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C. BLACKETT ROBINSON,  
Manager and Editor

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 Obser-  
vatory.

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 re-  
ference 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, Dep-  
uty Minister of Indian Affairs, the re-  
solution of the Moral and Social Re-  
forms Council, asking for a more ac-  
tive 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 Sun-  
day 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 ser-  
mon 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 measur-  
ed. 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 min-  
utes. The qualities of the sermon  
have much more to do with its seem-  
ing 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 succes-  
sion 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 hear-  
ers 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 illus-  
trations, we don't believe that any  
respectable congregation ever com-  
plains 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 con-  
stant succession of sentences arranged  
without any rhetorical skill must  
weary anybody. Some sermons are  
like a prairie. Anybody who has rid-  
den 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 resem-  
ble the prairie. Like the prairie they  
may be rich and for a time pleasant  
to hear, but they become very mono-  
tonous as the preacher goes on. There  
is no rise or fall in the sermonic land-  
scape; 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 re-  
minded 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 rhet-  
orically constructed.

Delivery, too, has a great deal to do  
with the apparent length of sermons.  
Monotony in delivery makes any ser-  
mon long at twenty minutes. A  
preacher who delivers his introduction,  
his divisions, his arguments, his il-  
lustrations, 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 mono-  
tony 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 com-  
position, 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 ordi-  
nary 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 ser-  
mons at all, either long or short. They  
are more likely to be made something  
near what they ought to be by attend-  
ing church, and if the length, or seem-  
ing length, of sermons keep them  
away, more's the pity. Even in the  
case of good Christian people, devo-  
tion ends when weariness begins. It  
is well to try to do justice to the sub-  
ject, 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 con-  
sider the sermon altogether too long.

## SWEETNESS OF SPIRIT.

There are some Christian men who  
somehow carry the charm of an at-  
tractive 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 fas-  
cinated by them. There is such sweet-  
ness in their spirit, such gracious gen-  
tleness in their manner, such kind ca-  
tholicity, 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 dis-  
position, a candid spirit, and the instinc-  
t of fairness in a controversy. It is ex-  
ceedingly hard for some men to be just.  
They are jealous, suspicious, and mo-  
rose, 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 trans-  
form their tempers so that they will  
be just toward any man against whom  
they have been led to have a prejudice.