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TORONTO, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 1887.

WE see it stated in some of our American exchanges that the Salvation Army across the lines, wishing to raise \$25,000 for some special work in New Orleans, raised it in a week by what they called "a week of self-denial." During this week they abstained from everything but what was necessary to life with a reasonable degree of comfort, and raised the money. We are not much in love with the "lingo" and some of the methods of the Army, but we are strongly of the opinion that this is a much better way to raise money than some of the methods adopted by many congregations. A week's self-denial would do congregations much more good than some tea-meetings we have seen. It is quite possible that a week's or a month's self-denial for some good purpose would help a congregation much more than a week of so-called revival meetings, at which sensuous excitement may easily pass as the work of the Divine Spirit. A dozen men in each congregation leading consecrated and self-denying lives would soon make a revolution in the Church.

A GLANCE at the blue book just published reminds us that during the past year the Church lost a worthy elder who has left a monument behind him that will last while Presbyterianism exists in the Dominion. We refer to the late Mr. James Osborne, of Hamilton, one of the founders, if not the founder, of the Widows' and Orphans' Fund of our Church. Mr. Osborne took an active interest in the fund, and was Joint Convener of the Committee at his death. On the list of that fund there are now sixty-one widows, and we know not how many orphans. Heaven alone knows how much comfort the fund brings to these sixty one widows and those dependent upon them. Mr. James Osborne was a quiet, kindly, unobtrusive man. He probably never made a speech, nor attended a Convention in his life. But he founded a fund which is as great a blessing to the Church to-day as any other fund the Church possesses. May a kind heaven send us more James Osbornes—more men who can do something that will live after them! We have talkers enough. What the Church needs most is men of resources and action.

THE meeting of the National Prison Congress here last week was timely. People were just beginning to recover from the horror and disgust created by the revelations of the *Globe's* amateur "drunk." Many had concluded it was high time that something should be done in the way of prison reform. If the meeting of the Congress leads to the erection of police cells in which human beings will be treated half as well as an average Ontario farmer treats his cattle, and to such an arrangement of the gaol as will prevent that institution from being a nursery for criminals, then Toronto will have great reason to be grateful. The trouble is that too many meetings of this kind end in resolutions and talk. It is said that one member of the Congress is the most eloquent speaker in America. If there had been any way of putting the Congress in the cell under the police court for one night, or of giving them a bath and a bed in the Toronto gaol, they would all have been eloquent on at least one subject next morning. The visit was an enjoyable one

for our neighbours. May it prove a profitable one for us, especially for the unfortunate lunatics in our county gaols!

It is proposed to build a ten-million-dollar cathedral in New York City. Some Presbyterians who probably have more money than sense have signified their willingness to contribute toward the building fund. The *Christian at Work* observes that before any further steps are taken it might be well to ask if Dr. Taylor, Dr. Hall, Dr. Ormiston, Dr. Crosby, Dr. VanDyke and others will be allowed to preach in the new building when opened for worship. That is, we should say, a rather practical question, and one that any sensible Presbyterian would ask before sending in his cheque. The theory on which funds are asked is that the great cathedral when built will represent the "union idea" in Christianity. Unless Episcopalianism in New York is unlike Episcopalianism in any other part of the world, there will be more of the "union idea" in the treasury than in the pulpit. Presbyterian money will do well enough, but when it comes to putting a Presbyterian in the pulpit the "union idea" may be conspicuous by its absence. The Presbyterian who allows himself to be caught with such chaff must have less sense than members of the family usually possess.

ABOUT one-sixth of the congregations in the American Presbyterian Church are vacant. Our condition is not quite so bad. We have 775 pastoral charges and ninety-four vacancies, or one-eighth of the whole number. In plain English this means that one-eighth of the Church is suffering numerically, financially and spiritually. Perhaps the most serious feature of the case is that most of these congregations are being preached into a state of irritation, and the vacancy may be ended, as vacancies sometimes are, by the calling and settlement of the poorest man that supplied the pulpit. One reason why we have so many vacancies is that too many Presbyteries and too many people look upon the resignation of the pastor as the sure and only remedy for every little ill that may arise in a congregation. Those who hold these radical—we might say revolutionary—views never stop to think that a vacancy has much greater drawbacks and dangers than any fairly successful pastorate. Nor do they ever think that the next pastor may not be one whit more effective than the last when he has been sequestered as long, and that the same parties who want to evict him may soon want to evict his successor. Their remedy for everything is "cut the pastoral tie," no matter who or what suffers. That is one of the ways in which we get one-eighth of our congregations vacant.

DR. FIELD TO ROBERT G. INGERSOLL.

EVERY age since the planting of Christianity has produced more or less conspicuous, more or less able, opponents of the Christian faith. In the apostolic and post-apostolic days there were many upholders of infidelity. They differed, the one from the other, in opinion, in methods of attack, and they agreed only in their unmistakable hostility to the religion taught by the despised Galilean. The calm philosopher imperceptibly endeavoured to show that the doctrines inculcated in the Sermon on the Mount were impracticable absurdities, the more passionate rhetorician found an unenviable delight in holding up to ridicule and scorn the truths that many hearts held most sacred—while others, moved by a fierce and relentless hatred against the pure and holy precepts of the Great Teacher, indulged in incoherent and violent rhapsodies, which roused their hearers to a frenzied intolerance. The tactics of modern unbelief do not differ essentially from those employed in the earlier ages of Christianity. There is the ponderous logic of the English deists, the keen wit and mocking raillery of Voltaire, the sentimental flabbiness of Rousseau, and the wild outbursts of the leaders of the French Revolution. Later, Christianity has been subjected to the destructive criticism of German Rationalism, which finds its most positive expression in the pages of Strauss, while the Oriental scholarship and the fine imaginative power of Ernest Renan have done their best and their worst to dethrone the Saviour of men.

Onslaughts on the Christian religion have been and will continue to be powerless. Its Founder's words are true, "the gates of hell shall not prevail

against it," but they often disturb and unsettle the wavering. The racy philippics of Ingersoll have a certain fascination for young minds, and it is quite possible there are not a few who have been deeply prejudiced against Christianity by the lectures spoken and published which have brought their author no small material gain. He is a man possessing gifts that fit him for gaining the popular ear when he appears on the platform. He has a copious flow of speech, much dramatic power, a strong love of liberty and hatred of oppression. He is, moreover, an adept in sarcastic hits and broad caricature. There is nothing remarkable in the fact that though he often outrages the finer feelings of a promiscuous audience, he should on the whole receive much applause and good pay when he makes a public appearance as a lecturer against religion. He is not strong on the logical side, and in consequence his diatribes have not evoked many replies. The late Judge Black was more than a match for him dialectically. The truth of Christianity however is not dependent on the skill and ability with which it may be attacked or defended, and dexterity in argument settles little beyond the ability of the individual disputants. However, it is at times necessary to prevent the mischief that unanswered attacks may occasion to show how shallow and irrelevant the vapourings of Robert Ingersoll really are.

Dr. Henry M. Field, of the New York *Evangelist*, has written in a most excellent spirit, and with great ability, an open letter to Robert G. Ingersoll, which appeared in the *North American Review*, and which has since been reprinted in more extended form. Dr. Field rightly holds that denunciation and vituperation are not the best weapons to use in contending with assailants of Christianity, and though there is much plain and manly truth speaking in the letter, he is scrupulously tender of the feelings of a man, who, however sensitive himself, has shown that in certain moods he can easily divest himself of scrupulous regard for the feelings of others. Dr. Field had passed an evening under the roof of the infidel lecturer, and was favourably impressed by seeing him in the light and warmth of the home circle. It is not necessary to make Ingersoll out a monster in order to show that his religious opinions are erroneous and dangerous in their tendency, and this latter Dr. Field does most successfully, while treating the man who holds them with the amplest courtesy. The points so ably stated in Dr. Field's letter are the Existence of God, the Immortality of the Soul. He then convicts Ingersoll of caricaturing the doctrines of Christianity, clearly stating the purpose and meaning of the Atonement, Regeneration and Future Retribution, without the employment of technical phraseology, and by means of plain, familiar and touching illustrations from ordinary life.

From these, he proceeds to the consideration of the character of Christ, which he presents as an evidential argument in a strong and forcible light. Appended to this is a short paragraph which successfully overturns Ingersoll's sneer at the apostles as "a poor lot."

Dr. Field then proceeds to show that all that is noble and beneficent in the past history of the American nation had its inspiration in Christianity. The arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers, and the founding of a new Western nationality, originated in religious devotion and the love of freedom. Domestic life reaches its best in Christian homes, true national prosperity and widespread infidelity are incompatible. Then the positive benefits religious and benevolent activity have inspired by faith in Christ are mentioned. Such is the work accomplished for the material, moral and spiritual well-being of young men by means of the Y.M.C.A., home and foreign missionary enterprise, the hope that Christianity impresses in human hearts. This is followed by a powerful paragraph on the evil of unsettling religious faith in which are the following sentences:

I should think myself wanting in respect to the memory of my father and mother, if I could speak lightly of the faith in which they lived and died. Surely this must be mere thoughtlessness, for I cannot believe that you find pleasure in giving pain. I have not forgotten the gentle hand that was laid upon your shoulder, and the gentle voice which said, "Uncle Robert wouldn't hurt a fly." And yet you bruise the tenderest sensibilities, and trample down what is most cherished by millions of sisters and daughters and mothers, little heeding that you are sporting with "human creature's lives."

The open letter was suggested by conversations which Dr. Field had with Robert Ingersoll. Reflection