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TORONTO, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 1879.

BEGIN the canvass early; make use of sample copies; let the people know what THE PRESBYTERIAN is, and the work it is doing; invite them to subscribe without delay. Balance of year free to new subscribers for 1880.

HOME MISSION FUND.

WE have this week given more space to correspondence on the state of the Home Mission Fund than we can well afford. The importance of the subject and the evident diversity of view prevailing must be our excuse. We are quite sure that all the friends who have written on the point are animated by the honest desire to advance the interests of the Church and especially to relieve the Home Mission Fund from its present embarrassing condition. Nothing but the very kindest feelings, we are persuaded, are cherished by any one of our correspondents towards the members of the Home Mission Committee, and even those of them who are ready to criticize the proceedings of that Committee most severely are convinced that though the course adopted is in their estimation not a wise one, the error at the very worst has been one of judgment, not of either cowardice or indifference.

And yet it is very difficult for onlookers to see what other course the Committee could have adopted. With a stationary or falling income, it has continued from year to year to maintain and even extend its scale of operations in the hope that the increased liberality of the members of the Church, arising from a more correct sense of duty and the return of good times, would make all straight and relieve the temporary difficulty without the humiliation to the whole body and the necessary suffering and loss to individuals arising from the dismissal of missionaries and the abandonment of promising and very needy fields of labour. It is very possible that from a mere business point of view the Committee erred in delaying so long to face the crisis, in hoping so persistently against hope, and in continuing to add to its pecuniary obligations till the burden became intolerable. But if in this a mistake was made, it was surely a very venial one, for which the whole of the Church is quite as much responsible as the Committee. The very faintest suggestion of curtailment was received with expressions of strong disapprobation, and the reduction of the salaries of all the missionaries was thought greatly preferable to the absolute withdrawal of any. The Church urged the Committee to a bold, believing and hopeful course. And the Committee was very willing to be so urged. It knew the extent, the need and the promising character of the various fields of operation better than outsiders could possibly do, while it was keenly alive to the claims of the missionaries and to the exceedingly painful position in which not a few of these would be placed by their being withdrawn from their various fields of labour. But borrowing from banks, and hoping that something would turn up, could not go on for ever. It was simply continuing to let on the steam and at the same time sitting on the safety valve. When the crash would come was a mere question of time, and the longer the delay, the more formidable the catastrophe. Instead of the Commit-

tee being to blame then for being so precipitate in bringing the Church face to face with the actual facts, it would have been better, perhaps, as one of our correspondents suggests, that this had been done a considerable time ago. And yet a good deal can be said on the other side. A season of very deep depression of trade, and a series of poor, if not actually bad crops, have been tided over. The general outlook is greatly more cheerful now than it has been for a good while past, and the ability to raise all the money needed has certainly been increased.

But is it fair or right, is it in accordance with our Church order or consistent with the directions of the Supreme Court to expect that the Committees appointed by the General Assembly shall not only administer the funds of the Church entrusted to them in the most economical and efficient manner possible, but shall also see that these funds be raised, and, if necessary, shall undergo all the personal labour and incur all the individual responsibility attendant upon such a course? It would seem to us that such a proceeding as an ordinary plan of action would simply be a confession that our Presbyterian system had turned out a failure and had helplessly broken down; while even as an extraordinary measure, the order of the General Assembly would in every case be a manifestly indispensable preliminary to such a proceeding. Much painful experience has shown that it is often a very unpleasant work for deputations from Central Committees to visit Presbyteries and Congregations even when they are backed by the authority and command of the Supreme Court. But to attempt such a course without that sanction or even in spite of something like a prohibition, has generally, if not always, been to invite failure and to incur very disagreeable and very useless personal mortification.

Besides, such a suggestion as that the Committee in this case should have taken the work entirely out of the hands of Presbyteries implies something very offensive, though we are convinced, perfectly unintentionally so to the great body of our ministers and elders. It intimates that they are cold and indifferent to the work of home missions, if not positively hostile; and that they cannot be trusted to see that the directions of the General Assembly in this respect are faithfully, constitutionally, and universally carried out. The Supreme Court of the Church has direct access to each congregation of the body. Every minister and elder at ordination engaged to be subject to their ecclesiastical superiors and to see that the decisions and directions of these were faithfully and honestly put in force. Have Presbyteries rebelled against this arrangement? Then these Presbyteries ought to be dealt with, unless the Church is willing to acknowledge itself in a condition of ecclesiastical anarchy. Have individual members of Presbyteries set themselves to nullify the arrangements of the Supreme Court or to defy the authority of their own local one? Then they are showing themselves untrue not only to the Church, but to their own honour and to the sanctity of their own engagements. There is not a Presbyterian minister in Canada, nor is there a Session, that has a right to come between a congregation and the General Assembly and say that that congregation shall not have an opportunity of making every collection which the Assembly orders unless it have a sanctioned equivalent for each or all of these. What that collection shall be, whether large or small, must be determined by the congregation itself, but that an opportunity shall be afforded it to make the collection is beyond all question. And that minister is not a loyal son of the Church, nor faithful to his ordination vows who will do or say anything to prevent that collection being made or its equivalent being given.

Are we prepared to acknowledge that we have such disloyal ministers and elders, and such inefficient Presbyteries as this suggested practical supersession of their functions would imply? We should be sorry to be shut up to so melancholy a conclusion, for to do so would be to confess that our boasted Presbyterian system at a time of crisis and difficulty had broken helplessly down; that our Presbyteries had become so absorbed in mere local interests that they had no regard for the general work of the Church, and were either unable or unwilling to carry out its laws; and that individual ministers and congregations were so narrow and isolated in their views, and so selfish in their feelings that they had practically given up the Presbyterianism of which they had been in the habit of boasting and had fallen back on that Congregationalism which they had so often repudiated, and whose

inefficiency for successfully aggressive Christian work they had so often proclaimed. We have no such idea of our Presbyteries and congregations. That there is abundance of power, though it may be somewhat latent, in the Presbyterian Church of Canada to carry forward with triumphant success all the departments of Church work, few, if any, competently acquainted with it would question, far less absolutely deny. Who may be the legitimate agents to bring out this latent power—is the only present question. If we could believe that Presbyteries and Sessions were in such a state of spiritual coma that they could not be trusted with what is certainly an integral part of their legitimate and normal work, then we should feel that there was good cause to tremble for the future of our Zion, for we could in that case have little hope that the spasmodic and abnormal would succeed when the steady, constant and legitimate had confessedly failed. The ever swelling outflow of Christian liberality must have its source and motive power in enlightened conviction, holy feeling and humble faith. Who under God are most likely to tap this fountain, to strengthen this conviction, and develop and intensify this faith? We must believe that the local influences which our Presbyterian system so wisely provides, may be expected to be far more successful in such a work than the flying visits of deputations, however eloquent or the earnest appeals of strangers, however much to the point. Presbyteries, besides, can if they please, call in such outside workers to their assistance. If they either cannot or will not do either one thing or another, matters are in a bad way.

IS A "MORAL INTERREGNUM" IMMINENT?

MR. GOLDWIN SMITH has endeavoured in a long article in the current number of the "Atlantic" to show that it is. He has, however, neglected to tell us what he means by the phrase, and his prophetic foreshadowings may, therefore, be conveniently taken as pointing either to what almost all would readily admit or to what far more would as emphatically deny. If there is a "moral interregnum" whenever there is a more or less widely diffused spirit of rebellion against what may be known as practical morality, and a considerable departure from that course of conduct which had usually been called virtuous, and which had consisted in the maintenance of truthfulness, integrity, generous regard for the feelings and interests of others, with all those varied opinions, feelings and practices which have been looked upon as constituting this morality and have been cherished as such; then it might be said that in all Christian times there is and always has been such an "interregnum." Those who have upheld such morality in theory and reduced it to practice in their own lives, have always been in a minority, so that when there has been even more than the usual amount of practical defection from the laws of this morality, it has been after all but a mere matter of degree, not any violent and universal breaking away from the course which had been previously followed, or anything like an utter and absolute collapse of authority on the part of those principles and practices which had formerly more or less widely ruled. If we take the phrase in this sense as conveying the idea of a decay of moral force, and that arising from a collapse of faith in those facts or truths (real or supposed) on which that morality rested, and from which it drew its vitality and power, then all that is suggested by Mr. Smith's rather unusual phrase is the ordinary and oft remarked upon fact, that the whole past history of Christian morals has been made up of revivals and decays, and that there is nothing not only more likely, but more certain than that in this respect the future will bear a more or less marked resemblance to the present and the past. In this sense we should be little inclined to quarrel with Mr. Smith's conclusions, though we might think it strange he should have taken such trouble to prove what few or any would be inclined to deny.

But if we are to understand by Mr. Smith's expression an utter collapse of Christian morality (for it is to this he has exclusive reference) as one of the possibilities, if not absolute certainties of the near future, such a collapse as may be properly represented by that cessation of executive authority usually described as an *interregnum* when though one king is actually dead another has not taken his place, then we may be permitted to more than doubt the force of his evidence and the accuracy of his conclusions. His whole