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TORONTO, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1887.

No less than 126 cases were called at the Toronto police court the other day, the largest number on the docket for one day since Toronto had an existence. Such facts should put an end to all pharisaical vapouring about "Toronto the Good."

THE people and press of New York and Brooklyn have been penning their opinions of Dr. Joseph Parker during the past few days. His sermons in Plymouth Church and his other appearances have furnished the data. The process adopted by everybody was to compare Dr. Parker with Henry Ward Beecher. This may have been very natural under the circumstances, but it was scarcely fair to the great London preacher. There is a remote possibility that a man might be a great orator and a great preacher without in the least resembling Henry Ward Beecher. The general conclusion arrived at seems to be that Dr. Parker has a good voice, fine articulation, splendid diction and faultless elocution all round, but that he lacks Beecher's naturalness, spontaneity and magnetism.

IN his opening lecture last week Principal Caven touched a most important practical point when he said:

While disallowing all that is irreverent and low, there is no wish, I need hardly say, to encourage a dull and heavy pulpit diction, or any kind of mock solemnity. In commending directness and earnestness of speech we have already pronounced against such a manner. The true remedy for dullness is not in flippancy and jocularly, nor in slang and the phrases of the reprobate, but in clearer and more vital thought, in a more earnest purpose, in a stronger sense of the divine presence, in greater zeal for the spiritual well-being of men. Let everything be real, and false solemnity, whether in words or in voice, will be hardly possible. A dead, formal, artificial manner is indeed a great evil, but there is no gain in exchanging it for vulgarity and levity, or any of the arts of the pulpit mountebank.

All true, and timely no doubt, but if a city pastor sees his pews half empty on Sabbath evenings, and knows that some who practise the methods very properly condemned by Dr. Caven, have their churches or pews crowded to the doors, there is a strong temptation to adopt their methods, at least in part. The temptation becomes stronger when office-bearers hint at empty pews, and a revenue that does not meet expenditure. There is sometimes this gain in exchanging a dead, formal, artificial manner for vulgarity, levity and the arts of the mountebank—the change fills the pews, at least for a time. The esteemed Principal might probably find an illustration of what we mean without going out of his own city. Of course, no minister of the Gospel is justified in making a mountebank of himself to fill any church, but if the church of mountebankism is crowded, and the church of severe good-taste empty, we can easily understand the strength of the temptation to do things a little out of the ordinary way. The fault lies partly with the people who crowd around mountebanks of the most vulgar kind.

No speaker at the Conference last week rendered better service to the cause of truth and righteousness than the Rev. J. A. Murray when he described in plain and manly language a class of characters who always flock to special services of every kind, but are

never found taking part in any other good work. Mr. Murray said:

He would also have a vigilance committee to "snub" men. He was not using any language any too strong. There were certain men who were never seen at the services of the congregation, or at the contribution box; but, like spiders and moths which come out from their holes into the candle-light, they always appeared when any little special service was got up. These men ought to be snubbed and kept in the background until they learned what the true work of Christ was; let them know that after that they would be glad to receive their co-operation.

These men are rarely seen in the house of God on Sabbath. They treat the ordinary preaching of the Word with a feeling a good deal like contempt. They care little for the sacraments, and remain away from the Lord's table for the most trifling reason, or for no reason at all. Attendance at the weekly prayer meeting regularly is something they never think of. They never support missions, nor any other good cause. In fact, they are not factors in the religious life of the community in which they dwell. But the moment special services are announced they are all on deck and anxious to get control of the ship. If anybody tries to keep them in their proper place, they coolly inform him that he is opposed to revival. If he tries to control their insolent vagaries, they inform him that he is resisting the Spirit. Whether "snubbing" is the proper remedy or not, these are plain, hard facts. Mr. Murray might have gone much further when dealing with doubtful characters who thrust themselves into special services, and injure the work by their unsavoury presence and impertinent meddling. It too often happens that persons push themselves to the front in such services who not only have no standing as religious men, but who are in bad odour with the honest business men of the community. The presence of such characters as prominent workers in special services does more to injure the effects of such service than probably any other cause. How can an honest man of business who makes no profession of religion be expected to attend special services, or have any respect for them, if he knows that some of the men who figure prominently in these services night after night are dishonest, or untruthful, or unclean? Conference may sit and talk, and pass resolutions until doomsday, but no conference, nor church court, nor any other body, can make special services profitable to any congregation or community, unless they are conducted by men in whom the Christian people of the community have full confidence. One of the reasons why men of known Christian character and high standing keep aloof from such services is because they have no confidence in the integrity of some who are allowed to figure prominently in the meetings. Men who take part in such services should be men about whose religious character and whose social and business standing there is no reasonable doubt. When this reform has been introduced, one of the hindrances to special services will have been removed.

THE CONFERENCE.

THE Conference held last week in Toronto was fairly well attended. The spirit of the meeting was good, and the interest well sustained from beginning to end. The addresses touched on a great variety of topics, and though some diversity of opinion prevailed in regard to methods of working, there was thorough unanimity on all vital points. The one thing desired by the Conference as a whole and by each individual member was increased spiritual life and power in the Church.

Unlike some of its predecessors this Conference framed a deliverance, and in plain terms told the Church some things that, in its judgment, the Church should do to renew and increase spiritual life. This deliverance is so sensible, practical and feasible that we cannot do better than lay it before our readers. The Conference was of the opinion:

1. That it is highly desirable that more prominence should be given in the courts of the Church, and especially in meetings of Synod, to the great practical work which lies before the Church—the conversion of sinners and the edification of believers.

There are few Christian men in the Church who have not come to this conclusion, and who have not said in private what the Conference says in this part of its deliverance. Theoretically Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods and Assemblies are spiritual courts. As a matter of fact their proceedings are often not specially spiritual. Sometimes they are the reverse to a painful extent as everybody knows who attends such meetings.

The General Assembly, though congested with work, does manage to give a considerable, and we are glad to say an increasing, amount of time to the vital work of the Church. The Synods have little work to do, and might very well give more time to the consideration of vital questions. As Dr. Smith suggested, it might be a good thing to remain over Sabbath and spend the time in devotional exercises and in discussing the best measure for increasing the spiritual life of the congregations. Is there any reason why a Presbytery meeting should not be a help to a minister in the more spiritual part of his work instead of a hindrance, as Presbytery meetings sometimes are? This court is the one above all others that gives tone to the Church. It is more in touch with the people than any other. It is a local court, and the people of the locality know what takes place. It meets every two or three months, and the other courts meet only once a year. The influence of the Presbytery is felt all the year round, and in every congregation and mission station of the Church. Many of the people are present as members of deputations, and in other capacities. Will any one say that the deliberations of Presbyteries are usually of such a nature as to benefit their own members or to impress visitors with the idea that the principal work of the Church is the conversion of sinners and the edification of believers?

The second part of the deliverance of the Conference touches a weak point and suggests a good remedy:

2. That it is very important for the quickening of spiritual life in our congregations that the work of Presbyterial visitation should be carried on more generally and should be accompanied, when possible, with addresses and devotional exercises, fitted not only to call attention to the duty of Christian effort on the part of believers, but also to awaken the careless, and lead them to the immediate acceptance of Christ.

The usual procedure is for the Presbytery to induct a pastor—in many cases a young inexperienced man—over a congregation, and leave him to his own resources. If he succeeds, good and well; if he fails, evict him. A few years after the induction perhaps, the young man resigns, or a petition or a deputation comes before the Presbytery asking for a Presbyterial visitation. The visitation takes place, and is generally followed by a rupture of the pastoral tie. Now what did that Presbytery do? Help the pastor? No. It simply held an inquest over his remains when he was ecclesiastically dead. Had he been helped by such a Presbyterial visitation as that suggested by Dr. McLaren at the Conference he might never have died. Dr. McLaren suggested a Presbyterial visitation with religious exercises, prayer and addresses by members of Presbytery. The doctor was perhaps old-fashioned enough in his ideas to think that a visitation of that kind might do a congregation more good than a so-called judicial investigation with commissioners from plaintiff and defendant making angry speeches, members of Presbytery posing as judges, and an excited crowd in the background putting in applause when they thought their champions made a hit.

What does Presbyterial oversight mean anyway? Does it mean that the Presbytery merely does a certain amount of routine business occasionally for its congregations—asks for money, and spends it in various ways? If so, then a Presbytery stands in about the same relation to its congregations as a municipal council stands to its municipality. Does it mean that the Presbytery settles—or makes worse—congregational quarrels? If so, a Presbytery is no more than a civil court, with this difference: that it often takes ten times as long to try its cases, and sometimes does not try them in so dignified a manner as cases are tried in a civil court. Does it mean that the Presbytery interferes when congregational affairs have gone so far wrong that something must be done? If so, the Presbytery in most cases simply acts the part of a coroner. Presbyterial oversight should surely mean help, encouragement, and at times spiritual work in the congregations within its bounds.

On the question of holding special continuous services the resolution of the Conference was, we think, timely and prudent:

3. That wherever the desire for the quickening of spiritual life warrants the hope of favourable results, or wherever there is urgent need, in the absence of any such promising indications, special continuous services may well be held with a view to the ingathering of the careless, and the leading of God's people to a more earnest consecration of themselves to Him in the Gospel of His Son; that these services