

Summer Session, we believe, must come on the principle that the colleges exist for the Church and not the Church for the colleges. There need not be much discussion about the month of April. Practically that month is almost useless for mission work in a large portion of the home field. If all the other Presbyteries would imitate Toronto and hold a two days' conference on missions we would soon have a practical solution of a number of problems that are now hindering the Church's progress. Sending these vital questions up to the Assembly in a crude state and allowing them to take their chance there along with the deceased wife's sister, and other perplexing problems, is simply playing with the vital interests of the Church. The Assembly has far too much to do and it spends far too much time on matters not nearly so important as Home and Foreign Missions.

MISSIONARY CONFERENCE.

MEMBERS of Toronto Presbytery in instituting a Missionary Conference have taken a practical step in the right direction. The Conference was occupied in talking over purposes and plans for the furtherance of the work of Christ at home and abroad. It was by no means purposeless talk. The time has gone past when talking at large will be any longer listened to with patience. The practical common sense element is too strong and time is too short for vague, dreamy disquisitions that lead to no conclusions save that produced by weariness and exhaustion. Conventions and conferences, that is Presbyterian ones, now mean business. Deliberation and careful forethought, however, are as essential to successful practical endeavour as are zeal and activity. The time spent in devising and discussing methods of work is not lost. It has long been felt that the holding of conferences on various aspects of Christian work, in addition to more formal presbyterial action, are very desirable. There is little in the objection that they lead to nothing definite, having no power to sanction authoritatively any particular course of action. The necessary work a Presbytery has to perform precludes the full consideration of many general subjects of vital importance to the Church's welfare. It is well that the freedom enjoyed in conference and convention permits wider scope for fuller and more extended discussion than can possibly be the case in Presbytery, where many matters of a routine but necessary character are constantly coming up. The conference is not antagonistic, but helpful to efficient presbyterial work. Opinions are crystallized and put in shape for action by the Presbytery and time is saved, for a subject that has been more or less maturely considered in conference generally assumes a definite shape, since the mind of the brethren concerning it has been somewhat fully ascertained.

Another advantage of having occasional conferences is found in the fact that participation in the deliberations is not restricted exclusively to members of Presbytery. Christian workers and the active members of congregations have the opportunity of expressing their opinions and valuable suggestions occasionally come from those who do not see all things through strictly presbyterial lenses. While it is well that the authority, influence and efficiency of the Presbytery should be properly safe-guarded, it is a manifest advantage to have ministers, elders and people in close touch with each other, all animated by the same spirit and working toward the one great aim—the promotion of the divine glory and the advancement of the spiritual life of the Church.

The Conference held in Toronto last week was in the main successful. The attendance was not quite as good as it ought to have been. The occasion was held to be of sufficient importance to bring several influential ministers from a distance, among them the respected Convener of the Home Mission Committee, to take part in the proceedings. So far as the practical work of the Conference was concerned, it was eminently successful. The vital questions of Home and Foreign Missions were discussed with a fulness and freedom that left little to be desired. There was no disposition to place the one department of Christian activity in opposition to the other. The practical difficulty of securing adequate supply for the more remote mission stations was carefully considered and various suggestions were offered, the more important being that contained in the letter sent by Dr. Laing, Moderator of the General Assembly, and the proposal submitted by the Rev. D. J. Macdonnell. Dr. Laing's method of meeting the difficulty is to have summer college sessions, in order that a number of students may be free to supply mission stations during winter, when unfortunately so many of them are left with but very little supply and some with none at all.

Mr. Macdonnell's proposal which was well supported and was ultimately adopted by the Conference, though not altogether free from objection, is not an untried experiment. It was acted on for many years by the Free Church of Scotland and with excellent results. The chief feature of the plan is to require of all students graduating in theology to devote a year's service in Home Mission work before being settled in a pastoral charge. It is easier to extend rather than to restrict freedom of action. For many years now the custom has prevailed that a student on receiving license to preach the Gospel is eligible for settlement in a congregation. Of late years particularly it has often happened that congregations have waited for some particular student to be licensed in order that a call might be at once extended to him, and several satisfactory settlements have been made in this manner. The proposal that has received the sanction of the recent Conference would put an end to the system of pastoral settlement by anticipated agreements. Whether this might be satisfactory or otherwise would require time to determine. At all events it is from this aspect of the case that objections will come. There is no denying that were the plan adopted it would go far to remove the serious difficulty of finding an adequate supply for neglected Home Mission stations, and it is high time that something were done to obviate the evil that all recognize. Without specifying the personal benefit that the exercise of self-denial in complying with the proposed arrangement would confer on the individual who willingly complies with it, there is the obvious advantage that the large and varied experience gained in the mission field would be of inestimable value to the young pastor. The memory of a year's labour even in remote settlements would be abiding, and would elicit an interest in Home Mission work that could not be easily extinguished. It appears to be the plan best adapted for meeting the difficulty, and is at least worthy of serious consideration and, if practicable, of adoption.

GENERAL BOOTH'S "WAY OUT."

THE scheme of General Booth for the reclamation of the "submerged tenth" has elicited a deep and general interest. The wide-weltering waves of poverty, disease and crime in which that unhappy moiety of the English nation is submerged are forever beating up against the stable ground on which the other classes are standing. Many pass on unheeding. What are the sufferings, the inarticulate groans or the dumb despair of the hopeless and helpless thousands, to whom day brings no comfort and night secures no shelter to those whose life has no high purpose? Many more listen with sympathetic ear to the howling of this pitiless sea of human misery; they look on with moistened eye, but they know not what can be done or what attempted to mitigate in some degree this ever-augmenting under-world. Many earnest and philanthropic Christian workers come into actual touch with the people hopelessly worsted in the struggle for existence. It would be unjust to say that their efforts were of little avail. Much good has been done by them. While the Divine Benefactor's words are true: "Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these little ones ye have done it unto Me," it will not do to say that any sincere effort in His name, however apparently inadequate, is valueless. Until we can know the human heart as He does, it is better to refrain from censuring those who, though it may be by mistaken methods, try to lift one poor human wail from the slough of misery into which it has fallen. Those who have seen most of the dark side of life in the larger capitals of the world are generally most deeply in earnest in thinking over the methods most likely to bring help and hope to the growing outcast class to be found even where wealth and splendour abound. It is actual contact with London wretchedness that has moved General Booth of the Salvation Army to devise the plan which, thanks to Mr. W. T. Stead, has been so ably and graphically presented to the people.

It is not altogether surprising that it has been so well received generally. "The Bitter Cry of Outcast London" aroused attention and effort. The public conscience was in a measure quickened. The terrible incongruity that in London, the centre of modern Christian civilization, there should exist thousands upon thousands of human beings almost as degraded as those encountered by explorers in darkest Africa is increasingly felt. General Booth is the first who has boldly and on a large scale propounded a practical scheme to deal with the acknowledged evil. He faces the question squarely. It is

admitted that many of the submerged have fallen by their own fault, that much if not the greater part of the wretchedness is due to crime, dissipation, indolence and incapacity, but it is there as a terrible and menacing fact. The body politic that has such festering sores eating in upon its vitality cannot be in a healthy condition. National as well as civic safety requires the adoption of ameliorating methods. Christian helpfulness is better than military repression. Brotherly kindness and charity are preferable to batons and bayonets. For these reasons General Booth's plan has met with a most encouraging welcome. Money has been coming in with unexpected readiness and in the course of the next few weeks it is likely that the million dollars called for will be obtained. Men in all walks of life and representing various branches of the Christian Church have been forward in this good work.

The *New York Independent*, with characteristic enterprise, has been eliciting the opinions of men supposed to be competent to form a proper estimate of General Booth's project. It is singular to find them so divergent. There is comparative unanimity among them in considering the conditions of London and New York as being very different. They differ in size, and several hold that there is work in the latter city for all who are able and willing to labour. Most of the men who have written on the subject think that the wretchedness to be found in the great American commercial centre is of a kind somewhat different from that existing in London. New York poverty is but of recent origin and smaller dimensions. The one is accidental, the other chronic. The wretchedness that is crowded away in filthy alleyways in New York differs in no essential particular from that to be found in Whitechapel. It is the same demoralizing, deadly thing in both cities. The alarming extent of destitution in London is of comparatively recent origin, and it is a question how much of it to be found there and in New York as well is due to modern industrial conditions. It is significant how differently such men as John Swinton and General Booth, who have visited and mingled with the destitute people in their lurking places—for homes they cannot be called—and a judge who presides at the special sessions, held in the Tombs, New York. The former are not pessimistic and are anxious to see any feasible scheme tried to cope if possible with a terrible evil. The judge pronounces General Booth's proposal an impracticable scheme. In this he is emphatic. He says:—

General Booth's scheme is not the one to remedy the evils to which he has called the attention of the public. For instance, we must bear in mind (and I speak from my experience in dealing with such people) that of the low female outcasts more than ninety per cent. are so from choice—not as the result of misfortune or misery, but from choice. Nearly all of them have been brought to their condition through a vain desire for display and a love of dress. But whatever has been the cause, whatever is the reason, they are what they are from voluntary choice, and they certainly prefer that mode of life. So that they would refuse to be "reformed" by any means, and certainly by this means which, as I understand it, will be an attempt to corral them, so to speak, to a place where, in a measure, they will be put on exhibition as specimens in a museum for other people to look at. Such a method of reform strikes me as visionary, almost ludicrous. Among the male outcasts, perhaps, there is not so large a percentage of persons who lead their lives from choice. There is a much larger number of men who have become criminals through misfortune, or the peculiar circumstances which have surrounded them, but even with a large proportion of those they are what they are from choice. The life they lead is one which is agreeable to them and which they have no particular desire to change. As long as they can keep out of jail they are perfectly satisfied. They are not particularly terrified at the prospect of going to prison, at the same time they would prefer their liberty. As for forming any aggregation of such fellows and getting them into colonies, it strikes me as so impracticable as not to deserve a moment's serious consideration.

If all were of the opinion entertained by this judge there would be little encouragement for Christian effort. Would the judge look on and see this wretchedness growing to larger and yet larger dimensions? Much more hopeful and encouraging are the views expressed by Dr. McGlynn and John Swinton. They have not sat on the bench dispensing justice in tones of cold severity, but have taken wails by the hand with a tender human sympathy. The last-named writer has a rather hard hit at the apathy and indifference of clergymen and the Church generally to the home heathenism of great cities. This is hardly fair, for numerous are the clergymen in New York and in London who are doing excellent work among the outcast poor, and it is encouraging to find that prominent ministers in England, both Churchmen and Dissenters, have come forward to support the scheme propounded by General Booth. Even should it prove a failure—and there is no reason to suppose that it will—it is better to try than to continue looking on in helpless indifference.