITAL SOCIAL QUESTION.

PERE HYACINTH first rose to renown by his Lenten sermons in Notre Dame. Fashionable Paris of the Second Empire flocked to hear the eloquent Dominican inveigh against the prevalent sins of modern society. Loyson filled the position left vacant by Lacordaire, and ranked as the first pulpit orator of his time. Curiously enough, he attacked with unsparing invective the evil that festered in the Parisian society of the time; and yet his plain speech only added to his fame. Dr. Dix, the rector of Trinity,

New York, in his own way has dealt in his Lenten lectures with some of the existing evils of modern American society. Woman's welfare, her place and influence in the social economy, has received special attention, and he has spoken on several themes with a plainness of speech that betokens manliness of character. One of the subjects was the alarming prevalence of divorce, the unhappy state of matters of which it is an indication, and the evils to which it leads. These discourses of the rector of Trinity, have attracted much attention, and have formed the subject of much and varied criticism. This was to be expected. It would, however, have been a healthier sign had there been a more earnest desire on the part of his critics to discuss calmly the facts to which he refers, to inquire into their cause and suggest a remedy for the evils that are poisoning the social fabric.

A number of Dr. Dix's critics are women. With this there is no reason to find fault, since much that is valuable on so vital a subject can best be said by them. They have a deep interest in the best of all social institutions—home. What they think and feel in relation to all its essential features is important; a comprehensive and satisfactory solution of existing problems cannot be had without their contribution to an exhaustive discussion of questions pertaining to a subject that is yearly becoming more prominent. Strange to say few of the lady writers to the journals come out in defence of home and in praise of its excellencies, or to urge the cultivation of its virtues. It would appear that many of them find more congenial themes in berating what they are pleased to assume is Dr. Dix's ignorance of the subjects on which he presumes to discourse. To this they add more or less fervent appeals in behalf of woman's emancipation. Much also of the newspaper criticism is in the same vein. In all this there is a sad lack of earnestness. There is no end to the accusations against the pulpit for not preaching to the times. The sorry sarcasms about speaking of the sins of Old Testament worthies, and not venturing to rebuke the evils of this generation are worn thread-bare, and yet when men, desirous of being faithful to their vocation, speak without circumlocution of existing iniquity people are alert to resent such unwelcome intrusion as violations of good taste, and culpable impertinence. In the present instance the general aim seems to be to turn aside the force of Dr. Dix's exposures and remonstrances as too troublesome to merit serious inquiry. Much of the criticism to which he is at present subjected says in effect, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." Another characteristic of the present discussion is that while there is an evident disinclination to grapple with the facts to which he refers there is no attempt to ignore them or to question the truthfulness of their delineation. If these things are so they afford sufficient reason for serious inquiry as to the means of lessening those evils that imperil the existence of happy homes, and by consequence a healthy national prosperity.

Dr. Dix has spoken plainly on the subject of divorce. The ease with which it can be obtained, in some of the Western States especially, is leading to a sad state of things socially. The frivolous pretexts by which it can be secured has led to a degradation of the marriage relationship. These evils, however, are not local. We look not without reason to the New England States for what is most distinctive in the moral and religious characteristics of American social life at its best. From that section of the Union the great forces of modern civilization have flowed westward. The grand old Puritan impress is yet visible in the Eastern States. Even there the same impatience of the conjugal yoke is everywhere discernible. The rapid increase of divorce in these States has occasioned the formation of the New England Divorce Reform Association. Its secretary has been gathering statistics which are more eloquent than words. The number of divorces in Connecticut in 1849 was ninety-one; now they average about four hundred and forty annually. In that State the ratio of divorces to marriages is one to ten; in Rhode Island it is about the same; Maine and New Hampshire have one divorce for every nine marriages; the showing of Vermont is somewhat better, having one divorce to thirteen marriages, and Massachusetts has the best record, though even in the Old Bay State the ratio is one divorce to every twenty-one marriages. Such a condition of matters is calculated to awaken anxious thought as to the immediate future of society.