

THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

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CONGREGATIONAL BYSTANDERS.

IN too many congregations a class of members may be met with who are not only mere onlookers, but who rather pride themselves on being this and nothing more. Their work in the church cannot be discovered upon the most minute and careful search. It would not perhaps do to say that they have never even in intention thoroughly identified themselves with the congregation they have outwardly joined, but all appearances point in such a direction. They have not got the length of saying "we" when speaking of what their church is doing or what it proposes to undertake. All, in their estimation seems vague, shadowy, indistinct, and distant. If they had not the least connection with the particular church organization, they could not speak in a colder, more critical and less concerned tone. If there is a church to be built, they wonder what "they" are going to do. If a minister is to be called, or elders are to be elected, or church debt to be reduced, or even a church festival to be organized, or a Sabbath school picnic to be planned, it is quite the same. The third personal pronoun is carefully and continually employed with too frequently very cheerful anticipations of coming failure, and hard condemnatory remarks on almost everything which had been proposed or attempted. Of course their own plan would have been very different, and the success which would have attended it, had it been adopted, could scarcely have been called into question. The misery is that that plan of theirs, as a matter of fact, was never proposed to the congregation, nay, was never even so much as sketched to the favoured few who may form the bystander's choice circle, and be kindred spirits with himself in all his church ways and works. It was something left undeveloped in the individual consciousness, but no doubt quite satisfactory to the only person who knew all about it, and quite sufficient to justify him in refusing to give his countenance and co-operation to that which the more eager, interested and practical, had upon the whole come to look upon as in the circumstances the best.

We are not saying that all church bystanders are fault-finders. On the contrary, a good many have not got such a length in feeling any interest about the affairs of the congregation in particular, or of religion in general, as either to criticize or condemn. They take it all easily and pleasantly, well content to let others work, and have the credit too, if themselves be left undisturbed to follow their own ways, and mind their own pleasures and projects. It would, perhaps, be unjust not to allow that there are even a good many who are willing enough to do, or at least to give, when they are asked to do so, and who have apparently a certain languid satisfaction in learning that those who "run the machine" have been pretty successful during the last year or so in getting matters into good comfortable working order. But, while this is all to be allowed, the danger of the "bystander" in church matters becoming gradually but surely the grumbler and the fault-finder is anything but small. We have

heard of congregations in which there was not a single member who had not some work assigned to him in connection with the church, and who did not engage in that work with more or less interest and energy. If such favoured congregations are to be found, we fear their number is but small, and that over all this Canada of ours there is one of this kind to be met with, any quantity of the opposite description may be surely reckoned on.

We have but to add in the meantime, for the benefit of all "bystanders" of the kind we speak of, that not only are they ready to find fault with whatever is proposed or done, while they themselves propose nothing and attempt as little; they too often shew a certain amount of ill-concealed jealousy of those who are more consistent, and therefore more active, while they too often find refuge in a sneer at some whom they may not even indicate by name, but who, they say, are always too anxious to be prominent and to lead and rule in everything, while, as a matter of fact, those persons thus indicated and condemned have often no ambition in the case, but the ambition, as laudable as it is rare, of helping forward the cause of their Divine Master as they best may, and of in the most efficient manner making others sharers of that which has so far filled their own hearts and lives with light.

If the "bystanders" in the church would do more, the others certainly would not be tempted to do less, but their activity would be less taken notice of, and would very likely be less condemned, because more appreciated and because the motive from which it had its power would be better understood.

INSANITY, ITS CAUSES AND COUNTERACTIVES.

THE Medical Superintendents of our Lunatic Asylums in their yearly reports to Government frequently make statements and throw out suggestions which are deserving of a far wider circulation and of a far more general study than they receive. Published only in the blue books, these remarks are practically entombed, so that those who stand most in need of the warnings, and would be most profited by the arguments, never know of their existence, and have consequently no opportunity of becoming acquainted with the terrible dangers to which they are exposed, or with the means of escape from injurious habits into which they have fallen and by which they are being carried surely, though slowly, to physical, mental, and moral ruin. For years on years, these gentlemen have lifted up their solemn, urgent protest and given forth their sad and earnest warnings with apparently little if any effect. They have asked the assistance of ministers, fathers, doctors, druggists, editors, and what not, in educating general opinion on the subject, and especially in cautioning those who are most likely to be drawn into those ways which lead down to death. The response they have received, however, has almost been next to nothing. Some have said, that, the representations made on the whole subject have been so exaggerated that they partake in some measure of the very insanity against which they were intended to guard. Others have found refuge in the excuse that the whole matter was far too delicate to be meddled with, while still others have been of opinion that any attempt of the kind would only intensify the evil intended to be counteracted, by putting notions into the heads of those entirely ignorant of what was denounced, and entirely innocent of the criminality against which it was sought to defend them. In this way it has come to pass that almost nothing is done, the evil remains and is intensified while the physicians of our lunatic asylums are in danger of being discouraged by the apathy, and inclined, without further effort, to let things go as they may, while they try to alleviate the terrible sufferings as they come, without attempting to prevent their approach by timely warning and honest outspoken instruction. And yet it is a terrible thing to be told that a very large proportion of those in our asylums are there not because of hereditary taint, not even because of extreme moral strain or physical effort, but simply because of their own vicious habits, and their utter disregard of the first laws of physical and moral well-being. It is awful to be told, that there are beds by the score occupied in all our lunatic asylums by patients hopelessly incurable, because of their own personal habits; that these persons are a needless burden on the community, and that they are in many cases preventing those of whom there is hope being

properly attended to, and having a chance of recovery afforded them. It is not many years since Dr. Workman suggested that all such ought to be warned that they would not on any consideration be admitted to the asylums, and other doctors in similar positions seem to have very much the same idea. All over this country, and in almost every other country, the evil prevails, bringing forth the same fruits of enfeebled physical powers, a premature decay of intellectual faculty, and a deadness of moral perception, issuing in many cases in utter idiocy, or outrageous madness. And it is among all classes. How many shy, nervous, dyspeptic, ailing, young men,—students, even of Theology sometimes—may well tremble at the terrible pit they have dug for themselves, while they try to persuade their friends, that it is over-work, or something else over which they had no control, though all the while, they know that it is something fearfully different. We are convinced that parents, ministers, doctors and teachers, ought to deal far more fearlessly and honestly with this matter than they do. The evils flowing from it can scarcely be exaggerated and are to be seen everywhere, culminating only too frequently in the lunatic asylum and all which that implies.

And other predisposing causes of the same terrible affliction have to be studied and guarded against. The sins of the fathers give a hereditary taint to the children, and an increased proclivity in the same sad and ruinous direction. Dr. Clark, of the Toronto Asylum, discusses this at considerable length in his report for last year, lately laid before Parliament, and shews with great earnestness and power, how there "is a lineage of disease as truly as there is a legacy of health," and that from imprudent marriages, contracted from mere worldly considerations, as well from the vicious lives of fathers and mothers, an ever increasing number are inheriting constitutions physically and morally deteriorated, which in due time help to fill our lunatic asylums and increase the general misery.

Among other additional causes of insanity, Dr. Clark denounces in very strong language the "senseless mental overstrain to which the school children are subjected," and this arising from the multiplicity of studies required of children and youths up to twenty-one and beyond. We are tempted to give rather a long quotation on this subject, for the evil is a very formidable one, and is resulting in more injurious consequences than many suspect. "Children," says the doctor, "are put in the worst ventilated houses which can be found in the country, and these, too often, are literally crammed with them. In this foul air they must study for hours at a time. Evening brings no relaxation for them, for a task needing several hours' study must be done before bedtime, or early in the morning, and this becomes a dreary, uninviting round 'from weary chime to chime.' Besides the four elementary studies, a smattering of almost every other branch of learning is required from mere children. They, successfully or vainly, endeavour, according to their strength, to overcome these daily burdens and obstacles to health by a constant effort which produces mental tension. The result is, many never recover from the struggle during the remainder of a lengthy life. Night and day, except a few hours of sleep, from the age of seven up to manhood or womanhood, the susceptible and tender brain is on the rack, and this strain is at a time when only moderate exercise is healthy to this impressible organ. The brain must, like the rest of the body, in its early days gather tone, fibre and capacity for the great struggle of life. The young are not permitted to do hard manual work because of the tenderness of the body, until maturity is almost reached, but the most important organ of our physical system is urged onwards to the utmost extent of its powers from babyhood upwards. The weary head is filled with all kinds of knowledge which in former times were wisely judged to belong to the colleges. It needs no prophet to see that this hot-house growth, in a foul atmosphere, and with a uniform system of forced training and long hours of study, mean nervousness, lassitude, periodic headaches, and a lax, prostrated physical and mental system. A tendency to, and an invasion of insanity may end the chapter of blunders, especially if a hereditary predisposition exists. A visit to any of the schools of Toronto needs only to be made to convince any one that the flabby muscles, bleached faces, weak and fluctuating pulses, languid movements, even in the play-ground, and the weary attempts to learn lessons,