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OTTAWA, WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 22, 1909.

Halley's Comet, though it will not be visible to the naked eye until next spring, was last week photographed by Prof. Burnham, of the Yerkes Observatory.

Some of the young people in several of the cities of the United States have been striving to live as Christ did when on Earth, for a limited period, say two or three weeks. It seems to us that should be their aim all the time. Do they purpose at the end of the named period to recede from their ideal?

In Montreal pulpits last Sunday reference was made very generally to the civic situation in the commercial metropolis of Canada. Dr. Johnston, in the American Presbyterian Church, preached a powerful sermon from the words: "A Citizen of no Mean City." At the time of writing we have not heard the result of Monday's voting, but all lovers of civic righteousness will hope that it will be such as to help put an end to the disgraceful affairs revealed before the Commission visit and inspiring address.

Rev. Dr. Shearer was in the city last week to place before Mr. Pedley, Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs, the resolution of the Moral and Social Reforms Council, asking for a more active administration of the law for the moral protection of the Indians in the northwest. The department will do everything in its power to carry out the wishes of the M. and S. R. Council for the better protection of the wards of the nation. Dr. Shearer spent Sunday in Montreal preaching in Crescent street church in the morning, going down to Quebec on Monday, where he gave an address before the Dominion Trades Congress. A very busy man is Dr. Shearer!

THE LENGTH OF SERMONS.

The hot season always brings up the old question—how long should a sermon be? It seems to be assumed by the many who discuss this question that the clock is the proper standard, and the only standard by which the length of a sermon should be measured. The fact is time has very little to do with the length that any sermon may seem to be to those who hear it. Some sermons seem short at an hour, and some tediously long at ten minutes. The qualities of the sermon have much more to do with its seeming length than the time occupied in delivery. A sermon brimful of good points well made rarely seems long. A sermon well illustrated is not often tedious. A sermon that has a succession of climaxes and which gathers increasing strength towards the end is not often complained of as tedious, even though the weather may be warm. In fact, any sermon that has what teachers of homiletics call "progress" is not likely to seem long if delivered reasonably well. The thing that wearies and worries hearers is dawdling away at one point without throwing any additional light upon it. So long as the preacher moves along and finishes something as he goes; so long as he makes good points, clinches good arguments, throws out fresh thoughts, and gives telling illustrations, we don't believe that any respectable congregation ever complains of reasonable length. People tire of words, and who can blame them? They tire even of good matter when arranged on a dead level. A constant succession of sentences arranged without any rhetorical skill must weary anybody. Some sermons are like a prairie. Anybody who has ridden over a prairie for a day knows that the view is very enchanting for a while in the morning. You gaze from your car window with delight as the eye sweeps over the boundless country around. But after a time the prairie becomes very monotonous. The sameness of the view wearies you until you fall asleep. Too many sermons resemble the prairie. Like the prairie they may be rich and for a time pleasant to hear, but they become very monotonous as the preacher goes on. There is no rise or fall in the sermonic landscape; no change in the structure of the sentences. No interrogations. No climaxes, nothing but plain, straight sentences of about the same length and strength until the end comes. As the preacher's voice strikes each sentence with painful regularity, you are reminded of the footsteps of the solid citizen who walks the streets without varying his strides for miles. The matter of such a sermon may be good enough for angels to feed on, but the sermon wearies because it is not rhetorically constructed.

Delivery, too, has a great deal to do with the apparent length of sermons. Monotony in delivery makes any sermon long at twenty minutes. A preacher who delivers his introduction, his divisions, his arguments, his illustrations, his appeals, in the same tone of voice always preaches long. The clock may say his sermon is only twenty minutes, but the people will declare it is an hour. Monotony in composition is bad enough, but monotony in delivery is fatal. In fact nearly all the principal causes that make sermons seem long may be summed

up in that deadly word, monotony—monotony in matter, monotony in composition, monotony in delivery. Any one of these three is bad, but the three taken together make a sermon long though the clock should say the preacher has only been at work for ten minutes.

The "occasion" on which a sermon is delivered should have something to do in determining its length, apart from all other considerations. If the occasion is made for the preacher and is full of interest he may preach much longer without wearying than in his ordinary ministrations. A preacher who goes a hundred miles to preach at a church opening and finds a large and highly expectant congregation waiting for him may preach a very long sermon by the clock and his auditors may consider it quite short. There is a vast difference between special work of this kind and the ordinary ministrations of the sanctuary.

It has often been urged that if people were what they ought to be they would not complain about the length of sermons. If people were what they ought to be they would not need sermons at all, either long or short. They are more likely to be made something near what they ought to be by attending church, and if the length, or seeming length, of sermons keep them away, more's the pity. Even in the case of good Christian people, devotion ends when weariness begins. It is well to try to do justice to the subject, but it is also well to try to keep careless sinners under the sound of the Gospel. The subject will come back, but the people may not if they consider the sermon altogether too long.

SWEETNESS OF SPIRIT.

There are some Christian men who somehow carry the charm of an attractive atmosphere with them. It's a pleasure just to look at them. Even when one differs in judgment with them as far as the poles are asunder, one is none the less drawn toward and fascinated by them. There is such sweetness in their spirit, such gracious gentleness in their manner, such kind catholicity, such manly frankness, such thorough self-respect on the one hand, and on the other hand such perfect regard for the judgment of others, that one cannot help loving them, however conscience may compel conclusions, on matters of mutual consequence, unlike those which they have reached.

These are not weak men, either. What people like in them is not that, with the everlasting unvaryingness of a mirror, they reflect back to the thought which is presented to them, and so are always at an agreement with others. Sometimes one is even more drawn to them when they are in opposition, because they are so true and just that their aspect carries with it all the refreshment of variety, with none of the friction of hostility.

Natural temper has something to do with this. God gives a great gift to a man when He gives him a sunny disposition, a candid spirit, and the instinct of fairness in a controversy. It is exceedingly hard for some men to be just. They are jealous, suspicious, and morose, in their natural bent. It is hard for them to believe good of others. It is easy for them always to put the worst construction upon matters. It sometimes seems as if it were almost more than grace itself can do to transform their tempers so that they will be just toward any man against whom they have been led to have a prejudice.