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The Canada Presbyterian.

TORONTO, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28th, 1891.

At the Methodist Ecumenical Council there were some rather exciting scenes. In several of the reports that appeared the disturbances that occurred were evidently made the most of. An ecclesiastical breeze is relished by some and brings pain and distress to others. People do not take into account that human nature requires a little free play, and that allowances have occasionally to be made. It is clear that the high winds that careered through the council were due to misunderstandings. Different modes of public procedure in Britain and America were not fully understood. Hasty conclusions were formed that insult even was intended to one of the gentlemen who presided, and the "hear, hears" and "chair" of the English brethren were misinterpreted. The brusque and sturdy independence of Mr. Atkinson, the English M.P., had a disturbing effect. His self-assertion and bull-dog tenacity will no doubt be set down to insular stolidity and indifference to any opinions save those entertained by himself. Had those interludes been omitted it would no doubt have been better, but the solid work done in the Conference will speak for itself.

FROM the fact that we have had a surfeit of political scandals from Ottawa, the proceedings of the Royal Commission now in session at Quebec have not attracted so great a degree of attention as was bestowed on the Ottawa reports. Then it may be supposed that those in which Dominion ministers and officials were involved were of wider interest than those which are supposed only to affect a province. But stealing is stealing whether from the Dominion or from a Provincial treasury. The investigation now taking place in Quebec is evidently being conducted with great fairness and impartiality under the presidency of the judges who have been appointed for the purpose of enquiring into the manifestly crooked operations in connection with Baie des Chaleurs Railway. Enough has been brought out to show that advantage has been taken to convert public funds to very private uses. Whatever conclusion may be reached, it is evidently high time for the Canadian people throughout the Dominion to insist that only honest men be entrusted with the work of legislation and the administration of public affairs. We have been too tolerant of dishonesty.

THE trial of Professor Briggs, of Union Seminary, New York, charged with holding views at variance with the standards of the Presbyterian Church, takes place this week. It will be followed with keen interest not only by Presbyterians generally, but by many others besides. Not a few have made up their minds already on the grave questions at issue. The keen discussions over the matter already held have to some extent made strong partisans for and against the professor. It is needless to say that ecclesiastical trials are almost always conducted amid too great intensity of feeling. There is an apparent desire to acquit, and an equally eager desire to condemn, one who is put on his defence for the views he holds. The cry of heresy is raised, and with possibly greater vehemence the cry of heresy-hunting is started as a counter cry. It is evident that the inflammatory state of mind aroused by warmth of feeling is the least favourable to a calm and dispassionate consideration of the great questions involved in a charge like that brought against Professor Briggs. It is to be regretted that when such questions are forced upon Church courts they cannot always be approached in a sincere and earnest, truth-loving spirit, the only consistent attitude that office-bearers in the Christian Church can rightly maintain.

POLICE authorities have discovered that some one has been making Toronto the basis of a most barefaced and despicable swindling operation. The sharper has been pretending to sell tickets for the Louisiana Lottery. It is evident from the number of letters received at the post-office addressed to the swindling operator that there are numbers here in Canada whose love of ill-gotten gain not only gets the better of their honesty, but even of their ordinary common-sense. When such things occur it is usual to demand that the laws for the protection of the unwary should be made more stringent. The law should certainly be sufficiently clear and explicit and so easy of application that men who prey on the credulity and weakness of the people should not be able to escape through its meshes, but the feeling of pity for the victims of shrewd rapacity is tempered by the consideration that the dupes should have known better. The fact that they responded so readily to the allurements of the sharper, tempts many who are not cynics to say "serve them right." It is a matter for deep concern that there should be so many who are prepared to disregard the divine law as embodied in the eighth commandment.

IT is worthy of observation that not a few of the prominent men who have left the Roman Catholic communion are strongly opposed to papal interference in the political affairs of States. They evidently know what lies behind the vehement desire of the Roman Catholic authorities to meddle in the secular affairs of nations. And yet it is no secret that the Roman Catholic Church desires to control education and legislation chiefly because by that means it hopes to regain the ascendancy from which it was driven by the Reformation. The design is visionary. A spiritual organization is one of greater power and influence than one that embroils itself with the shifting interests of political exigencies. Dr. McGlynn said recently: Are the American people entirely wrong in maintaining that prejudice against a Catholic? I say, No. And he gives as one reason that Monsignor Preston stated in a speech two years ago that we must take our politics from the Pope as well as our religion. Dr. McGlynn shows wherein this is a reasonable distrust. There is this feeling, he says that on a pinch, somehow they would not be such true Americans as if they were not Catholics. It is because of this constant effort of ecclesiastical politicians to aggrandize their temporal power. They fear the politics of the Pope. They would sooner have the sturdy son of a Presbyterian minister, like Grover Cleveland. And they would sooner have a man like Benjamin Harrison, about the blueness of whose Presbyterianism they have not much doubt, than to have a Catholic President, of whom they would feel they had reason to fear, that, in some way or other, he would be bewitched by messages from the Pope. The American people possibly would not object to a President whose religion was Roman Catholic, but they would most strenuously object to being ruled by a foreigner, especially if that foreigner is the Roman Pontiff who arrogantly claims to rule all nations.

AT the opening of the session of the McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, Dr. Herrick Johnson delivered the inaugural address. It is replete with good sound solid sense. He discoursed on Theological Narrowness and on Theological Broadness. In these days of extremes it takes a wise man to hold the balances even. Dr. Johnson said many good things on both topics. Here is what he says on the former.—

The field of theology is broad. In the treatment of its transcendent themes, the exactness of science is impossible. We can compel conclusions in mathematics when once our terms are understood. But as to many of the infinite reaches of truths in the Christian Scriptures, "we see through a glass darkly." Concerning the fundamental evangelical truths vital to salvation, the Christian world is pretty much agreed. The essential doctrines he that runs may read. God has not left even the lame, the halt, the blind, the impotent, the imbecile, in any uncertainty as to what they must do to be saved. But outside these indispensable doctrines are systems of truth, about whose Scripturalness equally good men and equally able men radically differ. You will hear something of these systems, and you will be taught that only one of them has Scriptural warrant. For this Seminary intensely believes in, and teaches as the Word of God, the system of truth commonly known as the Reformed or Calvinistic system. Our Church has embodied this system in her Confession of Faith, as most nearly expressing the mind of God revealed in His Word.

But no human system will probably ever compass the whole of revealed truth. And there are heights and depths of truth that baffle logic. Infinities, that on their face involve that profoundest mysteries, cannot be put in logical finite

form with the absolute assurance that that form contains the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

While the learned Doctor warns against the cramping consequences of narrowness of theological vision, he also holds that there may be a breadth that ends in aimless indefiniteness. So he proceeds:—

The broadness that lets down all bars, that believes in a Gospel of sweetness and light only, that thinks sin can be transformed by a lullaby, that calls "love" "the greatest thing in the world," and that is heard crying in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, "Give us less of Calvin and more of Christ," enters widely into the spirit of the times, and takes on every alluring guise to many a student now on his way to the ministry. But a broadness that embraces everything, and leaves us no definiteness of belief and no positiveness of conviction, is infidel to truth. Truth is large, but truth is mainly definite. Christ without truth is a phantom Christ. The Son of God and the Truth of God are one. Shade away the distinctiveness of truth, and you put Christ in shadow. The vivid outline is wanting that ever since Paul has given birth to the avowal, "I know whom I have believed!" A bold, brave, confident faith is a definite faith.

This Seminary stands for no breadth that cannot put itself in definite form for tremendous bearing on will and heart. The breadth of Presbyterianism is that it unchurches no Christian, and unfrocks no minister. But it has a definite theology to teach, and that theology is Calvinistic. We believe in the Calvinistic theology, because it more nearly expresses than anything formulated in human language what we believe is the mind of God in the Scriptures. And the belief is known by its fruits. Impalpable and shadowy souls are not born of it. The men it has fashioned are the men of iron nerve, of fixed conviction, of deathless courage, rooted as the oaks.

So, while I warn you against the peril of a narrowness that would make you bigots, I warn you also against the peril of a broadness that would empty your souls of conviction and your lives of victory. The heroes of a heavenly commission know what they believe. Only get your knowledge bathed in the spirit of Christ's Cross and passion, so that you will look out of His eyes at men who do not believe as you do, and then the positiveness and the definiteness of your convictions will be no bar, but a help to a wide effectiveness.

THE ITALIANS AND THE POPE.

THE Papacy evidently clings to the power of the keys. It desires to have the control of both worlds and aspires to supreme authority in relation to heaven and earth. It claims to open and close the gates of purgatory at discretion. It is permitted without check to fulminate excommunications against all who incur its displeasure, and its supreme head claims to preside over the Church as God's vice-gerent on earth. In that capacity the Pope can pronounce with infallibility what is to be believed and what rejected. Erring mortal though he be, in virtue of his office he claims the power to decree dogmas as if they were divine and that no man may dare question. How many intelligent Roman Catholics candidly in their hearts believe in so monstrous an assumption? The ablest men in attendance at the Vatican Council of 1870 fought strenuously against the enactment of the papal infallibility dogma, but they were overborne, some of them yielding to what they deemed the inevitable, but the late Dr. Dollinger could neither be coerced nor concussed, and the learned professor was excommunicated for no other crime than refusing to acquiesce in what he could not believe.

In spiritual matters the Papacy takes the loftiest ground, but if the so-called interviews with leading dignitaries who are supposed to participate in the Vatican counsels are to be believed, the Holy Church is not averse to the employment of means known to mundane politicians for the purpose of disseminating views they wish to be publicly believed. An instance of this appeared in the daily press last week, showing that there is a willingness to utilize existing means by which outside public opinion can be influenced. Cardinal Lavignerie's efforts to turn clerical opinion in France from the attitude of reactionary hostility into one of favour for the republic was expected to redound to the interests of the Papacy. The papal encyclical on the labour question was also expected to have the same effect. In connection with this the pilgrimage deputations of numerous bodies of French workingmen to Rome, it was thought, would have an excellent effect in turning popular feeling in favour of the Church and would likewise impress young Italy with the belief that it would be politic to stay its hand. All seemed to work well until the untoward episode at the Pantheon occurred. The result of that foolish escapade raised a commotion that astonished all interested and all who looked on. It is clear that the Curia has seen much significance in a comparatively trivial event that has led to great results and may lead to others of still greater importance. It led to an unexpected outburst of popular feeling. It has put an abrupt termination