

TORONTO PRESBYTERY'S REPORT ON THE STATE OF RELIGION.

The following report, by the Rev. W. Frizzell, Convener of the Committee on the State of Religion, was presented to the Presbytery of Toronto at its last meeting, and adopted as read:

The Presbytery will be pleased to learn that the answers to the questions on the State of Religion are, on the whole, encouraging. Answers have not been received from every Session within the bounds. This may be accounted for partly on the ground that some congregations are without a pastor, or have a pastor who is too busy to attend to such small matters as the State of Religion. Barring British Columbia, all the settled churches within the bounds, with five exceptions, have made returns, and most of the vacant congregations and mission stations have sent in answers more or less full.

The questions put to Sessions by the General Assembly's Committee on the State of Religion are eight in number with several sub-divisions.

I. (a) What assistance do the elders render in carrying on the work of your congregation?

The answers to this question serve to show that the elders, as a rule, render important service in carrying on the work.

Apart from the usual business in Session, and assisting at communions, most of them take part in prayer meeting, and teach in the Sabbath school. Some "visit members in their districts," "distribute communion cards," "visit the sick," "hold cottage prayer meetings," "set a good example by their liberality," "co-operate with managers when required," "engage in mission work." One says: "All our elders teach in the Sabbath school." Another says: "Two are superintendents of Sabbath schools, and two others teachers." Nearly all the Sessions speak of assistance rendered in prayer meeting and in Sabbath school work.

(b) How can their services be utilized to the best advantage?

The following ways among others have been indicated: "By bringing them into sympathy with the work of the Church, and giving them special districts;" "By giving each elder definite work to do;" "By recognizing their talents, and giving work in line therewith;" "By personal dealing with the unconverted;" "By giving specific work, and after they are started keep them from being discouraged;" "By laying the full responsibility of their office upon them."

(c) Is the duty which devolves upon them to be active members of the body of Christ faithfully impressed on those who are admitted into full communion with the Church?

Nearly all the answers to this question are in the affirmative. A few confess to a sense of unfaithfulness. One says: "It is done, but it seems a waste of words, or positively hurtful to administer general exhortations without pointing out specifically what they are asked to do. But what specific Church work can be given to each is very difficult to determine." Several say: "The duty is made prominent when new members are received into fellowship."

(d) Is discipline carefully maintained?

The majority say: "Yes." One says: "Fairly well." Another: "Not as carefully as it should be." While a third says: "I don't know what careful discipline means. Very little of it is done. The rod is used much more vigorously in the pulpit than in the Session."

II. (a) How has the spiritual life of your congregation progressed during the past year?

As this is the pivotal question of the series, you will be pleased to learn that the answers generally indicate progress. Here are typical replies: "Slight progress;" "Quietly but surely;" "We hope the temperature is rising;" "Increase on previous year;" "One of the best years in our history;" "A decided growth in spiritual life." The reply of the Session of West Church is: "We have great reason to praise and bless the Lord for a marked outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon our congregation during the past year, so that 275 members have been added to the Church, and a very general quickening of the whole people. It has surely been to West Church a year of grace."

(b) Do members and their families attend the services of God's house with commendable regularity?

Some exceptions are made. In Georgetown the children cannot attend for lack of room. In other places some do not attend for want of will, and have to be reminded of their duty. But in the main members and their families seem to attend the house of God with commendable regularity.

(c) What efforts are made, and with what success, to bring the more careless and indifferent in the congregation into closer connection with the Church?

Four or five sessions speak of special evangelistic services, lasting from two to five weeks, and with cheering results. In connection with these services it appears that a large amount of pastoral visitation, and personal work by elders and members was done. One session speaks of the Christian young men of the congregation visiting boarding houses, and inviting the non-church-going young men to attend Church. Another mentions the missionary, the Bible reader

and a staff of visitors as valuable agencies in reaching the careless. Most of the congregations, however, have relied on what they call the ordinary methods.

(d) How is the prayer meeting attended, and what assistance is received from members of your congregation in conducting it?

Many reply, "Well attended." One says, "Better attended during past six months than for some years." Some qualify by prefixing the word "moderately" or "fairly." In one congregation from one-fourth to one-third of the membership attend; in another the proportion is put at one-fifth. The attendance at West Church ranges from two to three hundred.

Nearly all speak of getting good assistance. There are forty-five in Chalmers Church ready to pray when called on. Several speak of assistance rendered not only in praying, but also in remarks on the subject for the evening, and in contributing missionary intelligence at the monthly missionary prayer meeting.

(e) Is family worship faithfully observed?

A good many of the replies run as follows: "Can't speak definitely;" "Hard to get information;" "Don't know;" "Generally it is;" "Pretty generally;" "To a considerable extent." Here is the definite testimony of Brampton Session: "Half of the families in the congregation have been visited with a view of ascertaining to what extent family worship is observed. Of those visited fifty-eight per cent. observe it more or less regularly." The Session of Union and Norval says: "About one-half of the families composing the congregations observe family worship." These Sessions are mentioned because the answers are more definite than the rest.

(f) Is there any perceptible improvement in the liberality of your congregation?

A few reply in this strain: "Same as last year;" "Improvement not very perceptible;" "Don't know that there is." But in a large majority of congregations improvement is very marked. "Yes" is the word in most answers. "Yes, fifty per cent. in the last two years," says one. "Yes, more than doubled last year," says another. "Yes; paid \$3,000 on church debt. Do well for Schemes. One elder subscribes annually \$600," says a third. "Yes; increase both on stipend and missions," and so they go on. One session replies, and perhaps this is the most remarkable reply of all, that "there is not much room for improvement."

(g) What method is adopted for increasing the liberality of your members?

A good many say "Nothing special." One answers: "Saying very little about it, never scolding; complimenting when possible, and ever keeping prominent the thought that it is a transaction with God, and not with man."

Several mention "giving information about the 'Schemes' from the pulpit," "disseminating missionary literature," "preaching missionary sermons," "holding missionary meetings," "taking up monthly collections," "holding missionary prayer meetings," "the formation of mission bands," "missionary societies," etc. The replies of several may be summed up in this one: "The presentation of Gospel motives, especially the obligation to do everything for the glory of God." The intention of one minister is "to deal with missionary themes monthly, during the current year, on the Sunday set apart for the mission collection."

III. What influence is exerted in your community by the religious life of the members of your congregation?

"A religious influence," says one. "Good," is the word used by the majority. "A good influence." "An influence for good which would be sadly missed did it not exist." One puts it as strong as this: "Good, and only good."

Others put it a little more mildly: "Hope it is for good;" "Don't like to answer;" "Good on the whole." A few express the fear, "that while a majority of the members are exemplary in their lives, others, by their worldly conformity, lead some astray."

IV. (a) What attention is bestowed on the religious instruction of the young people in your congregation?

Nearly all mention Sabbath school and Bible class work, and some emphasize home instruction. In addition to this there is in one congregation (Parkdale) what is called a "Boys' Organization," and a "Girls' Organization," for the study of Bible characters, and especially mission work, in which they are very much interested. A large number of the boys profess a determination to become missionaries.

In another congregation a short sermon is preached every Sabbath morning to the young. In a third seven or eight sermons are preached in the year; while in still another a sermon is preached once a month to the young in connection with the administration of baptism; and several make mention of special exhortations addressed to parents, urging them not to neglect the religious instruction of their children in their homes.

(b) What is done to develop the spirit of liberality among them and with what success?

It is clear from the answers to this question that a good deal is done. Without exception, almost, the children are asked to contribute to missions through the Sabbath school—some weekly, some fortnightly, some monthly and some quarterly. In one case con-

tributions are asked from individual classes rather than from the whole school, the amounts being made public with a view to stirring up a healthy rivalry in giving. The claims of the Schemes of the Church are kept before the young in many congregations, and in others an attempt is made to enlist their interest in the different missionary organizations. Success, more or less marked, seems to attend these various efforts.

(c) What means are employed to bring them into full communion with the Church?

Different means are used, but the ordinary are the most common, such as Sabbath school and Bible class work, faithful preaching of the Word, personal dealing in the home, special sermons are preached. Two or three mention a communicants' class, held for five or six weeks before each communion to impart instruction in the doctrines of Scripture, and in the polity of the Church. One mentions such a class held a few weeks once a year. One Session says: "Some parents are afraid their children may become members of the Church too young."

(d) How many are there in your congregation above eighteen years of age who are not communicants?

The definite answers to this question will do little more than excite curiosity, seeing that so many others are indefinite. Here is a specimen. "A considerable number," "comparatively not many," "a good many." Fancy a Church compiling a report on statistics from such answers as these. Among the definite answers the numbers run from ten, the smallest number in any congregation, up to 100, the largest, fifty being about the average.

V. Have any means, save the ordinary means, been employed during the past year to commend the Gospel of the Son of God to your congregation?

As a rule the answers are in the negative. There are these exceptions, however, to note.

Georgetown congregation held two weeks' special services last February, just preceding communion. The Session's testimony is: "Attended by much good."

Bolton. Five weeks' special services this year. Still in progress at date. Testimony: "Results good."

West Church. Special services for several weeks. Testimony as above.

Streetsville. Special meetings for five weeks. No testimony.

Oakville. Special services for five weeks. Testimony: "The whole Church has been revived and quickened. Ten members were added, while we expect the double of this soon to follow."

College Street. One week's special services. Testimony, satisfactory results.

Ersine. Special services for three weeks. Testimony: "Eighty members joined the Church, as the fruit of these services, and the spiritual life of the congregation has been quickened."

One Session, replying in the negative, says: "We believe that the ordinary means of grace are designed of God, to be the channels of communication by the Holy Spirit, and that when His people are faithful the Lord honours the preaching and the teaching of the Word, on the Lord's Day, as well as the regular meetings of the week, in chapel and private house, to the impression of the minds of sinners and the salvation of their souls. We believe, moreover, the tendency increasing in the Churches to depend on imported helpers is adapted to weaken the sense of divine obligation on every member to be a helper of the Lord in the work, and also to promote, on the part of office-bearers, a reluctance in fulfilling the duties to which, in their ordination, they have been set apart by the Holy Spirit."

VI. (a) Are there any special hindrances against which you have to contend in advancing the cause of Christ?

Here, also, answers are, as a rule, in the negative. Says one: "We have no special hindrances; but we find the ordinary hindrances sometimes very great."

Another: "We cannot speak of special hindrances, but the world, the flesh and the devil are constant hindrances." Among the special hindrances mentioned we find: "An unfortunate arrangement of the preaching stations," "intemperance," "worldliness," "love of pleasure," "scepticism," "the want of a minister," "want of united harmonious action," "lack of population," "the social dance," "the social dance in the country congregation, the want of morning and evening service in the town."

(b) What efforts are you making to overcome such hindrances, and with what success?

Some mention Bands of Hope and such like organizations as a cure for intemperance. Some special meetings as a cure for worldliness; some special sermons as an antidote for the social dance. At the same time there is a cheering consensus in the answers to the effect that the preaching of the truth, along with a godly example on the part of ministers and members, is the great power of God in overcoming both special and general hindrances.

VII. Have you any suggestions to offer regarding the better and more efficient manner of carrying on the work of Christ in the congregations of our Church?