

turns from some of the Sessions as your Committee have from some of the Presbyteries. Nor are the returns that are obtained always what they ought to be. For instance the following statement is made where a committee of Presbytery was appointed to draw up a report: "Your committee after a careful perusal of the answers and comparing them with those of last year cannot help feeling that there is a tendency to overlook the real object of these queries. In many instances they do not appear to have been submitted to the Session at all, the answers are only the opinion of the pastor. In many cases the pastor has forgotten to return answers until requested to do so by the Committee, and then the time was too short to summon the Session. The result is a great many answers are so vague and general that it is almost impossible exactly to know what is really meant." Such a mode of doing things is very culpable indeed.

The difficulty that lies in the way of preparing a report on the state of religion, even when Presbyteries and Sessions afford every facility within their power, is pretty well known to the members or Synod. It is not easy to ascertain the exact condition of religious life in a community, perhaps it is utterly impossible. The difficulty is made greater when, as in the present instance, returns in some cases are not made at all, and in others are vague and pointless. The vagueness is due in the case of some to a sensitive scrupulousness, to a shrinking from forming any estimate. It is to be feared, however, that on the part of some it is due rather to spiritual carelessness.

There is no progress of a startling kind to report now, no revivals, no extensive ingatherings from the world. There has no wave of spiritual excitement swept over congregations or communities. The aspect of things in the Church has been calm and regular and orderly. It is not asserted here whether the calm and order are an advantage or otherwise. There is room for discussion on that question. The gospel has been preached in a measure both of labour and of faithfulness. The young have been trained in the Sabbath School, the Bible Class, and in some cases in the catechetical meeting. There have been prayer meetings, visitations from house to house, and in some cases cottage meetings. One Presbytery reports that special services were held within its bounds in compliance with the recommendation of last Synod. And there has been the savour of a holy life diffused in a silent manner by many of the office bearers and members. Some result has followed from all this; it seems to be impossible that there should not be some result. Men have been brought out

of a state of nature and into a state of grace, and other men that were already in a state of grace have been lifted up to a higher level of knowledge and of spiritual life. We cannot perhaps lay our hands on such results and affirm without fear of contradiction that it is such results that we are laying our hands on, but we would fondly hope more or less of that issue has been reached. Such fruits as joining the fellowship of the Church, leading a moral life, engaging in Christian work, giving of means to the cause of God, both at home and abroad, loving one another, are referred to in the reports, and such fruits are very desirable. A large measure of these was brought to maturity during the past year, and in this we rejoice, for this we give thanks.

To be honest, however, that we may not congratulate ourselves on what may after all be gilding and not real gold, let us confess that there may be much of what we have now referred to and yet no infallible certainty that genuine godliness is flourishing. Making a profession of religion by coming to the Lord's Table in obedience to Christ's command does not prove that the practice agrees with the profession. External purity, at least much of the purity that is current in these days, is not sufficient, it may be but the respectable decency which is the natural outcome of moral habits, and of the civilization of our age, the heart never having been changed in the sense of being born again. Men may engage in active service even, in Sabbath School work, in Tract Distribution, in exhortation, public and private, and in similar work, and yet be far from the kingdom of God. And one cannot say how far liberality may go and not be based on the right motive. There are men whom we all know, and whom nothing but the work of the Spirit on the heart could make liberal, their nature is so niggardly. There are other men of nature so refined and generous that they can give and give largely without any self-denial, there being nothing behind but a delicate and subtle desire of self-esteem, even though they themselves be unconscious of that self-esteem. Therefore we need to be careful lest we count that to be fruit which is not genuine fruit. Oh! how cautious we as office-bearers in the Church of God ought to be, ready to be encouraged and yet not to be over sanguine.

Among the discouragement that almost all the reports refer to are drunkenness, love of the world, and fashion. Drunkenness need not be enlarged on here, as it forms the subject of a distinct report. That it is a great hindrance to the growth of true godliness all of us are well aware. That millions of dollars are spent on drink,