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TORONTO, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13th, 1888.

DR. DANIEL WILSON, President of the Toronto University, declines to become Sir Daniel. We have a few men in this country who can afford to do without any prefixes or affixes to their names. President Wilson is one of the few. His thousands of friends and admirers will think all the more of the veteran President, because he declined to put any further attachments to his honoured name.

A GOOD brother who formed part of the Conference that tried Mr. Longley began his judgment by saying that he "had come to the Conference greatly prejudiced against Mr. Longley, believing that he deserved the heaviest penalty." That brother's confession will give a rude shock to the faith of those who believe in ecclesiastical tribunals. Before he had heard one word of evidence or even taken his seat in the court he had decided that the accused man was guilty! Fancy a judge going on the bench quite convinced that a prisoner was guilty, and his mind made up that the man ought to be hanged! Something dearer than life to a good man was at stake in this trial, and one of the judges had his decision ready before the trial began. One cannot help wondering whether many of the judges that take part in ecclesiastical trials decide before they hear the evidence as this candid brother did. His candour far surpassed the judicial qualities of his mind.

THE agitation for Home Rule in Ireland may do good in a direction that no one anticipated. It may lead to a reasonably clear understanding that the Pope must take no active part in politics. That is a consummation devoutly to be wished. The Irish people meet and protest against the Papal rescript with an amount of vigour and independence that is quite refreshing. The league orators lecture his holiness with a freedom, not to say fierceness, that is quite novel in Irish Catholic circles. The outcome may be, in fact must be, the lessening of the Pope's influence in Irish politics. The priests, of course, now stand off a little, but the people do not seem to think that his holiness has a right to interfere between them and the British Government. If the Pope's temporal power is reduced to a minimum in Ireland, middle-aged men may live to see the Province of Quebec delivered from Romish thralldom in civil matters. Perhaps his holiness of Rome is convinced by this time that meddling with Irish politics is a risky kind of business. Whatever the result of the agitation in favour of Home Rule may be, should it lead to the lessening of the Pope's influence over the Irish people, no Protestant need be sorry.

THE Legislature of the State of New York has unanimously changed the gallows for electricity in executing the sentence of death upon criminals. Those who think that criminals should be put out of existence in one of the most horrible ways imaginable, will, of course, denounce this innovation. But even if the change made in the mode of putting unfortunates to death is not an improvement, some other changes are undoubted reforms. Visitors, who from motives of mawkish curiosity, love to call upon and speak to a man soon to be hanged, are hereafter to be kept out of the prison. Reporters are not to be present when condemned men are put to death, nor are newspapers to be allowed to publish a report of the execution. This will be a great boon to all who like a clean

newspaper. On the whole, the law is a good one, and will, no doubt, soon be passed in other States. Perhaps some humane politician will make a similar movement in Canada. Thomas D Arcy McGee rendered the country good service when he introduced the law abolishing public executions. It was contended by some at that time that private executions would lessen the fear of the gallows, and in that way encourage crime. No such result ever followed. There is brutality enough in the country without public executions. To change the mode of execution might not encourage any more than did the reform introduced by the lamented McGee.

WHEN the Methodists of Canada divided their Church into local conferences and assigned a certain amount of work to each it was hoped that less time would be given in Conference to routine business and more to the vital work of the Church and the best methods of carrying it on. The *Guardian* says:

This expectation has hardly been as fully realized as could be desired. In most of our Conferences the time is so fully occupied with routine business and the incidental discussions which arise that but little time is often left for a free interchange of thought on the wants of the Church and the best means of supplying them. Yet no questions can be of greater importance than our Sunday school work, the place and value of evangelistic services, the best kind of preaching for the times, the need of personal connection, and the best methods of conducting our Church services so as to make them influential for good to all classes.

Add to these the discussion of mission work and you have a list of the questions that should occupy about three-fourths of the time of the higher courts of any evangelical Church. Routine business could be disposed of quite easily, but "the incidental discussions" are the consumers of time that ought to be given to the real work of the Church. When did any Church court spend half a day in discussing "the best methods of conducting our Church services so as to make them influential for good to all classes." These services are the very foundation of all real church prosperity. If a minister does not conduct them properly he is soon sent to the right about. And yet the Church never tries to help the weak brother; in fact never says a word to him about his mode of conducting service until interference is too late to do any good.

THE *United Presbyterian* tells its experience in this way:

We say a thousand good things and get no credit for it; but a word that is displeasing brings us all kinds of reproaches. People do not learn how to set one thing over against another and thus strike an honest balance; they must see all as in agreement with their beliefs and prepossession.

And this reminds us of an incident that occurred in an Ontario city not long ago. An estimable and accomplished minister's wife—one whose praise is in many Churches—warmly thanked a contributor to this journal for his word, and incidentally added that he occasionally wrote things with which she could not quite agree. "It would be difficult," said the contributor, "to write every week and say things with which everybody would agree." "Difficult," said the lady; "it would be impossible." Yes it would be absolutely impossible, and yet there are many fairly good people who expect the impossible to be done. Why expect a journal, secular or religious, to agree with its readers on every conceivable point? Do our best neighbours agree with us on all questions? Do our nearest friends think exactly as we think? Would it not be more generous and more just to give credit for the "thousand good things" and agree to differ in a few questions? The pulpit is often treated in the same ungenerous and unjust way as the press. A minister preaches a hundred fairly good sermons and there is little said about them. He puts one foolish sentence into one sermon and it sets the congregation in a blaze. Is that striking "an honest balance?" An elderly Christian lady, now in heaven used to excuse her minister's occasional weak sermon by saying, "Many a good one he gave us." Would that she had more imitators.

IN all such cases as the painful one lately before the Niagara Conference, there is much more at stake than the standing of the person chiefly concerned. The ability of Church Courts to try such cases with dignity and impartiality is always tested. Hugh Miller used to say that in the very nature of things an ecclesiastical must be the least satisfactory of

tribunals. Many less competent judges than the great Scotsman are of the same opinion. The most useful and accomplished ministers may not have judicial minds. Their training and experience are not always such as to fit them for delicate judicial work. An eloquent preacher may be poorly qualified for sifting and valuing testimony. Besides this, as Hugh Miller observed, there is a conflict of functions of ecclesiastical Courts. The same men act as counsel on both sides, judge and jury. Any one who has ever watched a weak Presbytery wrestling with a difficult case, must have noticed the confusion that arises from this conflict of functions. The members are doing their best to unravel the tangled mass before them, but they have not the machinery for getting at the facts in a cool, scientific way. In the case alluded to, we understand the most important evidence was put in in written form. Ten minutes cross-examination might have put an entirely different face on that evidence. In estimating the value of testimony, jurists always attach a large amount of importance to the demeanor of a witness. His manner of giving evidence may throw as much light on the case as the evidence itself. However, an approximation to justice in all that can be had from any earthly Court, and if Church Courts give an approximation, they do all that can reasonably be expected of them. A good rule of life is: Keep out of all Courts, civil and ecclesiastical, if possible, and if that is impossible, never expect too much from them. The movements of even judicial minds are rather uncertain.

## THE HALIFAX ASSEMBLY.

THIS evening the Fourteenth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada will assemble in St. Matthew's Church, Halifax. To the membership of the Church generally the Assembly meetings are objects of much interest, and by many prayers have been offered up for divine direction and blessing on the assembled delegates and for the advancement through their instrumentality of His cause whom the Church seeks to serve.

So far as has yet appeared no question of overpowering interest is likely to absorb the attention of the General Assembly. For several years past the Supreme Court of the Church has been able to give tolerably full consideration to questions chiefly of an administrative character. This no doubt has been very advantageous to the smooth and harmonious working as well as to the progress and prosperity of the Church. The Conveners of the principal Schemes, have had ample time for the presentation of their respective claims, and if they have not in all cases received the attention they deserved, it is not because they have been crowded out by protracted and discursive debate. To all appearance oratory-at-large in the General Assembly is a thing of the past, and the mourners for the vanished past that go about the streets are not conspicuous by reason of their large numbers.

So complex and extensive however has the business of the Assembly become that were no subjects of special importance to emerge, except those that are regarded as ordinary and routine, the time and attention of the members would be fully taxed. When questions of grave moment and general importance arise, they, of necessity, awaken the interest of the delegates and many of them feel called upon to give them exhaustive discussion. On such occasions, even though the time of meeting is extended, ordinary and regular business of much importance is hurriedly disposed of and many matters are excluded altogether, much to the regret and disappointment of brethren and their friends having special interest in them. Even the business that must be done, is, towards the end, transacted hurriedly by a thin house, the jaded members remaining reluctantly and eagerly awaiting the final benediction. This is felt to be far from satisfactory, although the brethren who generally remain conscientiously to the close are mostly men of experience and have the confidence of their brethren. Yet they do not like to have such grave responsibilities thrust upon them, and rarely venture to suggest modifications lest they might fail to meet with the approval of the Church at large.

While the prominent Schemes of the Church usually receive due and adequate consideration, those that are deemed minor obtain but scant notice. There are certain of the larger Schemes, such as Home and