

Pastor and People.

TRUSTING JESUS.

If I could feel my hand, dear Lord, in Thine.
And surely know
That I was walking in the light divine
Through weal or woe;

If I could hear Thy voice in accents sweet
But plainly say,
To guide my groping, wandering feet,
"This is the way,"

I would so gladly walk therein; but now
I cannot see.
O, give me, Lord, the faith to humbly know
And trust in Thee!

There is no faith in seeing. Were we led
Like children here,
And lifted over rock and river bed,
No care, no fear,

We should be useless in the busy throng,
Life's work undone,
Lord, make us brave and earnest, in faith strong,
Till heaven is won!

REPORT ON THE STATE OF RELIGION.

BY REV. WILLIAM FARQUHARSON, OUNGAH.

(Concluded.)

Having now reviewed the working powers of the congregation, the question naturally arises what tangible evidence can be presented as to the success of these united labours? This information is elicited in the official form by two questions: "How are ordinances appreciated at Sabbath service, communion and weekly prayer meeting?" and "to what extent are the families of the Church represented in the Sabbath service and weekly prayer meeting?" What the Assembly's Committee meant in asking for the appreciation of ordinances apart from patent facts as to attendance is hard to conceive. Certainly to convene every Session for a general discussion of opinion of ordinances, turning largely on the minister's pulpit efficiency, is scarcely Presbyterian, and your Committee fails to see any good to be accomplished by it. No attempt is made in any of the returns to measure the appreciation of ordinances otherwise than by attendance and hence the answers to the former question are virtually repeated in answering the latter. Taking, then, the questions as one and considering all the facts presented, it is pleasing to note that the reports as to the appreciation of ordinances are everywhere encouraging. Two-thirds, three-fourths, four-fifths, nineteen-twentieths and "all" are estimates that tell the proportion of families that attend the Sabbath service, though the complaint is made that weather and roads sometimes sadly mar the symmetry of the proportions. In Huron, one Session has "become so accustomed to seeing all the families present that if one is absent the failure is at once attributed to sickness or other lawful cause," while Paris deplores "the tendency in some quarters to regard the Sabbath school as a sort of children's church, and to look upon attendance there as sufficient." Statements like these warrant the conclusion that "the pulpit is by no means losing its hold upon the people, and gives no token of ceasing to be operative over the life."

The reports as to the communion are even more enthusiastic than those referring to the ordinary Sabbath services. Tangible evidence of appreciation is everywhere presented in full churches, a large attendance of members and the evident eager expectancy with which the day is looked forward to as a season of refreshing, although the London Presbytery is shrewd enough to notice that some are seen for a few Sabbath days about that time who mysteriously disappear again till another communion approaches.

As a rule the reports of attendance at the prayer meeting are less glowing. Chatham says "fairly good," cautious Bruce adds, "not by any means a failure," Stratford chimes in, "room for improvement," while Paris still bears "the old wail about meagre attendance." The proportion of families who attend is variously estimated as "one-tenth," "one-quarter," "one-third," "one-half," while a few Sessions place the estimate as high as "three-quarters," or "all within reach." In the larger congregations in Huron, a hundred and fifty is considered a large attendance, a degree of excellence attained to only by the first three. One Session complains of the fewness of the young people, the prayer meeting being mostly made up of heads of families, but most returns emphasize the hopeful fact that the meeting is mostly made up of young men and young women, among whom it has been instrumental in doing much good. Although distance, darkness, and mud are chief hindrances to attendance, it is noted from almost every quarter that the female element preponderates. Everything possible seems to be done to make this means of grace take the place its importance warrants. Distance has to some extent been eliminated by district meetings; variety is sought in securing a fuller co-operation from the members of the Church; meetings have been conducted in the Bible class method; Pilgrim's Progress has been read with interest and profit; and yet from many congregations comes back the pleading cry: "How can we keep up a live prayer meeting?"

Intimately connected with the general appreciation of religious services is the specific enquiry as to how closely the young people are in touch with that work. Two questions bring us face to face with the facts in this connection. The first asks: "What proportion of the young people attend regular Church services, Bible class, Sabbath school, Mission Bands and meetings of the Y. P. S. C. E.?" In reply almost every report states in general terms that the attendance at Sabbath service is satisfactory, though in most cases there is felt the need of the addition of some qualifying term. A session in Huron gives the pleasing testimony that "all the young people attend," but sadly weakens its force by the addition of the saving clause "at least occasionally." Another Session in the same Presbytery notices that while "the proportion of the young women and girls and the younger boys is large, the proportion of young men is much smaller." London Presbytery tells us that "in a number of congregations the young people attend Church, but hold aloof from any active effort either in Bible study or Christian work." The complaint comes from Chatham that when there is a special organization for young people they attend their own meeting and leave the regular prayer meeting to older members, but as the report proceeds to show even where there is no special organization provided for the young people, they are not always so very eager to avail themselves of prayer meeting privileges.

As a rule Bible classes are not as well attended as Sabbath schools, the general complaint being that the young men are conspicuous by their absence. Yet this is not the invariable rule for a goodly number report that all or nearly all attend both Bible class and Sabbath school. Fifty, sixty, and seventy-five per cent. of the young people at the Bible class, and seventy-five, eighty, and a hundred per cent. of the children at the Sabbath schools, are estimates of different Presbyteries.

The reports as to the Y. P. S. C. E. are somewhat vague. At the very mention of the name a Session in Hamilton rises to a point of order demanding: "By what authority was the Y. P. S. C. E. ever recognized as an institution of our Church?" Mantland "cannot speak decidedly of the proportion of the young that attend them," for they tell us "the order is a new one," but in congregations where the Society is established we learn from other reports that the proportion of the young attending varies from one-half to three-fourths. From these reports we see but too plainly that notwithstanding all our modern organization, a considerable number of our young people are virtually lost to all Church influence when they leave the Sabbath school. Tell it not to our unbelieving world, harass not a struggling minister by flaunting before his eyes what has cost him so many anguishing tears, only show how the difficulty may be solved, give some new inspiration to the work with renewed patience and zeal, and many a faithful labourer will bless you.

The reports from Hamilton, Paris, London, Huron, Sarnia, and Chatham show that from these Presbyteries the number of young people who have united with the Church during the year is one thousand and seventy-six. In the several congregations in the Synod generally a few report no additions, while in others the number received varies all the way from one to forty. These figures and others given in the various reports are, however, of very little use, as your committee have no means of ascertaining how long people are supposed to stay young in different congregations.

The beautiful picture of Church life given in connection with ministerial encouragements is sadly marred when we are brought face to face with the prevailing evils in the different communities. The Church's foes are many and lively. In every community in the bounds, Sabbath desecration in the form of idleness, worldly conversation, visiting or driving, is felt to be a real evil, while in Windsor and other border towns and railroad centres, the Sunday traffic has a specially distracting influence. Everywhere the drink traffic is recognized as an enemy of the Cross of Christ. The very terms in which it is mentioned tell in their impassioned eloquence the terror which this foe inspires. We hear of "strong drink," "moderate drinking," "intemperance," "drunkenness," "the bar room," "the pool room," "the liquor traffic," and "the cursed liquor traffic," as a mighty hindrance to the work. But the evil with which the Church is called to wrestle in closest conflict, the evil respectable but insidious and destructive that threatens to strangle her very life, in that spirit of the world that to day, as in Paul's time, "drowns men in destruction and perdition." It is reported as manifesting itself in many forms. Some in days of giddy youth it lures through the "attractions of fashionable society," "the theatre," or "the dance"; in others it gratifies the insatiable craving for excitement at "the gambling table," "the horse race," and in one case recalling to life the "cock fight," which we fancied had been buried for generations, in others still it burdens the heart through "love of gain" till the way is paved for "selfishness," "covetousness and dishonesty"; and thus this mighty evil is found to be the mother of "jealousies," "strifes and the fruitful cause of 'divisions' in the body of Christ. With all these forms in which it manifests itself, its air of respectability, its insidiousness, working in the Church scarcely less powerfully than in the world, it is no surprise to read in report after report that it "is the hindrance most painfully experienced by the Church." Add to these evils of a more general kind, the demoralizing influence of bad companionship at school complained of by one Session, the

baneful power of novels of the baser sort, and the withering influence of sceptical literature mentioned by two others, and you have some idea of the class of foes with which the Church of to-day is called to contend.

Some looking exclusively at such definite forms of evil as drinking, gambling, and so forth, are able to report that they exert "no appreciable influence on the life of the Church," but in all reports that take into account the full power and insidious character of the worldly spirit, there comes the ambiguous testimony: "they retard growth within and work out," "blunt the conscience," "neutralize the effect of spiritual life and engender a secular spirit."

The all-important question comes: What is the Church doing to counteract these evils? As might be expected, answers vary according to the nature of the evil contemplated. To meet some of the forms of opposition, the most effective instrument seems to be the civil law, and so from a goodly number we hear the cry for "new legislation," or better enforcement of existing laws to stop the Sunday traffic, arrest the power of the saloon, shut up the gambling dens, and stop the inveterate smuggling that sows seeds of dishonesty in all border communities. All doubtless good in its place, but law—"the hangman's whip" is a weapon unproved, and gladly we hear from every part of the Church that her great hope in the tremendous conflict is not in law, but in the full and faithful presentation of the Gospel. It is enforced by all the moving power of a Sovereign's love; by means of special sermons it is brought to bear on the particular form of evil that demands resistance. In personal dealing it is presented with all the power of individual persuasiveness, but in whatever way applied the hope of the Church unambiguously expressed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our soldiers count it no honour to wield the Imperial blade, but girding their loins with truth, putting on the breastplate of righteousness, taking the shield of faith and bowing the knee in prayer, they draw with tighter grasp the well furnished brand—the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and thus armed go forth against all foes, determined to preach that Gospel, which in all ages has proved itself to be the power of God unto salvation.

From the report thus presented there is abundant cause for thankfulness. We have a ministry, earnest, devoted and true, who, untainted by the faintest suspicion of heresy, faithfully declare God's truth; these are ably supported by the whole body of the eldership, who to devotion and consecration add their practical business experience to help to right decisions on all questions coming before them; godly women, a few, have consecrated themselves in all proper ways to labour with them in the Gospel, while as an advance corps, burning with all the enthusiasm of youth, we have our young men and young women organized in Sabbath schools, Bible classes and Christian societies, winning their companions and leading them to the Saviour. But while on this side the prospect is so fair, we see on the other side the mighty hostile camp, not only holding the citadel of evil so firmly entrenched, but active and aggressive, sowing the bad seed on the very field already devoted to the Master, and not only luring some to their ruin, but so deadening the life of others that all their energy for service is blighted and withered. Standing face to face with such mighty foes, it is not for us to number our armies or count our converts, but with the knee bowed in prayer and the eye turned heavenward to press on to ever new conquests, never yielding till by God's grace the banner of Immanuel shall wave triumphant over every citadel "from Greenland's icy mountains to India's coral strand," and Jerusalem shall be a praise in the earth. All of which is respectfully submitted.

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THE HOLY SPIRIT'S INTENT.

It does not make the slightest difference to this generation what Isaiah's ideas of what the prophecy uttered in the fifty first chapter meant. But it is a matter of moment to us to know what the Holy Spirit meant for us in that famous chapter. Isaiah did not understand the great truth of the vicarious atonement in his words, "And by His stripes we are healed," but the Spirit knew, and has revealed it unto us in the New Testament. And Isaiah's "environment" at that time concerns the doctrine of the atonement in his words, as much as does the colour of the prophet's eyes.

TOO LATE.

"Too late!" The object in view is not attained; the desire is not realized. Why? Not for want of knowledge, for the time and the conditions were well known. Not because of any real difficulty in the way, for there were both opportunity and ability in the person who now bewails his lot. Simply he allowed the matter to be neglected; he did not remember the inexorableness of law; he trusted that all would be well, when he was not doing his part, and now he is startled with the words, "Too late." Salvation is so near, it is so easy and so precious, and yet it is allowed to be lost for simple want of attention. Time moves with an even and easy step, until suddenly the door of eternity opens on the startled one, and he sees that all is lost. Too late—that is all, but that is everything.

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